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Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Doctoral Thesis

**The Body Sign:
Contemporary Iraqi Fiction and the War on Terror**

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Doctoral Programme: Literary Theory and Comparative Literature

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June 2022

May 25, 2022.

To Whom It May Concern:

Professor Andrew Monnickendam (UAB) and Professor Mònica Rius-Piniés (UB) hereby certify that they have supervised the research undertaken by Ms Hanan Jasim Khammas for the doctoral dissertation *The Body Sign: Contemporary Iraqi Fiction and the War on Terror*, which has been recently completed. We testify, in addition, that the thesis fulfils all the academic requirements necessary for its public defence, once all administrative process has been completed.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to begin by thanking the late Professor Jaume Botey i Vallès and Professor Màrius Martínez Muñoz who made it possible for me and for my sister to continue our higher education at UAB after we were displaced and took refuge in Barcelona in 2006, due to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. I am incapable of expressing enough gratitude to my directors, Professors Andrew Monnickendam and Mònica Rius-Piniés for all the invaluable remarks, patience, and unconditional support. Similarly, I am most grateful to Dr. Lucia Boldrini and the Centre for Comparative Literature at Goldsmiths, University of London for hosting my Doctoral Research Visit. I also thank my colleagues, members of the research project Género(s) y Lenguaje(s) en la Arabidad Contemporánea [PGC2018-100959-B-I00 Programa estatal de generación de conocimiento y fortalecimiento científico y tecnológico del sistema de I+D+I. Subprograma Estatal de Generación de Conocimiento. Modalidad Proyectos de R+D – Ministerio de Ciencia, Innovación y Universidades], particularly Dr. Abdallah Tagourramt El Kbaich, Dr. Meritxell Joan and Èlia Romo for all the advice and assistance. Also, infinite gratitude to the library staff at Biblioteca d'Humanitats, UAB and l'Institut Català de la Dona for their invaluable service and documents. I want specially to thank my dear friend Dr. Víctor Alarcón Bermejo for his support and love and his insights on Bakhtin and laughter. I would also like to thank Dr. Itzea Goikolea Amiano for keeping us aware of the feminist subject and the importance of female voices in academia. I also thank Dr. Charles Eager for the invaluable help and comments and the psychotherapist, Alba González Ollé, for making it so much easier and for explaining everything so clearly. Finally, my family, my sister Qitaf for all the love and support, my brother-in-law Joan for his brilliant ideas on optimising work environments, my husband and partner Raimon for bringing joy, support and making our home such a wonderful place, and, lastly, my mother, Eman, for the infinite support, the life lesson on sovereignty and for giving us an Iraq we can believe in.

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Abstract

The years that follow the 2003 Iraq invasion witness an unprecedented phenomenon in the Iraqi literary scene: fiction exceeds poetry in production, critical reception, and market figures. The emerging narrative genres are concerned with representational mechanisms that express the need to tell stories of wars and trauma. A phenomenon within these mechanisms is the excessive concern for depicting corporeality and sexuality in their most material sense. Such interest in the realm of the material and physical may indicate a shift in the perception of corporeality particularly present in fiction, where new depictions of the body unfold political and epistemological reformulations which are reflected in the aesthetic representation.

This research, then, traces a genealogy of the Iraqi body that could uncover the complexity of the historical and the socio-political discourses entangled with the construction of the perception of bodies. Building on Yuri Lotman's theory of cultural semiotics and Jacques Lacan's mirror stage, this research examines the body as semiotic sign within particular 'semiospheres' which reference each other in the act of political and military conflict. Taking into consideration religious, social, inside, and outside political influences, this research considers the examination of corporeality in three major blocks: the body in Iraqi society and culture prior to 2003, the body in the discourse of the war on terror as a major semiotic interference, and the body in contemporary Iraqi fiction as the result of the encounter between the two conflicting discourses. Such examination structures the ways in which corporeality in the status quo was interrupted by and instrumentalised in war propaganda, and how new representations in fiction respond to the two semiospheres in conflict.

الخلاصة

شهدت السنوات اللاحقة لاحتلال العراق عام 2003 ظاهرة غير مسبوقة في الوسط الفني والأدبي العراقي تتمثل في تغلب الفن السردي على الشعر من حيث الإنتاج، التلقي النقدي واكتساحه لسوق الكتب سواء داخل العراق وخارجه. وتبدي الأجناس السردية الجديدة اهتماماً خاصاً بآليات التمثيل التي تعبر عن حاجة ماسة لسرد أهوال الحروب وصدماها النفسية. واحدة من آليات التمثيل هذه هي المبالغة بتصوير الجسد والجنسانية بمعنييهما المادي البحت. وقد يؤشر هذا الاهتمام بالمادي والجسدي الى نوع من التحول في مفهوم وإدراك الجسد والذي يتضح في الفن القصصي خاصةً، حيث التصوير الجديد للجسد ينطوي على تركيبات سياسية ومعرفية تنعكس في التمثيل الجمالي.

يتتبع هذا البحث جينالوجيا الجسد العراقي التي قد تُظهر للقارئ ولدارسي الأدب والمجتمع العراقي التعقيدات التاريخية والسياسية-الاجتماعية للخطابات المساهمة في تكوين مفهوم الجسد وإدراك الأجساد. بناء على نظرية يوري لوتمان في السيميائية الثقافية وعلى نظرية جاك لاكان مرحلة المرأة، يدرس هذا البحث الجسد كدلالة سيميائية في فضاءين دلاليين يشير أحدهما الى الآخر وسط صراع سياسي وعسكري. بأخذ النظر التأثيرات الدينية، الاجتماعية، والصراعات السياسية الداخلية والخارجية يقسم هذا البحث دراسة الجسد العراقي الى ثلاث فضاءات دلالية: يشتمل الأول على الجسد كدلالة في الثقافة والمجتمع العراقيين قبل أحداث 2003، والثاني على صورة الجسد في خطاب الحرب على الإرهاب كدلالة سيميائية دخيلة، والثالث على تمثيل الجسد في السرد العراقي المعاصر كرد على الصراع بين الفضاءين الأول والثاني كخطابين متصارعين. ستضع لنا الدراسة بهذه الطريقة هيكلية يمكننا من خلالها متابعة التغيرات التي طرأت على مفهوم الجسد في وضعيته قبل احتلال العراق، وكيف استخدم الجسد كأداة معرفية في خطاب الدعاية للحرب، وكيف تحاول تمثيلات الجسد في السرد العراقي المعاصر الرد على الفضاءين الدلاليين المتصارعين.

Note on Transliterations and Sources

This thesis has been formatted according to the 9th edition of the MLA Style manual published in April 2021. Margins and title page are set according to the UAB theses formatting guide. Texts and names in Arabic, Iraqi dialect, or Kurdish, which are not translated to English, are transliterated into Latin characters according to the *Journal of Arabic Literature*'s system of transliteration. Translated texts and their authors' names are used as indicated in the English translations. Citations in Arabic are translated by the author within the body of the thesis, and the original is provided in footnotes.

Electronic books cited, particularly some Kindle editions, use location number rather than page number; this explains some large numbers in the parenthetical citations.

The Abstract and the conclusions are additionally written in Arabic for the fulfilment of the requirements to obtain the title of PhD with International Mention.

To the memory of Professor Jaume Botey i Vallès
(1940-2018)

“We are not hurt only by tragedy: the grotesque too carries weapons, undignified ridiculous weapons.”

Graham Greene, *The End of the Affair*, 40.

I. Introduction

This, That, and the Other¹

1. Setting the Grounds

The initial motivation behind this research was to outline a theoretical framework that corresponds to the politics of the representation of corporality in contemporary literature in Arabic. I have come across a specific case in a clearly limited context which may not respond exclusively and entirely to this initial objective. For historical, social and political reasons, this case presents a clear example of ‘before and after’ which would help to see the genealogy of development in the conceptualisation of the body, in addition to the external and internal factors that shaped this development. This case is that of contemporary Iraqi fiction. It is for further research and examination to see how far the case of Iraq is similar or relevant to other Arab literatures and contexts; but, for the time being, this research responds to the demand of outlining the development of the representation and conceptualisation of the body in contemporary Iraqi fiction.

¹ The title for this section is borrowed from Larry David’s joke in the show *Seinfeld*, season two, episode nine, *The Deal*. It refers to the kinds of interaction between a man and a woman in relationship. Jerry and his female friend Elaine used ‘this’ to refer to their status as friends; ‘that’ refers to their sexual interaction, which they engaged in when they were officially a couple, prior to their friendship; and ‘the other’ refers to a new paradigm, ‘The Deal’, in which they could maintain the friendship with occasional sexual and romantic involvement without jeopardising the authenticity of the two previously defined relationships. The premise of the joke is that it is impossible to have such a paradigm within the established social codes. My purpose in using this title is to highlight the complexity entailed in reading contemporary Iraqi fiction, for it is one thing to read it from the centre of two separate and incompatible semiospheres, namely ‘this’ and ‘that’, and it is a different thing to read it as the sum of ‘this, that and the other’. This research traces the genealogy of the body initiated in ‘this’, interrupted by ‘that’, and manifested in ‘the other’.

1.1 Why and What is the Body?

In the past decades, literature in Arabic and other languages has shown an increased concern with the body. Abir Hamdar, for instance, describes this preoccupation as a turn: “the turn to the body in recent Arabic literature is an antidote to the collapse of the collective national and political ideology of pan-Arabism” (132). Iraqi scholars Falīḥ al-Ricābī and Ṭu‘amah Muṭāyir Ḥusaīn claim that the body has an ‘enchanted authority’ (*sulṭah sāḥirah*), which has been employed in contemporary Arabic fiction recently to demonstrate social and political complexities of Arab and Muslim men and women (69). On a more general level, Roger Cooter also describes it as a turn and writes that “[t]he last few decades of the twentieth century witnessed the body moving from no one’s particular concern to virtually everyone’s preoccupation – including historians” (393). Such observations show that the preoccupation with the body is a universal concern and not culturally specific. However, there are cultural and historical specificities to the development of each case of these ‘turns’. Modern and contemporary philosophy assumes that the body is the locus of knowledge in which, and from which, subjectivity is defined – particularly in the later development of phenomenology of perception put forward by thinkers influenced by Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

The same can be said about Arab-Islamic thought but in the sense that its distance from the body is what determines the righteous rather than the true self. Muḥammad al-Muṣbāḥī explains that in the development of Arab and Islamic thought, a discursive opposition towards the body created what he calls ‘disdain of corporeality’ (*iḥtiqār al-jismīyah*) because it is subject to change and decay, as opposed to the soul, which is the true self, the moving engine of the body and therefore the superior part (1401). This opposition led to the disdain of plurality, difference, the need for the Other, and dismissiveness towards

time, history, desire and feeling (1421).² Hishām al-‘Alawī also states that Arab-Islamic thought has focused its attention on the body as rival to the soul and as a unit by which to measure opposition to and abandonment of the faith (10). Following the classical Aristotelian tradition, Islamic philosophy saw the body as an obstacle in the soul’s way in its eternal quest for happiness (79). Therefore, Hamdar’s coinage of the ‘turn to the body’ represents a turn away from this opposition and disdain – and towards an ‘antidote’ and an ‘enchanted authority’. This is especially true in fiction, which makes understanding the structures and the frameworks that accompanied or led to this turn an urgent task; this is where the present research can provide some answers.

Hamdar rightly suggests that the preoccupation with the body reflects symptoms of socio-political changes, and that the use of the word ‘turn’ signifies a change or a diversion in the development of the representation of the body. However, she oversimplifies the significance of this turn when she describes it as merely a celebration of freedom after the collapse of pan-Arabism and the loss of a collective identity:

it is almost as if the trauma accompanying the loss of a collective identity, which had been anchored in notions of liberation from colonial forces, has been compensated for by the desire to celebrate the freedom of the body from all social, cultural and sexual restrictions (133).

Hamdar here ignores the categorical difference between collective identity and hegemonic identity. The pan-Arabist ideology does not represent collective identity anymore, as there is a difference between being an Arab and being pan-Arabist and, therefore, the collapse of this ideology does not necessarily mean a loss of collective identity. The most recent

² "الروح محرك وفاعل، وأنه لا يمكن الاستغناء عنه طرفة عين، لأنه هو الذات التي تصدر عنها الحركات والأفعال والإدراكات (...) فانتقلت عن الجسد إلى صاحب الجسد ومحركه (...) ومن الواضح أن احتقار الجسمية في هذه الرؤية صار يعني احتقار التعدد والحركة والاختلاف والمغايرة والحاجة إلى الآخر، والنفور من الزمن والتاريخ والرغبة والإحساس، بل وحتى من القول والتفكير"

engagements with the body in contemporary Arabic fiction, particularly post-2003, or rather in the years leading up to and following the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ (2010 – 2012), indicate more complex significations and reveal an introspective examination of the history and heritage of the area. The employment of the body in this process of examination stages one of the fundamental aspects of the contemporary Arab literary canon: violence. This is seen in both the use of imagery concerning annihilated bodies as well as in the use of transgressive language, conveying the idea that poetic and bodily aesthetics form an act of epistemic violence in themselves. This does not only reveal only the grievances borne and injustice suffered by people, but it also informs us of their detachment from established structures of knowledge.

Similar to Hamdar, Samira Aghacy examines how literature of the Arab East, post-1967 Naksah, reassesses the representation of sexuality and gender performativity, particularly in the case of the masculine body. She claims that the post-1967 era and “the continuous rebuffs and debacles in the area caused many men a daunting sense of impotence and ineffectiveness, demystifying an essentialized masculinity generally viewed as firm and stable” (72). The constant military violence and forced displacement destabilised the perception of the body and its sexuality: “war, which proved to be a catalyst for change, unsettled existing gender codes considerably and produced huge tension and incongruities in the representations of masculinity and femininity” (109). Nevertheless, I suggest that this questioning of gender codes is a symptom of a larger process of questioning the relation between self and body. The demystification of essentialised masculinity, I argue, is not only a result of violence and a sensation of impotence; rather it is a violent act itself, since it is an indication of a shift in the perception and conceptualisation of the body from being a cultural signifier to a sign constructed in and by history, as is discussed later.

For many critics of Arabic literature,³ the body and its sexuality are employed as a reflection of the tumultuous development of contemporary political history and national identity. I partially share their views, since I see the body as described by John B. Thomson in his Introduction to Pierre Bourdieu's *Language and Symbolic Power*: "The body is the site of incorporated history. The practical schemes through which the body is organised are the product of history and, at the same time, the source of practices and perceptions which reproduce that history" (13). This definition is one which I find apt for contemporary Arab thought for a significant reason: history occupies a particularly crucial constituent in the basic formation of the contemporary Arab mind as it is the instrument with which national and religious identity – hence corporality – have been inscribed (Chejne 383; Abed al-Jabri vii-x). This narrative of colonial and nationalist struggle is now being questioned in fiction, and the validity of this inquiry consists in showing how the body, as the site of this particular incorporated history, reveals the rewriting of history. Another relevant aspect of corporality I find in Jean-Luc Nancy's definition of the body in *Corpus* (2006):

Bodies [...] are *open* space, implying, in some sense, a space more properly *spacious* than spatial, what could also be called a *place*. Bodies are places of existence, and nothing exists without a place, a *there*, a "here," a "here is," for a *this*. [...] More precisely, it makes room for the fact that the essence of existence is to be without any essence. That's why the *ontology of the body* is ontology itself: being's in no way prior or subjacent to the phenomenon here. The body *is* the being of existence. [...] [Bodies] take place at the limit, *qua limit*: limit – external border, the fracture and intersection of anything foreign in a continuum of sense, a continuum of matter (15–17).

³ See Ouedghiri Ben Ottmane 17; Shaaban 179; Klemm 493 and Al-Hassan 204.

Nancy's 'body' conveys the eminence of history too, and it adds to it a geographical dimension that complements Bourdieu's definition. The body is a place by which existence is conditioned: we *are* as long as we are bodies, and only if the body is there, then we are. 'We' and 'there' are determined by a perception that is conditioned by time – history – and space – geography. Corporality in this sense is the nexus of experiences which are informed by and which are located within histories.

The body which I examine here, that is, the specific case of Iraq, is a new manifestation of corporality which appeared in the literary fiction written by local and diaspora Iraqi authors after the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. My argument is that this manifestation of corporality is not just a reflection of the collapse of national identity, nor is it a mere registration of the trauma of war and occupation, but also a manifestation of a reconceptualisation of corporeality, that is, a redefinition of the meaning of the body and the way it is written about. It is a process which is directly linked to the neo-colonial hegemony and to the history of the conceptualisation of corporality in the *status quo*. Therefore, the body I examine is created via language – a socially, culturally, politically and historically moulded language – which makes of the body a space of existence constructed in the in-betweens of the colonial and postcolonial realities. In broad terms, my hypothesis, then, relies on Homi Bhabha's view that in postcolonial contexts and wars aftermaths, the perception of the body corresponds to the confrontation or amalgamation between the different socio-cultural discourses before and after the epistemic violence that results from the colonial process takes place. Therefore, throughout this work I deal with the body, bearing in mind it is the epistemological arena where subjectivity is not only created but also negotiated.

1.2 Why and What is Iraq?

Hamdar notes that “the turn to the body in Arabic literature is by no means uniform and varies in degree and intensity as we move from one political locale to the next” (133). This is another reason – not to mention for the sake of coherence and accuracy – why I limit the corpus of this research to focusing on one specific locale: Iraq.

Iraq presents an interesting case for various reasons. On the one hand, contemporary Iraq has been the stage for different destabilising circumstances during a relatively short period of time: The Gulf Wars, dictatorship, political persecutions, the economic embargo, military invasion and occupation, and last but not least, terrorism.⁴ On the other hand, amidst all the political turmoil and the various colonial processes in the Middle East, when it comes to fictional writing, Iraq has produced major literary innovations. According to Iraqi author and literary editor, Samuel Shimon, between the invasion in 2003 and the year 2018, there have been more than seven hundred published fictional works, a number that surpasses the ones published in Iraq through the twentieth century (16). These works were written in Arabic by Iraqi authors inside Iraq and in exile. This information is also consolidated by the not yet published *Index of the Iraqi Novel 1919-2019* by the scholar Najm ‘Abd Allāh Kāzīm, who has been working on this major opus for more than twenty years.⁵ According to his research, 571 novels were published between the years 2003–2014 only, and 729 novels in the entire twentieth century since the publication of the first Iraqi novel, *Jalāl Khālīd*, in 1919. This shows an extraordinary tendency towards writing fiction, especially when we

⁴ Henceforth, I refer to the economic embargo as the genocidal embargo.

⁵ This document was supposed to be published and released in the early months of 2020, but it was interrupted by the global health crisis Covid-19 and by Dr. Kāzīm’s death in July 2020. I had the privilege to consult the index while still in progress by contacting the author. The index includes a list of all fictional works written by Iraqi authors during one hundred years. It also contains sub-indexes categorising these works in different genres, such as feminist novel, young adult fiction, Jewish Iraqi authors, and so on.

consider that up to 2003, the predominant literary genre in Iraq was poetry (Bahoora, "Iraq" 247).

Although this is a general tendency in literary writing in the Arabic language in general, contemporary Iraqi fiction also witnessed the emergence of new fictional genres.⁶ For instance, the first anthology of science fiction in the Arab world is *Iraq +100*, an anthology of science fiction short stories edited by Hassan Blasim, imagining Iraq after one hundred years of the US-led invasion in 2003. This anthology was followed by *Palestine +100*, imagining Palestine after one hundred years from the Nakbah of 1948. It is interesting to see that, at least for the editors and publishers of these anthologies, the impact of the invasion of Iraq is comparable to the impact of the Nakbah. Although these are not the first attempts to promote the writing and publishing of science fiction in Arabic, these are the first Arabic Sci-Fi anthologies to be published as such and to receive international recognition in translation and awards.⁷

In addition to science fiction, there is also fantasy fiction, – as defined by David Roas – a genre that presents an aesthetic alteration in narrative logic, a problematisation and a questioning of the notion of reality (Roas 30–42). This genre is becoming popular in recent fiction in Arabic, as in the short stories of Mazen Marouf, Hassan Blasim, Ahmed Saadawi and Diyā' Jubaīlī, among others. There is also the first anthology of Noir fiction, presented as a part of Akashic Books Noir series, *Baghdad Noir* (2018), which came after *Beirut Noir* (2015) and *Marrakech Noir* (2018) and *Tehran Noir* (2014), whose editor, Salar Abdoh, is also one of the authors in *Baghdad Noir*. Another author of *Baghdad Noir* is the American author and veteran who served in Baghdad in 2003 – 2006, Roy Scranton. There is also

⁶ That is, new in its context.

⁷ Both anthologies are winners of the English PEN award. Since 2008 the Syrian Public Book Board has been publishing the journal of Science Fiction, where Sci-Fi literary texts and studies both in Arabic and in translation are promoted. See 'Umrān.

Tunisian author Hayet Raies. This plural perspective in narrating the city shows how Baghdad is part of the consciousness of its neighbours, visitors and invaders. All authors of this anthology share the fact that they have lived in the city for a period of time in their lives. Baghdad is the locus of semiosis in these authors' works and in their cultural dialogue.

Other than the question of genre, there is an increased interest in translating and giving awards to post-2003 Iraqi fiction. One example is the work of Hassan Blasim whose stories, translated by Jonathan Wright, were longlisted and won the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize in 2010 and 2014. He was also awarded the English PEN three times and has been described by *The Guardian* as “perhaps the best writer of Arabic fiction alive”.⁸ Sinan Antoon has also been awarded many prizes for his academic work; his second and fourth novels were nominated for the international prize of the Arabic novel in 2013 and 2017, and his third novel, which he translated into English himself, was awarded the Saif Gobash Award for Translation. There are also Diyā' Jubāilī, who won Al Tayeb Salih Award for Short Stories in 2017;⁹ Ahmed Saadawi, who won the International Prize for Arabic fiction for his *Frankenstein in Baghdad* in 2014; and 'Āliyah Mamdūḥ who won the Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature in 2004, among others. These anthologies and international collaborations among Iraqi and international Arab and non-Arab authors and publishers suggest a concern for Iraqi literature after 2003. This concern, an act of solidarity with a traumatised people as well as a recognition of artistic originality, is due to, firstly, the fact that, as Roger Stahl argues, “Iraq was perhaps the most dangerous war since WWII” (*Militainment, Inc.* 88) in the sense of communicating and informing about the war. Telling what happened in Iraq in 2003 is an example of what Said describes as “imperial arrogance

⁸ See Yassin-Kassab for full article.

⁹ As far as this research is concerned, only one of Diyā' Jubāilī's short stories has been translated into English; this was by Chip Rossetti in *Vestal Review*, an online journal of flash fiction. The name of the author was transcribed as 'Diaa Jubaili', <https://www.vestalreview.net/the-night-girl/>.

unschooled in worldliness, unfettered either by competence or experience, undeterred by history or human complexity, unrepentant in brutal violence and cruel electronic gadgetry” (*From Oslo to Iraq* 4499) that violates human rights everywhere. Iraqi fiction post-invasion matters because, as Slavoj Žižek puts it, Iraq was used “as a pretext or an exemplary case to stake out the coordinates of the New World Order” (*Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle* 5).

Žižek’s statement highlights another interesting aspect, because of which I believe the Iraqi case requires examination. The 2003 war and invasion were also fought semiotically. Both Judith Butler in her *Frames of War* (2009) and Slavoj Žižek in *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle* (2004) suggest that televised coverage of the war and the use of cameras and visual symbolism were in fact part of the military operations. Bodies, both Iraqi and American, examined in the following chapters, are central in these images and visual symbolism. Surprisingly, both Žižek and Butler focus their analysis on “us”, the outside spectators of war: “The message was addressed not to the Iraqi people, but primarily to all of us, the witnesses to the war – we were its true ideological and political targets” (5). What I intend to examine is the implication of this military strategy on the Iraqi people themselves, who are doubly victims of this war, once by living it and twice by watching it. Spectators outside Iraq, before and after the invasion, had access to international media while millions of Iraqis had only Iraqi media to watch and follow the news of the war, and, for years, the state’s media was the only source for following the political meltdown. The state’s media reflected only the state’s conceptualisation of corporality and selfhood. It was only weeks after the invasion that Iraqi households began to have access to international media and see that the narrative of war inside Iraq differed significantly from the narrative of war outside it. Iraq’s contact with other cultures, languages, media, and other sources of knowledge became suddenly and drastically wider, which, I argue, influenced the perception of reality, and hence, corporality and identity.

2. Setting the Theory: The Clash of Imaginaries

In *The Location of Culture* (1994) Bhabha writes: “In the postcolonial text the problem of identity returns as a persistent questioning of the frame, the space of representation, where the image [...] is confronted with its difference, its Other” (66). The Other, in Bhabha’s remark, is the image of the self as seen/produced by the coloniser. I argue that in the context of 2003 Iraq there is a second Other, the big Other, in Lacanian terminology, the self as seen/produced by socio-cultural discourse, and – as Bhabha confirms – it “is not simply the image of the person, but the discursive and disciplinary place from which questions of identity are strategically and institutionally posed” (68). In the discussion on interrogating identity, Bhabha uses Fanon’s work to exemplify the psychic and semiotic displacement of the conceptualisation of the body, which emerges at the encounter between narratives that represent the colonial subject. The colonial subject, the Iraqi in this case, finds his image mirrored in two different mirrors or frames – to use Bhabha’s terminology. These mirrors are the different discursive and disciplinary narratives that construct the traits of his/her subjectivity. In the case of Iraq, there is, on the one hand, the traditional and nationalist discourse that ruled Iraq since the formation of the republic in 1958. On the other hand, there is the ‘Western’ discourse of the war on terror and war propaganda, existent since the second Gulf War until after the invasion in 2003. Both created an imaginary in which are presented generalised, oversimplified, and primitive stereotypes of corporality in order to assert a knowledge of what being an Iraqi means. Both discourses are legacies of Orientalism as defined by Said, and, as described by Sadik Jalal al-‘Azm, ‘Orientalism in Reverse’.

According to Said, Orientalism is a categorically Western belief not only that there is an ontological difference between East and West, but also that this difference is imperative for their political, economic and cultural interaction; he claims, moreover, that it has become

a performative, constant praxis for centuries. Furthermore, this belief was institutionally supported in order to create and nourish an image of the oriental Other that perpetuates this difference. The claim that the discourse which led to the invasion of Iraq is a legacy of Orientalism is hardly a new thought. Said himself states that the wars on Iraq and Afghanistan – known as the war on terror – were a continuation of the imperial distortion of knowledge, creating ‘reductive images’ of the oriental Other for the benefit of the imperial project.¹⁰ Sadik Jalal al-‘Azm formulated – based on Said’s views – what he calls ‘Orientalism in Reverse’, by which he means that, despite Said’s warnings, the “subjects and victims of Orientalism” apply “the readily available structures, styles and ontological biases of Orientalism upon themselves and upon others” (al-‘Azm 231). Al-‘Azm states that Arab nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism – which he calls ‘revival’ – are nothing but two instances of Orientalism in reverse, self-essentialising imaginaries based on the premise of Said’s thesis. However, the novelty that Orientalism in reverse produces is that Orientalism goes both ways, with not only the West having the power to generate systematic knowledge about the orient, but, by the same token, the oriental having the capacity to embrace a discourse of the superiority of this essentialised “Oriental mind (the ‘Arab mind’ in this case) over the Occidental one” (232). This is where the two imaginaries come into conflict, and the following analysis is concerned with the ways in which the representation of corporeality responds to this conflict.

Prior to the invasion in 2003, Iraq was governed by an anticolonial discourse since practically the beginning of the twentieth century. Towards the late decades of the ba‘thist government, anti-colonialism metamorphosed into an ideological manifestation of Orientalism in reverse, which started during the late years of the Iran-Iraq war. The discourse

¹⁰ See Said’s Preface to the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Edition of *Orientalism*.

of the war on terror, then, introduced an interruption into a supposed ontological status. This interruption caused a rupture within a pre-existing process of identification by a new process of identification, hence “[t]he white man’s eyes break up the black man’s body and in this act of epistemic violence its own frame of reference is transgressed, its field of vision disturbed” (Bhabha 60). There is certainly a strong argument to be made that dealing with this conflict in terms of white versus black reduces everything to a binary, which may exclude infinite shades of grey; but the opposition of white versus black, here, is a metaphor for an un-negotiable binary, that of invader versus invaded, self-glorifying Orientalism in reverse and dehumanising Orientalism. This does not mean that the prior is a harmonious process; rather, it is an imposed discourse of ‘being’ inflicted by a dictatorial political system in pretence to historical coherence which in itself is problematic. This is what I believe has happened in the post-invasion years, and this is what this research traces: a genealogy of the body in contemporary Iraqi fiction within the coordinates of two conflicting political discourses that have created conflicted ontologies and which can be read in the representation of corporeality.

Accordingly, my hypothesis maintains that the representation of the body in contemporary Iraqi fiction shows an indication of a shift in the perception, the meaning, and the cultural production of corporality. This shift, I argue, has resulted from this clash of imaginaries, which I define as a semiotic process that took place in the encounter between the discourses of power that led to the invasion and the destruction of the Iraqi state. The ideals that Iraqi people have been dealing with for decades prior to the invasion, once met by the representation of Iraqis/non-white/none-Western/Muslim persons in the discourse of the war on terror – the combination of Western propagandist dreams of freedom and liberation with the Iraqi violent reality – created a new paradigm of signification for having or being a body. On the one hand, the ideals for which the war was fought – freedom of

speech, freedom of movement, freedom of sexuality, women's rights, and democracy – contradicted what happened on the ground: Sectarian killing, random shooting, random imprisonment, massive unemployment and shockingly negative media images. On the other hand, these negative media images not only contradicted the 'noble' purpose of the war: they also contradicted the self-image which was cultivated and invigorated in the Iraqi social sphere by traditional and nationalist authorities.

The body, Butler warns, “is exposed to socially and politically articulated forces as well as claims of sociality – including language, work, and desire – that make possible the body's persisting and flourishing” (*Frames of War* 3). The war, the invasion, and the occupation, along with sophisticated technology and immeasurably superior media and visual symbolism, exposed the body to another force: the discursive shock and awe displayed in media and the language and narrative of war. This new force of articulation interfered with the forces existing a priori and altered the perception of the body and its relation to the construction of the self. The new conceptualisation of the body, as we shall see in Chapter IV, characterised by 'grotesque aesthetics', is employed to convey agency, dissent and self-determination. I maintain my claim by relying on the theoretical principles of cultural semiotics as put forward by Yuri Lotman, and the mirror stage and its relation to the formation of the subject as explained by Jacques Lacan.

2.1 Lotman

Literary scholar and semiotician Yuri M. Lotman (1922–1993) created a universal model for semiotic cultural analysis, which helps to understand the semiosis of cultural processes. I rely on Lotman because, as Umberto Eco explains, for him

[s]emiotic systems are *models* which explain the world in which we live (obviously, in explaining the world, they also construct it, and in this sense, even at this early stage, Lotman saw semiotics as a cognitive science). Among these systems, language is the *primary modelling system* and we apprehend the world by means of the model which language offers. Myth, cultural rules, religion, the language of art and of science are *secondary modelling systems*. We must therefore also study these semiotic systems which, since they lead us to understand the world in a certain way, allow us to speak about it (x).¹¹

This approach provides the space and justification to look at the complex areas intermingled in the encounter between the proposed semiospheres. The body, as I perceive it, is a sociolinguistic construct created as a result of extremely conflicting images produced by cultural discourses. Both discourses are primarily modelled by myth, religion, cultural rules and language.

Lotman terms this model of semiotic analysis the semiosphere, which he defines as “the semiotic space necessary for the existence and functioning of languages” (*Universe of the Mind* 123). On another occasion he specifies it as the “same semiotic space, outside of which semiosis itself cannot exist” (“On the Semiosphere” 208). According to semiotician Daniel Chandler, “[a] sign is a meaningful unit which is interpreted as 'standing for' something other than itself” (260). To Lotman, a sign is the atomic element and the first instance in the construction of the semiosphere (206), and it is only within its specific semiosphere that a sign can be understood and the semiosis in the communicative process can make sense (207). Within the semiosphere, the interaction and relation between the different signs make the semiosis possible. Lotman names the result of this interaction, or

¹¹ From Umberto Eco’s introduction to Lotman’s *Universe of the Mind*.

rather what is produced within the semiosphere, texts. They can be actual written text on any event that might generate meaning and preserve cultural memory (*Universe of the Mind* 18): “the text is treated as something that is valuable, not in itself, but merely as a kind of packaging from which a topic of interest is extracted” (11).

Lotman specifies two characteristic points in a semiosphere: the boundary and the dialogue mechanism. The former is the automatically generated outer limit that defines the individuation of the semiosphere (131). The boundary delimits and clearly distinguishes the interior and exterior sides of the semiosphere: “if the inner world reproduces the cosmos, then what is on the other side represents chaos, the anti-world, unstructured chthonic space, inhabited by monsters, infernal powers or people associated with them” (140). On the other hand, the semiosphere is heterogeneous, asymmetrical, a fluctuating sphere in which elements can shift from centre to periphery. Lotman uses the example of the Jeans which once were miners’ clothes and which with time and sociopolitical change became fashionable young people’s clothes; then they became something different to different generations and, I add, cultures. This process, Lotman explains, intensifies at the frontier areas of the semiosphere because the boundary functions as a filter “to control, filter and adapt the external into the internal” (141). As such, the boundary is ambivalent: it is the place where outside material is filtered and translated into the semiosphere, and also where elements which are shifted from the centre to the periphery concentrate:

the semiotic border is represented by the sum of bilingual translatable “filters”, passing through which the text is translated into another language (or languages), situated outside the given semiosphere. “The isolated nature” of the semiosphere subsists in the fact that it cannot be contiguous to extra-semiotic texts or nontexts. In order that these may be realised, they must be translated into one of the languages of

the internal space, in other words, the facts must be semiotized. In this way, the border points of the semiosphere may be likened to sensory receptors, which transfer external stimuli into the language of our nervous system, or a unit of translation, which adapts the external actor to a given semiotic sphere. (Lotman, “On the Semiosphere” 208–9)¹²

A process as such as this does not happen in colonial processes of a military nature: here we have two semiospheres corresponding to the two sides of war and political power. Separated by their delimiting boundaries, their interaction happens at such violent speed and method that the facts are filtered without translation or semiotisation. This lack of semiotisation explains Bhabha’s statement that “[t]he white man’s eyes break up the black man’s body and in this act of epistemic violence its own frame of reference is transgressed, its field of vision disturbed” (60). The white man’s semiotic universe – the invading semiotic universe – imposes its signs into the centre of the black man’s semiotic universe – the invaded semiotic universe – and violently shifts the latter to the periphery.¹³ This is, perhaps, why liberal Arab thought is considered a political infiltration of the West and a perpetuation of colonialism, while, in fact, it could be a genuine result of cultural translation and semiotisation.¹⁴ On a cognitive level this is what the tactic of shock and awe does: its overwhelming force, speed and violence infiltrate the semiotic boundary and disseminate its signs right at the centre of the semiosphere, causing rejection, confusion and broken semiosis.

¹² When Lotman mentions language and translation, he is referring both to natural language and language in the semiotic sense.

¹³ To clarify, I am using ‘white man’ and ‘black man’ to refer to the two patriarchal semiotic universes rather than referring to skin colour and ethnic representations.

¹⁴ On liberal Arab thought and nationalism and westernisation see Christoph Schumann’s work, particularly his introduction to *Nationalism and liberal thought in the Arab East: Ideology and Practice* 17–30, in which he discusses nationalism and liberal thought in Egypt, Iraq and Syria, and argues against the oversimplification of scholars such as Abdeslam M. Maghraoui who showed “Egyptian “liberals” tried to mimic Western culture and civilization to a degree that came close to contempt for their own indigenous culture” (22).

The other characteristic process of the semiosphere is the dialogue mechanism which takes place when semiospheres are in contact. Lotman explains:

the elementary mechanism of translating is dialogue. Dialogue presupposes asymmetry, and asymmetry is to be seen first, in the differences between semiotic structures (languages) which the participants in the dialogue use; and second, in the alternating directions of the message-flow. This last point means that the participants in a dialogue alternately change from a position of ‘transmission’ to a position of ‘reception’ and that consequently the dialogue process consists of discrete sections with intervals between them. (*Universe of the Mind* 143)

Asymmetry in structure takes place in natural language, in semiotic processes and positions of annunciation. The notions of corporality which were praised and considered honourable within the Iraqi semiosphere prior to 2003 – such as chivalry and protectiveness of the homeland – were then twisted to indicate signs of terrorism in the semiosphere of the war on terror. The same thing can be said about, for instance, women’s rights in the discourse of the war on terror. While the latter implemented a discourse of rescue, the ba‘thist discourse used women’s rights as a discursive instrument to implement its policies and to subscribe to traditional Arab nationalism, whenever found politically convenient.¹⁵ This does not mean that ba‘thist Iraq was a homogeneous, clearly defined semiosphere. It nevertheless was characterised by the distinctiveness and counter-image, which as Lotman describes it, is necessary for a dialogic process to take place (“On the Semiosphere” 220).

Lotman defines a five-step process of reception, which presumably each of the participants in the dialogue can undergo: the first involves the ‘strangeness’ of the text

¹⁵ On ba‘thist discourses, see Hawraa Al-Hassan’s book, *Women, Writing and the Iraqi Ba‘thist State* (2020), specifically the introduction 2–3.

coming from outside the semiosphere. A comparison is generated in this step between the foreign language and the language of the semiosphere in which the foreign language acquires a superior status. This stage could be easily compared to the historical moments after the famous removal of the statue of Saddam Hussein from Firdaws Square, at the heart of Baghdad. The predominant reading of that moment was that dictatorship was now defeated and that a new realm of ‘liberation’, ‘freedom’ and a ‘rebuilding’ of the country were to be established; this was the official version of the discourse of the war on terror. The second step involves a mutual restructuring between ‘imported’ and ‘home’ texts (*Universe of the Mind* 164). Lotman explains that “during the first stage the psychological impulse is to break with the past, to idealise the ‘new’ [...] In the second stage, however, there is a predominant tendency to restore the links with the past, to look for ‘roots’” (146–147). This stage explains the censorship and the destruction of literary and cultural production generated during the ba‘thist era and the return to the pre-Ba‘ath literary, artistic and cultural heritage. ‘*Ijtithāth al-Ba‘ath*’ (the Ba‘ath uprooting law), for example, is a symptom of this impulse to break with the past, and it was ideologically manipulated and led to infinities of unjust decisions and policies. On the third step Lotman writes:

During this stage a tendency develops to find within the imported world-view a higher content which can be separated from the actual national culture of the imported texts. The idea takes hold that ‘over there’ these ideas were realised in an ‘untrue’, confused or distorted, form and that ‘here’, in the heart of the receiving culture they will find their true, ‘natural’ heartland. The culture which first relayed these texts falls out of favour and the national characteristics of the texts will be stressed. (147)

This step is the vital and the most crucial one in the process of dialogue, because it suggests that the receiving culture not only assimilates and integrates the foreign language, but that it is actually looking for the ‘bright side’ of the culture and embracing, adopting and also complementing and amplifying the imported knowledge, making it more inclusive and adding a new meaning and transcendence to it. Interestingly enough, the Iraqi literary productions that refer to the literary and artistic Western canon obviate the presence of the foreign element as an occupier or warmonger. The American soldiers, politicians, war and occupation practices as such are hardly involved in the plot of many literary texts produced after the US-led invasion. There is more focus on the social destruction, sectarian killing and the injustice of dictatorship rather than the 2003 war and occupation.

On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, there is a clear and interesting presence of Western canonical texts and figures in new Iraqi fiction, such as ‘Abd al-Hādī Sa‘dūn’s *Mudhakkarāt Kalb ‘Irāqī* (Memoirs of an Iraqi Dog, 2012) which explicitly refers to Miguel de Cervantes’s *El Coloquio de los Perros* (1613). Other examples, among many, include *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013), which echoes Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818); Muhsin Al-Ramli’s *The President’s Gardens* (2012) which implicitly echoes Guillermo Cabrera Infante’s *Three Sad Tigers* (1965); and Diyā’ Jubāilī who is constantly referring to canonical authors in his works and titles, such as: *La ‘nat Marquez* (Marquez’s Curse, 2007); *Mādhā Naf‘al Bidūn Calvino* (What We Do Without Calvino, 2017); *Al-Nimr alladhī Yadda ‘ī innahu Borges* (The Tiger who Claims to be Borges, 2020) . Many of these texts also refer to Arabic and Iraqi literary heritage as well as the Western canon. Sinan Antoon, for instance, begins his four novels with epigraphs from the Qur’ān and the Ḥadīth as in *The Corpse Washer* (2010); Ibn al-Nadīm and al-Jāhīz alongside Walter Benjamin and Jorge Luis Borges as in *The Book of Collateral Damage* (2016), or Ibn Khaldūn and Ibn Manẓūr in *I’jaam* (2003). Similarly, Maīyādah Khalīl refers to Roberto Bolaño and al-Sharīf al-Raḍī

in *Nescafé ma 'a al-Sharīf al-Raḍī* (Nescafé with al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, 2016). These references are a testament to the semiotic process. They show the transference and the translation of signs and codes from outside to inside the semiosphere. They show how – by approaching and adopting the other – language brings texts into the semiosphere, and at the same time modifies the languages within that same semiosphere. It is not the first time this has happened in the history of Iraqi literary production: in 1954 poet Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb echoed Edith Sitwell's *Still Falls the Rain* (1940) in his poem *The Rain Song* (1960),¹⁶ a foundational text in the free verse movement that changed the Arabic poetics forever.¹⁷ Like Sitwell's poem, *The Rain Song* is concerned with human suffering at times of war and political hardship. These texts are symptoms of a new semiosphere in which new meanings are generated.

However, this does not mean that there are no contemporary literary texts concerned with the presence of the American troops and military activities in Iraq. Ikram Masmoudi's book *War and Occupation in Iraqi Fiction* (2015), and Usāmah al-Nāshī's *Tamathulāt al-Iḥtilāl al-Amrīkī fī al-Riwāyah al-'Irāqīyah 2004-2014* (Representations of the American Occupation in the Iraqi Novel) cover this question extensively. Masmoudi raises an interesting point by suggesting that the war on Iraq and the invasion were marked by the absence of 'symbolic exchange' as articulated by Jean Baudrillard (Masmoudi 1), and that the novels she examines can redeem this absence. Nevertheless, the texts and the theoretical framework she examines – although they register the testimony and the unheard Iraqi voice in relation to war and sovereign power – do not exactly show 'symbolic exchange' but rather perpetuate the spectrum in which contemporary Iraqi fiction is placed: a narrative that documents the atrocities and the reaction to the trauma of war and the horrors of dictatorship.

¹⁶ أنشودة المطر.

¹⁷ On al-Sayyāb and British modernist poets see El-Azma and Thompson, Levi.

This research complements these works by adding another dimension: examining new forms of claiming agency alongside the narrative of victimhood and vulnerability.

The final two steps in Lotman's process of reception imply full absorption of the imported texts by the receiving culture. The result of semiosis becomes the centre of the semiosphere and the receiving culture becomes a transmitting culture, which I believe is not yet the case. I do not think that this will be the case in the near future, given the global political situation and the lack of favourable historical, social, and psychological conditions, which – according to Lotman – are necessary for the fulfilment of cultural contact (*Universe of the Mind* 147). What is clear, rather, is that some texts show symptomatic indications that we are at step three in the process of dialogue; and these texts are the focus of this research.

The clash of imaginaries is manifested here in the facts that, first, there was no natural functioning of the boundary, nor was there a semiotic exchange since there was no alternating in the direction of message-flow (143). The receiving semiosphere was violently 'bombarded' by signs and semiosis which penetrated and were negotiated in the receiving sphere but were not embraced or dealt with by the invading one. Moreover, no 'mutual attraction' preceded the cultural contact, which means no favourable historical, social, and psychological conditions were met in order for the semiotic exchange to take place (147). On the contrary, the messages/texts received from the invading semiosphere contradict and break the semiosis in the receiving sphere by virtue of a mirroring effect that displaces the cultural signifiers on the receiving end. That is, by being a social product, as Bourdieu affirms, the body as semiotic construct automatically becomes a cultural signifier, because, like a language, the body is spoken and articulated by social identity ("Remarques Provisoires" 51) and participates in the production of semiosis. If, in a dialogue, the signifier is ambivalent or refers to a different or rather opposite signified then there is

miscommunication, miscomprehension, misidentification of the sign. This is, to my mind, what Bhabha refers to as the ‘seizure of the sign’ where “there is a contestation of the given symbols of authority that shift the terrains of antagonism. The synchronicity in the social ordering of symbols is challenged within its own terms” (277). Since there was no interaction on the behalf of the invading semiotic system, and therefore no semiotic exchange, the receiving side commences internal ‘revisions’ – in Bhabha’s terminology – questioning the validity of the semiotic process within its own sphere. From Lotman’s semiosphere, José Enrique Finol coins the term ‘Corposphere’, which he defines as “that part of the semiosphere, as proposed by Lotman, which encompasses all the signs, codes and signification processes in which, in different ways, the body is present, active and signifying (125).¹⁸ Therefore, the examination of corporality in this research entails an examination of the corpospheres within each of the conflicting imaginaries.

2.2 Lacan

The Lacanian theory of psychoanalysis serves us here in its reliance on language and discourse in the formation of subjectivity and its relation to corporality. According to Colette Soler, Lacan suggests that the body, what we refer to as our body, is constructed through language: “this body which you call your own, is bestowed upon you by language” (10). Based on Lacan’s elaboration of the mirror stage, there is a fundamental connection between the formation of the subject and the perception of corporality, generated via the narratives that constitute and confirm the specular image of the body as observed by the child in the mirror (*Anxiety* 32; 59; 91;120). The image of the body in the mirror is never sufficient to

¹⁸ My translation: “La corposfera sería esa parte de la semiosfera propuesta por Lotman y abarcaría todos los signos, códigos y procesos de significación en los que, de modos diversos, el cuerpo está presente, actúa, significa”.

determine the ownership of this body unless it is consolidated by a witness, an authoritative witness, an adult – perhaps the child’s parents who, through language, would assert, or rather inscribe, the identity of the subject onto the specular image of the body. The perception of that specular image consolidated by the witness’s eye, or rather, language, becomes what Lacan calls the ‘primary body’, ‘the body of the symbolic’ (Soler 9), the body woven from language ingressing the subject into the symbolic order: “society’s unwritten constitution [...] a yardstick against which I can measure myself” (Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* 8–9). Before going any further let me remind readers that

Lacan’s utilization of the idea of the mirror is not exclusively literal. Although he often talks of mirrors as shiny reflective surfaces, he does not limit mirroring to being a visible physical phenomenon alone. Most importantly, other persons’ speech, gestures, postures, moods, facial expressions, and so on frequently can be said to “mirror” back to one an “image” of oneself, namely, a conveyed sense of how one “appears” from other perspectives. (Johnston)

Thus, the mirror that generates the specular image of the body is never separable from the ‘yardstick against which I measure myself’ and can be an active element in the process of semiosis within a determined semiosphere. Accordingly, religious discourse is a mirror, social decorum is another mirror, and ideology is a mirror. Every time the subject, child or not, encounters a new symbolic order, a new discourse of being, his perception of selfhood, his body image is altered. Therefore, the mirror which I refer to when it comes to reflecting and constructing the specular image of the body in this research is in fact the image of the body as presented by the discourses in conflict prior to, during and after the invasion of Iraq. My account is that, on a semiotic level, something happened to the perception of corporality when the image of the body constructed in the first ‘mirror’, namely the semiosphere – or

rather the corposphere – of the status quo, was juxtaposed with the invading ‘mirror’, namely the semiosphere and corposphere of the discourse of the war on terror. Lacan speaks of ‘depersonalisation’: a phenomenon which

begins with the non-recognition of the specular image. [...] [T]he subject starts to be gripped by a depersonalizing vacillation whenever he cannot find himself in the mirror [...] If what is seen in the mirror is anguishing, it is in so far as it cannot be proposed to the Other’s acknowledgement. (*Anxiety* 120)

When the Iraqi subject saw a contrast in his/her self-image, by examining their body-image as represented in the invading mirror, their sense of self was shattered because the specularisation of the body image – and self-image – was detached from what Lacan calls the Big Other: the self-image as represented in the symbolic order. When the subject cannot recognise himself in the mirror, he/she is dispossessed from the Big Other and his/her specularisation is altered, it “is strange, odd as the English say, unpaired, devoid of symmetry. It is Maupassant’s *Horla*, the *hors-l’espace*, outside space, inasmuch as space is the dimension of the superposable” (*Anxiety* 120). Depersonalisation does not mean an action of ripping off a fixed personality, it is also an actual alteration in the formation of the ego (Federn 241). Lacan compares this process with Maupassant’s horrific story because it destabilises the narrative of the formation of the ego, and it brings close the distance that separates

the phantasmatic kernel of the subject’s being from the more superficial modes of his or her symbolic or imaginary identification. It is never possible for me to fully assume (in the sense of symbolic integration) the phantasmic kernel of my being: when I venture too close, what occurs is what Lacan calls *aphanisis* (the self-

obliteration) of the subject: the subject loses his/her symbolic consistency, it disintegrates. (Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* 55)

This is what, I argue, happened in the case of Iraq, as we shall see in the following chapters, after 2003, on the cultural-semiotic level. The images and the representations of the body in the discourse of the war on terror forcibly brought the utmost fear into images on the screens or on paper, that is, it brought the phantasmic kernel into actualisation, the unthinkable into tangible, the unsymbolised into language, and the inherently private unknown into the public.

Now that the conflicting imaginaries are juxtaposed as two semiotic universes, two mirrors, reflecting linguistically constructed bodies onto each other's surfaces, what would the resulting image of the body be? Is it possible that by reflecting a particular body-image – as discussed in Chapter III – the discourse of the war on terror altered the act of signification the body in the Iraqi cultural context – as discussed in Chapter II? How are the representational politics of corporality in contemporary Iraqi fiction – discussed in Chapter IV – an indication of a new act of signification? These are the questions that the following analysis addresses.

3. Setting the Methodology

I propose to examine the body as the construct of a collective symbolic order within two semiospheres: the first is pre-2003 Iraq, which was invaded and violently met with the second, namely the discourse of the war on terror. The first presents the historical background and the conceptualisation of the body in the status quo prior to the invasion. The second, the narrative of the war on terror, particularly in the Anglo-American context, the leading force of the invasion, which sheds light on the mechanisms or the texts – in Lotman's

terminology – by which the status quo was interrupted, or rather the boundary of the semiosphere was infiltrated, and the act of signification was altered. Finally, a third semiosphere is suggested, namely contemporary Iraqi fiction, where the new phenomenon of corporality shall be examined.

The relation of power and language inputs takes up oppressed/oppressor dynamics in the constitution of the symbolic order of the semiosphere. Amidst this interdisciplinary entanglement, the Foucauldian archaeological method presents the most adequate tool with which to untangle the semiotic processes that construct the sign of the body and its corpusphere. As Foucault puts it, the archaeological description is a systematic reorganisation of what has been said or written (*The Archeology of Knowledge* 138). If the objective of this research is to articulate a meaning or an interpretation of the representations of the body in contemporary Iraqi fiction, the archaeological description and analysis can provide the space to understand how these representations come into being by defining “discourses in their specificity; to show in what way the set of rules that they put into operation is irreducible to any other” (139). Archaeology, however, Foucault warns, is not a quest for the origin of things; rather, it is a description of how the meaning of things is articulated within discourse both linguistically and in practice; it “is nothing more than a rewriting” (140). This method is congruent with the objective of this research: to see how the representation of the body makes sense or, rather, what it means. The following section details how the archaeological method is applied in this research.

3.1 Archaeology

Archaeological analysis will help us to see the ‘rules of formation’ of the body: “conditions of existence (but also coexistence, maintenance modification, and disappearance) in a given

discursive division” (38). The discursive division, in this particular case, can be understood as the space where the epistemic violence occurs and the act of signification is modified – in other words, to outline in separate totalities a description of systems of thought and knowledge that govern thinking of/about the body in contemporary Iraq, as well as analysing the outcome resulting from the interaction between these systems. The effectiveness of this method is supported by the argument that archaeology

allowed the historians of thought to operate at an unconscious level that displaced the primacy of the subject found in both phenomenology and in traditional historiography. However, archaeology’s critical force was restricted to the comparison of the discursive formations of different periods. (Gutting and Oksala)

The archaeological method can show the connections between these signs within and outside their operating discourses and help perceive the depth with which a certain image of the body relates to substrate processes. Archaeology does not merely show the route to the meaning of the sign in its relation to other signs; it also shows how this particular sign relates to other signs in the other – confronting – semiotic space.

Since

[a]rchaeology defines the rules of formation of a group of statements [, it] analyses the degree and form of permeability of a discourse: it provides the principle of its articulation over a chain of successive events; it defines the operators by which the events are transcribed into statements. (Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* 167)

Accordingly, this research’s major task is to trace those statements concerned with body and compare and articulate the structures in which these statements are organised within the two examined discourses. By being “the elementary unit of discourse” (80), a statement does not

have to be something limited to a grammatically correct sentence; it could be an event, an act, a performance, a proverb, a verse, or a legislation: anything that constitutes the mirror reflecting the body-image in the symbolic order. A statement, as Foucault illustrates, is the meaningful functionality of the sign in time and space,

it is the function of existence that probably belongs to the sign and on the basis of which one then may decide, through analysis or intuition whether or not they ‘make sense’, according to what rule they follow one another or are juxtaposed, of what they are a sign, and what sort of act is carried out by their formulation (oral or written). (86–87)

Furthermore, since it is difficult to ignore the cultural, social and political components of the construction of the knowledge of the body, because literature responds to the reality that provides these components, I examine the body-statements within specific archives. An archive is that “which defines the mode of occurrence of the statement-thing [, that is,] *the system of its functioning*” (129). These archives, then, will not include literary texts exclusively, but also religious texts, popular knowledge, anthropological and sociological treatments, journalism: wherever a certain system of annunciation is being applied.

I mentioned previously that this research traces a genealogy of the body in contemporary Iraqi fiction, which makes it necessary to outline an approximation of what this means. I understand genealogy as explained by Elizabeth Grosz in *Volatile Bodies* (1994):

Genealogy is what provides a “history of the present,” a history of the various events that lead up to or make possible various struggles in the present [...] a history that in no way pretends to be neutral, disinterested, and objective or to describe historical events as they really occurred. [G]enealogy can be seen as the study of elements

insofar as they are already interpreted, a study aimed at unsettling established models of knowledge and epistemological presumptions involved in the production of history, philosophy, and morality. (145)

The following analysis, then, follows a particular organisation that entails a chronological but also a systematic logic: the second chapter, for instance, illustrates the rules for the formation of the body as an episteme in Iraqi society, culture and literature prior to the 2003 US invasion. I use the term ‘episteme’ as defined by Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*: “the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems [...] it is the totality of relations that can be discovered, for a given period, between the sciences when one analyses them at the level of discursive regularities” (191). Here, I analyse a wide range of statements collected from religious, social, political and literary texts organised in a historical line: since the formation of the Iraqi state in 1921 until 2003. This is detailed in two analytical sections: a section for socio-political and cultural analysis and another for the analysis of literary texts. This chapter tries to give with certain depth a comprehensive picture of the socio-cultural conceptualisation of the body as well as an approximation to a universal symbolic order in this particular context.

The third chapter illustrates statements concerning the body in the discourse of the war on terror prior to, during and after the invasion. Structurally, this chapter is organised in two parts: the first analyses the statements employed by the political discourse of the war on terror and the second traces this employment in fiction. This section shows, on one level, the construction of a certain ideal of the colonised subject through the representation of their bodies. On a deeper level, and more importantly, it shows how the representation of the body in the discourse of the war on terror impacts the symbolic order outlined in the previous

chapter and how, in this sense, it could be considered part of the strategies of military operations.

The fourth chapter focuses on corporality in contemporary Iraqi fiction as a result of and as a response to the encounter between the previously examined discourses. By addressing two questions of representation – aesthetics and gender – this chapter shows how the representation of corporality is an indication of a new act of signification and how a new conceptualisation of the body can be defined.

3.2 Corpus

As far as the selection of texts, the forthcoming analysis addresses a selection of texts which exemplify the phenomenon I examine. The selected texts are considered representative based on their aesthetic and content value; they are written by the major names in contemporary Iraqi literary scenes. The contemporary Iraqi texts were selected to form a category in which, firstly, they correspond to the different aspects of the corposphere (sexuality, death, the pornography of horror, obesity and disability). Each text presents a significant case of the grotesque representation of the body, which perhaps, as is argued in Chapter Four, is the most significant development in the history of Iraqi literature.

The second feature lies in the fact that they have received a wide popular and academic following.¹⁹ The third feature consists in the fact that they refer to Western literary and artistic canons as well as Arabic and Iraqi heritage (*turāth*) and folklore and these engagements indicate an attempt at epistemological dialogue rather than a manifestation of

¹⁹ As mentioned by Bahooora, 2017: 260–263; Caiani and Cobham 1–21; Masmoudi 10–11; al-Nāshī' 10; and Nāyif al-Fāyīz throughout his book *Tamathulāt al-Mawt fī al-Riwāyah al-'Irāqīyah 2003–2013* (Representations of Death in the Iraqi Novel 2003 – 2013).

influence. This feature situates us on the boundary where hybrid-sourced semiosis is in action. The texts present a different stand on gender and the representation of sexuality namely as a medium of self-affirmation, which indicates a continuity between modern and contemporary fiction; however, contemporary fiction, particularly in the selected works, shows a clear decrease in or retreat of male supremacy. The fourth feature consists in the fact that they reflect on cultural dislocation by examining the situation before and after the invasion and occupation. The fifth feature consists in the fact that in the selected texts there is a considerable absence of interaction with the invading soldier. I find this characteristic particularly significant as it shows that there is a somehow systematic attention shown towards the death and destruction of the Iraqi self, rather than towards the nationalist notion of losing the land. As Ikram Masmoudi rightly indicates,

the war experiences depicted today in Iraqi novels are not those of heroes of battles or war martyrs sacrificed in the name of ideology and the homeland; they are the experiences of the 'other' war actor, a different kind of actor who refuses coercion, subjugation and humiliation (215).

Masmoudi's indication places the fiction of and about the Iraq of the post-invasion period within the scope of modern war narrative, where the hero/heroine is the civilian rather than the combatant. Whilst the absence of the invading soldier, on the one hand, decentralises the political conflict between states and shifts the focus onto the Iraqi subject with the American-Iraqi conflict in the background, on the other hand, contemporary fiction shows a new process of signification in which nationalist ideology is being retrieved from the symbolic order. This 'other' war actor, who takes us away from nationalist discourse, is an indication of the dispossession of the subject from its Big Other, an indication of a new self-image which is in the process of becoming.

In addition, the texts I include discard the idea of Islamic radicalisation as a response to or a symptom of trauma, because such an idea reproduces the neo-orientalist discourse of war and terror; and the latter is already examined in Chapter Three. The texts I choose seem to be deliberately wanting to break the rule which states ‘violence reproduces violence’; they do not present the occupation as an act of humiliation which incites hatred and violence; rather, it is seen to be an abuse of power that falls upon the characters. Envisioning the occupation as an act of humiliation belongs to the nationalist paradigm, but I believe that we have a chance, here, not to perpetuate this paradigm, and, rather, to hear a different voice. Similarly, I have also discarded the texts that engage in phallogentric national allegories, as well as those texts that perpetuate the orientalist representation of gender and sexuality. I deal with these representations in Chapters Two and Three; therefore, these texts, as far as contemporary innovations are concerned, do not represent greatly valuable content, and they are already subject to examination in different research materials.

3.3 Setting Positionality: A note on ‘testimony’

In the *Remnants of Auschwitz* (1999) Giorgio Agamben defines testimony as “an act of an ‘author’” (150). Based on his examination of the different meanings of the Latin word ‘auctor’, Agamben concludes that ‘auctor’ “signifies the witness insofar as his testimony always presupposes something – a fact, a thing or a word – that preexists him and whose reality and force must be validated or certified” (150). To him, “an act of the auctor completes the act of an incapable person, giving strength of proof to what in itself lacks it and granting life to what could not live alone” (150). Previously, I mentioned that this research pretends to a history of the representation of the body; now I add that it does this, as organised, analysed, interpreted and lived by myself. I have written this research partially from this position of witness. My intention as a scholar and a witness is to consolidate and

complement with academic examination a literary phenomenon of a given reality, namely Iraqi literature. However, having been born in Iraq and having lived the precise context of my examination, I am aware of the limitations and also the singularity of my testimony, which might be interpreted as that of a ‘superstes’, i.e., “a person who has lived through something, who has experienced an event from beginning to end and can therefore bear witness to it” (17). I chose this matter as a first step in my research, because, as a scholar who witnessed in the flesh the question under examination, I saw a considerable distance between the reality that contemporary Iraqi fiction addresses, and the way in which this fiction was and is being approached by the academy. Post-2003 Iraqi fiction is generally seen as a narrative of trauma and resilience limited to the context of Iraq’s contemporary history. My testimony wants to call attention to the fact that this approach excludes literary works from being examined as such. As Toni Morrison advised, I am writing research that I want to read.²⁰ I want to read about Iraqi fiction as literary texts that speak to other literary texts, and as literary creativity that responds to the great concerns of modernity and to the history of human thought.

Both when I was only Iraqi and when I became an Iraqi *and* a European citizen, I have always been on the boundary, far from the centre of any semiosphere. My knowledge comes from the points of interaction and the transfer of texts from and into their semiospheres. Being a ‘double agent’, an outsider-insider, an informant-spokesperson, I can relatively easily spot the connections and distances between texts on different sides of the boundary; but it is possible that my reading is among a reduced minority. This is perhaps the tragic nature of writing today: the narrating voice can be valuable, but it can never be decisive. My testimony entails a recognition of cognitive violence that was deliberately

²⁰ “If you find a book you really want to read but it hasn’t been written yet, then you must write it.” (qtd. in Brown).

exercised to impede the natural functioning of the boundary that separates and unites the semiospheres – us and them – where meaning and dialogue could have been articulated. This caused not only an alteration in the process of semiosis, but also in its perception and reception. I am writing from the body which was caught in between, the grotesque, doubly misinterpreted body, sanctified on the one hand, demonised on the other. I can bear witness to this body I am writing about because I have lived it, seen it, read it, and this is how I managed to organise the knowledge I came across.

II. This is a Man's World

The Body in Iraqi Society and Fiction before 2003

As its title indicates, this chapter focuses on the first corpusphere: semiosis, meanings, and the representations of the body in the Iraqi socio-cultural system prior to the 2003 US-led invasion, and the question of how fiction approached them. I begin this analysis by outlining that the body, as a concept can in this context be understood as a problem with its origins in the religious and social concepts of corporality. Both concepts reflect an understanding of the body as being primarily masculine. In other words, what we encounter is a symbolic order in which the specular image of the subject is conditioned by hegemonic masculinity as dictated by religious and social authority. This notwithstanding, I do not ignore the fact that there are non-hegemonic discourses that constitute the conceptualisation of the body in this or in any context. This research, however, tries to show that there is a relation between the hegemonic discourses of corporality in order to understand the emergent discourses of corporality in contemporary Iraqi fiction.

Since concepts of corporality are conditioned by historical and political contexts, this analysis focuses, first, on outlining the conceptual paradigms of the religious and social construction of the body. Second, on examining how these constructions were approached in fiction in three different periods of time since the formation of the Iraqi state in 1920 until 2003. The conceptual paradigms are divided into two parts: religious and socio-anthropological. In the religious paradigm, the analysis focuses on the representation of the body in the Qur'ān as the primary source of the religious construction of the body. For the

social and anthropological set, I rely on Sana Al-Khayyat's *Honour and Shame: Women in Modern Iraq* (1990) and Abdelwhab Bouhdiba's *Sexuality in Islam* (1975) among others, as well as on my own experience. By looking at women's lives through testimonies, Al-Khayyat's book reveals certain peculiarities in the Iraqi social praxis of the body which elucidate the semiosis of corporality within this context. Bouhdiba's book draws a detailed picture of the social aspects of sexuality in Muslim societies, and how social and economic realities participate in the creation of religious conceptualisation of the body. As for the historical aspect of the analysis, my approach brings together the histories of the Iraqi novel in the twentieth century by Haytham Bahooora and Najm 'Abd Allāh Kāzīm. These histories take into account literary and socio-political contexts for the division of the genre into three general periods with distinct style, content, and context.

1. The Problem of the Body

The conceptualisation of the body entails a historical philosophical, psychological, literary, and religious problem in the context of Arab and Muslim societies. This problem – as literary critic, 'Abd Allāh al-Ghadhāmī describes it – lies in the fact that the language that constructs corporality is under male control (7). Although al-Ghadhāmī suggests that this control stems from classic texts in the Arab and Islamic cultural heritage, I believe it is rooted in the problem of the interpretation of the Qur'ān. I understand this problem as discussed by such Muslim scholars and feminists as Leila Ahmed, Fatema Mernissi, Amina Wadud, Mohammed Arkoun and Nasr Abu Zayd, who emphasise that the religious text is a linguistic and semiotic product of its time, and that its interpretation has been limited by social, geographical, political and ideological circumstances, as opposed to the belief of orthodox interpreters and theologians who believe in the logocentric nature of the holy text.

Corporality, then, like any other philosophical question in the context of Arab and Muslim thought, is subject to the evolution of the interpretation of the religious text. Muslim philosophers – both al-‘ulamā’ and falāsifah – develop their thought from the idea that the body is that part of the self that moves in a direction that distances subjectivity from the soul (al-‘Alawī 10–23). They believe the soul to be the true self that controls the body’s perception and movement (al-Muṣbāḥī 1401–1482); and, in this active precedence, the body must reflect the truthfulness of the soul, which is what unites us with the creator. Modern Arab thinkers and critics continued to explore and to use this dialectic until the mid-late twentieth century, when debates actively began to stress the notion of the body as a socially repressed side of selfhood which needs to be outspoken, a concept advocated by Muslim and Christian authors such as Jumānah Ḥaddād in both her literary works and her magazine project, *Jasad* (Body); Aḥlām Mustaghānmī; and Nizār Qabbānī among other less canonical authors, whose works reflect the internalised belief of the separation between soul and body in social praxis. The question of the body and the soul is often referred to with the term ‘*Ishkāliyat/Jadaliyat al-Jasad*’ (problem/dialectic of the body) as in *Mawsū‘at al-Sard al-‘Arabī* (Encyclopaedia of Arabic Narrative, 2008) elaborated by the Iraqi ‘Abd Allāh Ibrāhīm (Vol. II 399–420). One of the consequences of this historic split and the precedence of the soul imposed by interpreters of the sacred text is that corporality became a construct conditioned by the function of reflecting the image of closeness to the creator. The body became a structural signifier of faith, i.e., ideology, as it has to reflect the image of being close to the creator.

The problem of the body in the Iraqi sociocultural sphere, I argue, is that it is perceived as originally masculine. That is, the body is perceived within a phallogocentric paradigm in which femininity does not merely differ from the centre, but rather in which it is defined as a deviation and an incompleteness. ‘Abd Allāh al-Ghadhāmī insists that the cultural category

‘woman’ is a linguistic construct, not a linguistic agent (8),²¹ and hence language has become virility itself.²² That is, ‘woman’ is a concept created by a language stemming from a domain of men who can create linguistic constructs. ‘Woman’, being a construct, cannot generate language. Al-Ghadhāmi argues that speech is a masculine act that historically has silenced the feminine voice. Fāṭimah Yūsuf al-‘Alī confirms al-Ghadhāmī’s statement by explaining that the perception of subjectivity could not dissent from the centrality of the masculine consciousness until Arab women began to transform consciousness by transforming language (14). Similarly, on language and the formation of its masculine consciousness in the Arab world, Rajā’ Bin Salāmah argues that the notion ‘feminine’ has been established as that which hides the meaning, shadows the truth and threatens its production, something that is secondary and at the same time threatens what is central: ‘masculine’ (34). I examine below how both religious and social decorum consolidate the masculine consciousness that has narrated the body.

1.1 The Qur’ān

I began the research for this section with my master’s dissertation which examined the representational politics of corporality in the Qur’ān. In this present section, I focus on the analysis of the textual representation of the body, not the implicit ‘*ahkām*’ (laws) on which Qur’ānic scholars might agree and disagree. The purpose of such a reading of the body in the Qur’ānic text is to outline some of the statements – in the Foucauldian sense – that constitute the sociocultural discourse of corporality. If prayers “offer the believer a tangible means of communing with the Creator on a regular basis” (C. Turner 163) through the recital of the

²¹ "فالمرأة موضوع لغوي وليست ذاتاً لغوية"

²² "صارت اللغة فحولة وقمة الإبداع هي (الفحولة)" The word ‘Fuḥūlah’ (virility) in Arabic is also used to mean excelling at something.

Qur'ān, then it is important to analyse the precise language in which this communing is conducted. The representation of the body in the Qur'ān is enhanced by the anthropological and social conceptualisation of the body in Iraq, or for instance, Tunisia or Lebanon or Egypt, where the codification of the body and dress code may have had other historical, geographical, and ethnic factors of influence. In *Women and Gender in Islam* (1992) Leila Ahmed details the history of the area today named Iraq and shows how the confluence of cultures, societies, and religions worked together to institutionalise men's control over female sexuality. The Muslim society that emerged in the area was a determining factor in the constitution of Islamic law and institutions (Ahmed 372). Ahmed's history expounds the historical dimension to male supremacy and the masculine consciousness of the language which I examine here.

However, I focus this examination on the Qur'ān, the text, rather than on Islamic exegesis for three reasons. To begin with, as Malek Chebel suggests, the main occurrences of the body in Islam are to be found in the the Qur'ān, whether it is explicitly mentioned or rhetorically evoked via figures of speech, metaphors, allusions or ellipses (Chebel 13). This means that any discussion of the concept of body and corporality in Islam should begin by the analysis of these occurrences in the Qur'ān. Mohammed Arkoun explains that "Muslims [...] focus on the Qur'ān as the Word of God, providing all the believers with clear, eternal, indisputable norms, teachings and ideal commandments to enlighten this life and lead to salvation in the next" (Arkoun 930). The second reason is that, as Arkoun argues, the Qur'ān participates in the building of the Muslim subjectivity:

By defining man as a creature gifted with intelligence, by appointing him 'the Vicar of God on earth' (ḥalīfat Allah fil-arḍi), the Qur'ān (following Judaeo-Christian thinking and in accordance with the Greek philosophical tradition) establishes that

sovereignty of the subject and that identification of the Ego, which will receive a more ‘methodical’ formulation in the Cartesian Cogito. This ego, invested with a divine mission and thus promised to immortality, is to supervise the faculties of the mind in their function of re-cognition (*ya’qil*) (in dreams, take-offs of imagination, rational speculation, meditation) of the True-Good-Beautiful as opposed to the false-bad-ugly. (Arkoun 3031)

Accordingly, if the Cartesian Cogito is *Cogito ergo sum*, ‘I think, therefore I am’, then the Qur’ānic subject is formulated as ‘I believe that [what the Qur’ān says], therefore I am’. Thus, any inquiry into the meanings and the significance of the body for Muslims should begin with the construction of that sovereign subject and the identification of that ego. Third, Ḥusān considers the examination of the Qur’ān the beginning of the “true intellectual history of Arabic literature” (332–3),²³ and this view is advocated by other scholars including Mohammad Salama who states that “[i]f one is willing only to see the Qur’ān through the Islamist lens of literalism, or to denigrate it from an orientalist perspective as a mere imitation of pre-existing religions, any progress in understanding the Qur’ān or one’s fellow human beings will be impossible” (Salama 116).

As this research aims at tracing the genealogy of corporality in the fiction of this context, then examining the Qur’ān becomes mandatory. Furthermore, the Qur’ān is the religious text most read by Muslims and by Muslim scholars. People – and by people, I mean not scholars – are more likely to read the Qur’ān rather than the exegeses or any other interpretative text, since readers believe it is the direct word of God, and reciting it is believed to protect them and to bring them close to the creator. In Iraq, it is common knowledge that every Muslim household has at least one solid copy of the Qur’ān. Moreover, and most

²³ Qtd. in Salama 27.

significantly, Iraq witnessed a peculiar period of its history in which a massive reading of the Qur'ān was a state policy. As Zahra Ali describes in her sociological study *Women and Gender in Iraq* (2018), “the [ba‘thist] regime launched its *hamla al-Imaniyya* (“Faith Campaign”) at the beginning of the 1990s” (112). Ali describes that part of this campaign was the reading of the Qur'ān and giving Qur'ān lessons to women affiliated with Ba‘ath institutions. What she leaves out of her study is that the reading of the Qur'ān became a compulsory school subject since the early years of elementary school until the very last year of university education (Baram 11). Young learners, including myself, read the Qur'ān throughout all primary and secondary school, and also during summer holidays, as some parents sent their children to the mosque each week for a number of hours to learn the text and its recital. Such was the municipal plan organised on a national level to engage primary school students in an educational activity during the summer holidays (Baram 11). Learning the Qur'ān was the only programme.

The religious perception of the body, I argue, is sourced from the qur'ānic text in addition to the exegesis's interpretations and teachings. Lastly, my focus on the Qur'ān rather than on the exegeses, or on the totality of Islam, is motivated by what Amina Wadud says: “My concerns for *what* the Qur'an says, *how* it says it, what is said *about* the Qur'an, and *who* is doing the saying, have been supplemented by a recent concern over what is left *unsaid*: the ellipses and silences” (180). Certainly, the interpretation of the religious text is limited to those who have acquired the formation and the knowledge to do so, and the task here is by no means to interfere with the hermeneutics or the sciences of the Qur'ān. The interest is rather in the cognitive denotations of the qur'ānic imageries, perceptions, and representations of the body for a reader who is not a qur'ānic scholar, for this is the language that participates in the construction of corporality in the semiotic space. The images of the

body in the Qur'ān, I propose, are one of the Lacanian mirrors with which the subject identifies and from which it constructs the specular image of the self.

Among the different representations of the body in the Qur'ān, there is a notion of supremacy attached to the masculine body and to masculinity, both linguistically, via the customary use of the masculine pronoun and declensions when referring to human beings in general, and conceptually when specifically addressing the male body and the role of man. The most evident example is the miracle of creation. The human body, which is a sign of the creator's mastery, genius and a proof of His existence is a masculine body, the body of Ādam: "Your Lord said to the Angels, 'I will create a mortal out of dried clay, formed from dark mud. When I have fashioned him and breathed my Spirit into him, bow down for him, and the angels all did so'" (15:28–30). However, this miracle is described as converting something loathsome and insignificant into a holy, miraculous body. The materiality of the body is emphasised repeatedly, particularly in the story of Iblīs's expulsion from heaven (7: 11–12). The conflict lies in the fact that Iblīs believed that Ādam's body was created from worthless clay while his body was created of fire. This story is repeated in 15:28–35; 17:61–63; 20:116–123, and 38:71–77. The message here is ambivalent: the divine wisdom intended the human body to be identified as a despised material, and yet favoured it.

Similarly, the idea of shaping the human body of a '*Nutfah*', the Arabic word for sperm, which in the text is described as '*mahīn*' meaning 'despicable; despised; insignificant; worthless; contemptible; menial; humble; low; base; mean'.²⁴ The word is translated in the cited edition as simply 'fluid' or 'underrated fluid': "He first created man from clay, then he made his descendants from an extract of underrated fluid. Then He moulded him; He breathed from His Spirit into him, He gave you hearing, sight, and minds.

²⁴ See *al-Maūrid* and *Almaany* dictionaries.

How seldom you are grateful!” (32: 8–10). This idea is repeated in the Ayahs 16:4; 18:37; 35:11; 36:77. Thus, in addition to being the favoured worst, the human body has its origins in sperm. The Qur’ān says: “People, be mindful of your Lord, who created you from a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from the pair of them spread countless men and women far and wide ...” (4:1). There is a debate on the meaning of the words ‘from it’ (Wadud 707). According to the translator’s note, it means “‘from the same essence’, Razi convincingly reached this conclusion based on comparison with many instances ...” (Abdel Haleem 105), which means from clay and or sperm. The popular belief that the first female body was created from Ādam’s body, as Leila Ahmed shows, is not mentioned in the Qur’ān. The traditionalist literature written after the Muslim conquests made that story popular (Ahmed 134). Nevertheless, the Qur’ān reiterates that both bodies are created from the sperm, “that He Himself created the two sexes, male and female, from an ejected drop of sperm ...” (53: 45–46). This is also repeated in 92:3 and 78:8. For Wadud, the Qur’ān does not specify God’s intentionality in creating humankind starting from a male, and He “never referred to the origins of the human race with Adam” (734). However, the Qur’ān clearly states: “We created you, We gave you shape, and then We said to the angels, ‘Bow down before Adam,’ and they did” (7:11). Additionally, in the Āyahs 15:28–30, mentioned above, the mortal that God created and told the angels to bow down before is Ādam, and this story is repeated, mentioning the name Ādam in 2:33; 17:61; 18:50, and 20:116. This is the first instance of male supremacy, being the origin of human life.

On the other hand, there is a suggestion that the creation of a female partner is God’s blessing, to provide Ādam with pleasure and the gift of procreation: “And it is God who has given you spouses from amongst yourselves and through them He has given you children and grandchildren and provided you with good things ...” (16:72). There are further examples, too: “Another of His signs is that He created spouses from among yourselves to

live with tranquillity ...” (30:21); and “those who pray, ‘Our Lord, give us joy in our spouses and offspring. Make us good examples to those who are aware of you’. These servants will be rewarded with the highest place in Paradise ...” (25:74–75). In addition to the idea of proceeding from the masculine body and complementing the male role, the Qur’ān also establishes gender hierarchy. The *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, regarding gender, writes:

Five basic linguistic observations may be made. One, gender terms predominate over sex terms in Qur’an. Two, sometimes gender and sex terms are used inversely so that the gender terms may indicate the biological condition or sex terms may make a religio-cultural statement. Three, the word ‘woman’ and other gender terms referring to female persons appear mainly in relation to men. Four, women are most frequently mentioned as wives. Five, the same word may be given similar or different inflections in the female and male forms. (Vol. II: 288)

Amidst this linguistic confusion, the interpreter’s role becomes crucial: because Adam was created first, because his needs lead to the creation of his partner, and because women are most frequently mentioned in their relation to men, male supremacy is consolidated. Even though the text corresponds to certain historical circumstances – as Islamic feminism teaches us – Muslim societies have made the belief in male supremacy popular and have consolidated this interpretation as a normative cultural identifier.²⁵ Judith Butler explains that “the ‘sex’ which is referred to as prior to gender [is] itself [...] a postulation, a construction, offered within language” (*Bodies That Matter* 5). According to the story of creation, sex is not prior to gender, but rather complementary to it, and the socio-political lingering over the perpetuation of this belief makes it possible for language to consolidate this masculine centrality. Moreover, the creator chooses to refer to Himself with the

²⁵ See al-Tamīmī. in the introduction, she insists on: 1) how women’s inferiority was an idea ideologically imposed idea by the interpreters of the Qur’ān and 2) how Muslim society helped to perpetuate this belief.

masculine pronoun. Whilst He clearly indicates that He is neither male or female “He begot no one nor was He begotten” (112:3) – he protests with indignation when female or feminine attributes are attached to Him: “are you to have the male and He the female? That would be most unjust distribution!” (53:21). Although it is comprehensible that many languages use the masculine pronoun and declensions to refer both to male and female objects and people, the issue, nevertheless, is not merely the particular use of grammatical gender, it is also the context and the way in which sexual and gender difference are regulated.

There is a tendency in qur’ānic discourse towards regulating sexuality, considering sexual male desire a serious demand, the satisfaction of which is a reward in the afterlife (Saleh 76 – 80). Even though both male and female are punished for unauthorised intercourse “Strike the adulteress and the adulterer one hundred times. Do not let compassion for them keep you from carrying out God’s law ...” (24:2) – the regulations for female sexuality differs from the male. On the one hand, the Qur’ān dedicates a Surah to women’s legal, social and sexual issues under the title “al-Nisā’” (Women). Although all the Surahs of the sacred text address the believers – men or women – to communicate God’s word and teach them God’s laws, lessons and doctrine, ‘women’, unlike ‘men’ seem to be something that the believers should learn about. The text addresses issues that imply both men and women such as matrimony, intercourse and divorce; yet there are regulations concerning female sexuality exclusively – for instance, menstruation. The Qur’ān deals with menstruation as in “Say, ‘Menstruation is a painful condition so keep away from women during it. Do not approach them until they are cleansed ...’” (2:222). The *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān* describes menstruation as “a cause of major impurity analogous to that entailed by sexual intercourse” (Vol. III:376). Coming near women during menstruation is considered an impurity, in much as the same way as in 4: 43, where God forbids the believers to come near the prayers if they are drunk, or have defecated, or have touched women.

According to Waleed Saleh, the Qur'ān expresses awareness regarding the importance and the impact of sexual instincts. In fact, it is so important even to the extent of considering it a moral obligation to satisfy sexual desire (Saleh 76–80) – a subject which is thoroughly discussed by Fatema Mernissi and Sana Al-Khayyat. This importance is reflected, Saleh explains, in the sexual compensations in the afterlife, which facilitate the believers' self-control. In the afterlife, the believers, who have won God's mercy and approval, will be in heaven enjoying all sorts of pleasures, including the sexual: there will be “any fruit they choose; the meat of any bird they like; and beautiful-eyed maidens, like hidden pearls: a reward for what they used to do [...] We have specially created – virginal, loving, of matching age – for those on the Right” (56:20–36). The idea of the beautiful-eyed maidens given as a reward is also repeated in 44:54; 52:20, and 55:72. These maidens are referred to by the word '*ḥūr*' which means “youthful, virgin females with large dark eyes, white skin, and a pliant character” (Wadud 1339). According to tradition, these females regain their virginity after every intercourse, eager to be devout men (Saleh 80). This description perhaps reflects the dreams and desires of male-dominant society in the pre-Islamic period. As Saleh points out, its promise sexual pleasures as a reward for Muslim men is an indication that the Qur'ān does not despise the sexual instinct; rather, it shows an awareness of its importance and value (Saleh 80). However, unless female homosexuality is a reward in the afterlife – which it is not – these beautiful-eyed, permanent virgins are meant to please male believers exclusively. The recognition of the importance of the sexual instinct is a recognition of a male-centric desire for polygamy.

Mernissi suggests that “men and women are considered to have similar instinctual drives, yet men are entitled to as many as four partners to satisfy those derives, while women must content themselves with at most one man” (59). The Qur'ān does not address female sexual instincts, neither in earthly life nor in the afterlife. Women are supposed to join their

husbands in the afterlife “Enter Paradise, you and your spouses: you will be filled with joy” (43:70). The only occasion where female sexual desire is addressed is in the story of Yūsuf, in which Egypt’s ruler’s wife tries to seduce Yūsuf because she is enchanted by his beauty (12:23–30). This story links female desire with promiscuity and evil, which is not the case for any example of male desire in the narrative of the Qur’ān.

For these reasons and based on the examples outlined above, when read without scholarly guidance, the Qur’ān offers a message of male superiority. This is especially seen in this problematic Ayah:

Men are the protectors and the maintainers of women, because Allah has made one of them to excel the other and because they spend (to support them) from their means. Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedient (to Allah and to their husbands), and guard in the husband’s absence what Allah orders them to guard (e.g. their chastity, their husband’s property). As to those women on whose part you see ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them (lightly, if it is useful); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance). Surely, Allah is Ever most High, Most Great. (4:34)²⁶

This translation of the Ayah is a statement in the Foucauldian sense: it reflects how these representations centralise the masculine body, considering it a sign of God’s will. As in Arkoun’s earlier claim, these representations of masculine supremacy get established within the identification of the ego. “This, ego invested with a divine mission and thus promised to immortality” (Arkoun 3031), is formed from a specular image that glorifies the masculine body. Moreover, the Qur’ān uses corporeality as an instrument of surveillance: “Suffer

²⁶ I choose a different translation to cite this Ayah, to highlight the popular misinterpretation. See *The Noble Qur’an*, translation of the literal meaning as understood in Arabic.

today, because you went on ignoring [my commands].’ Today We seal up their mouths, but their hands speak to us, and their feet bear witness to everything they have done” (36: 65–66), and

They will say to their skins, ‘Why did you testify against us?’ and their skins will reply, ‘God, who gave speech to everything, has given us speech – it was He who created you the time and to Him you have been returned – yet you did not try to hide yourselves from your ears, eyes, and skin to prevent them from testifying against you. (41: 21–22)

The very idea that bodies can testify what consciousness does not want to release is frightening, yet hardly surprising; it is a discursive statement of the religious discourse in which the body becomes an instrument of surveillance. The image of the sealed mouth and talking organs depicts the kind of relationship an individual has with their own body. These Ayahs create an effect similar to the Foucauldian Panopticon:

each individual, in his place, is securely confined to a cell from which he is seen from the front by a supervisor; [...] He is seen but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication... to induce in the inmate a state of permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. (*Discipline and Punish* 200–1)

The cell, in this case, is corporality itself. The body exposes the individual to the complete supervision of the authority represented in God and his Word, which construct the body both physically and conceptually. Thus, the supremacy of the masculine subject is secured by making the body an instrument of surveillance and, at the same time, the masculine body is held superior. The following section shows how this mirror affects the specular image of the

body in Iraqi social decorum. The notions of the superiority and the centrality of the masculine body are also enhanced in social praxis and its conceptualisation of corporality.

1.2 Iraqi Society

Arab societies are believed to silence the body and censor writing about it because they are subject to political and religious dictatorships which exercise violence on the body physically and cognitively. This belief is shared by Arab and Western scholars alike. Syrian author Khalīl Ṣwāīlīḥ writes:

I have always looked at the body with distortion and ambiguity because of the historical taboos and hegemony of the forbidding culture on the mechanisms of Arab creativity in general. These have produced hybrid and incomplete texts that are sometimes censored or violated, both in terms of interpretation and exclusion, which have made the distance between discourse and practice great.²⁷

Ṣwāīlīḥ refers to literary texts that explore the body. By ‘discourse and practice’ he means written discourse and social practice. The distortion and confusion he mentions are also due to the constant clash between contradictory attitudes towards the body, as discussed in the previous section. The religious and social prohibitions and constraints concerning the body produce contradictory outcomes. On the one hand, there is the glorification or, as Ṣwāīlīḥ puts it, mythologisation of the body, and on the other, the constant suppression, codification and disdain towards it. The control of the body in the Arab and Muslim social sphere, including Iraq, is present in social and Islamic laws concerning food, drink, clothing,

27 "الطالما نظرت إلى الجسد نظرة مواردية وملتبسة، بسبب ثقل المحظورات التاريخية، وسطوة ثقافة المحرّم على آليات الإبداع العربي عموماً، الأمر الذي أفرز نصّاً هجيناً وناقصاً، وأحياناً ممنوعاً أو منتهكاً، سواء لجهة التأويل، أم لجهة الإقصاء، وبدت المسافة بعيدة بين الخطاب والممارسة"

appearance, hygiene, sexuality, and interaction with other bodies. Submission to these laws determines not only the individual's identity but also their ideological attitudes towards other individuals. For example, the Iraqi actor, Karrār Nawshī was kidnapped, tortured and assassinated in Baghdad in early summer 2017. His stylish, long, bleached hair, his colourful way of dressing, his tight clothing and 'suspicious' sexual orientation, were assumed to be against the laws of righteous Muslim manhood. Thousands of Iraqi young men and women were tortured, and in many instances killed, because their political bodily statements did not conform to the admissible, Muslim body codification, which disdains subversive gender roles, non-heterosexual orientation, as well as uncovered bodies. The problem of the interpretation of the religious text aggravated the contradictory conceptualisation of the body. Theologians of different schools of interpretation, all heterosexual men, mythologise and simultaneously incite hatred of the body. Social and political taboos, which have often been translated into banning literary and philosophical works for political persecution, have created writing about the body which has finally led to troubled or absent body hermeneutics. Therefore, prohibitions, codifications, and regulations against the body were established within the culture and within the collective imaginary. The holy text declares: "Verily, We created man in the best stature (mold). Then We reduced him to the lowest of the low" (95: 4–5). Such attitude has made the body a parallel text to the culture of repression, as Şwaīlīh says.

Nevertheless, it is not only this religious text and its problematic interpretations that have centralised the masculine body. The Iraqi collective imaginary has inherited overlapping historical, social and religious circumstances which has led its heritage in that direction:

Obsession with mythologising the body goes deep into the human imagination. It goes as far into history as Gilgamesh. This epic laid the foundation for the cultural imagination of ancient Middle Eastern civilisations. It shows man's place in the universe, from the historical heroes to whom narrators gave godly features to the representations of the mythologised body in contemporary Arab societies. The specific historical, political and ideological circumstances made the leader's body an invisible mythological moment. (Ṣwāīlīh)²⁸

The idea, of mythologising the leader's body, offers a starting point from which to decode the body sign in the status quo of Iraqi society and fiction before 2003. The representation of the leaders' body stems not only from the historical glorification and religious vision of male supremacy, but also from the extremely complex gender construction in Arabic epistemological topology, particularly in Iraq. There is a deep anthropological conception of the glorification of the hero's body, who stands for his people's pride. The epic hero's mythologised figure is essentially masculine, which is at the heart of the body problem.

In 1951, Iraqi sociologist, 'Alī al-Wardī (1913–1995), wrote a study on the Iraqi personality, in which he argues that the Iraqi individual has a dual personality based on the historical, social and psychological circumstances that take part in the formation of Iraqi society throughout history. On the social and psychological aspects, he writes that “[p]rinciples had developed in us that made the woman a being/kind/sex of less value and weaker mind than the man and gave the man superiority and pride to be more than her” (al-Wardī 57).²⁹ These principles enact the segregation of women into closed, covered or

²⁸ "أن هذا الهوس في أسطورة الجسد، يمتد عميقاً في الخيال الإنساني إلى "ملحمة جلجامش"، هذه الملحمة التي تؤسس لتصور ثقافات شرق المتوسط القديمة لمكانة الإنسان في الكون، مروراً بالأبطال التاريخيين الذين أضفت عليهم كتابات الرواة ملامح إلهية، ووصولاً إلى تمثيلات الجسد المؤسّطر في المجتمعات العربية المعاصرة، وقد تمت في ظروف تاريخية وسياسية وعقائدية محددة، جعلت من جسد الزعيم أو القائد لحظة أسطورية غير مرئية "

²⁹ In the original text, al-Wardī uses the Arabic word 'jins' which means both sex/kind of a human being. "فقد نشأت عندنا قيم تجعل من المرأة جنساً أقل منزلة من الرجل وأضعف عقلاً بحيث يشعر الرجل إزاءها بالتعالي والكبرياء."

inaccessible spheres in order not to be seen by men other than male members of direct families (58). This segregation has led to sexual and psychological deviance expressed through violence and hatred towards women, because social norms force the man into a dual positioning towards women. While he loves and desires her, he must show superiority to and distance from her (66). Al-Wardī suggests that this discrimination is due to complex socio-historical factors such as the inherited glorification of the hero, socio-geographical coexistence/transformation between/from the Bedouin life in the Iraqi desert, which was characterised by strict traditional biopolitics, and the urban elite in the city, who advocate modernising social behaviour, yet in an anti-colonial spirit. These factors favoured the man in the public sphere and seclusion of women to the private. Sana Al-Khayyat agrees with al-Wardī and adds that the religious construction of male supremacy, which is taught to individuals from the time that they are schoolchildren, participates markedly in the creation of these male-female dynamics (Al-Khayyat 11). Al-Wardī's views are also confirmed by Iraqi psychologist Fāris Kamāl Naẓmī who argues that there are deep historical and anthropological factors that have made the concept of 'woman' part of the man's 'sacred' properties, and that this belief has gradually become a socio-economic value that was integrated in the consciousness of both sexes (*Maqālāt wa Dirāsāt* 50).

I argue that the problem of the body in Iraqi society is that corporality and selfhood are constructed and interpreted based on this male supremacy. In Iraqi society the notion of honour, addressed by Naẓmī and Al-Khayyat, is a masculine quality that organises the lives of bodies and genders. Accordingly, in the symbolic order created by socio-religious discourses, even if a body is female, it must reinforce masculine values because they represent the righteous and superior way of being. This leads us to the following section where I examine the semiosis of masculinity in Iraqi society.

1.2.1 Masculinity

Anthropologist David Gilmore suggests that all societies institutionalise sex-appropriate roles based on biological difference (9). In the case of females, having biologically female bodily functions is sufficient to assign authenticity automatically to the identity, and the role of a woman to that body. For instance, menstrual cycles, pregnancy, breastfeeding and so on already make a 'real' woman. Being a real man, however, does not totally depend on biological functions. The male individual must go through physical tests of endurance, heroism, and bodily codifications in order to prove himself apt to become a 'real' man (11). Moreover, societies that greatly emphasise segregation tend to attribute the role of providing, protecting and safeguarding the family and relatives to the masculine subject.

Iraqi people, before and after the formation of the Iraqi state, lived in a highly segregated society, up until about the 1940s. Arab traditions and Islamic laws concerning garments and movement in the public space reinforced this segregation. Masculine subjects were predominantly placed in the public space and the feminine subject was relegated to the private, to the extent of converting masculinity into the public image of society and femininity into the private. An indicator of a woman's morality and virtue was – and to a certain extent still is – to have never been seen, meaning that no one other than her close family might have been able to lay eyes on her, that she never left the family house, and that no one heard her voice. In fact, a common colloquial Iraqi proverb that teaches young girls social etiquette says: if she "raises her voice, she shows her vulva",³⁰ meaning that raising one's (her) voice is as scandalous as showing the vulva. Any female public appearance is linked to her sexual exposure. Female gender roles and social behaviours were clearly

³⁰ "طلع جسها، طلع كُسهها"

defined by virtue of the female biological functions. This is the kind of statement of Foucault's archaeology that this chapter traces, and which shows how the discourse of corporality is constructed in the semiosphere of Iraqi society before 2003.

Iraqi manhood, by Gilmore's definition, is in constant need of public reaffirmation. While male bodies codify their social behaviour to prove masculine identity, female bodies are constantly burdened with being the opposite. Masculinity in Iraqi society has become the ultimate definer of human body and self. By dominating the public sphere and being presented as superior in the religious text, the masculine body became historically the source of knowledge where the defining concepts that shape the identity of both male and female bodies were built. The body problem rests in the interiorised episteme of masculinity that encodes femininity with sub-category otherness, not independence. In other words, concepts of femininity are constructed by biological differences. Having a body is understood by the admission of the body within the constellation of masculine agency: strength, virility, and pride. Male bodies need to reflect these values in order to be at the top of the dignity scale.

Female bodies, consequently, need to *project* these values *on male bodies* by performing complementary values: gentleness, femininity, modesty and privacy. Gilmore adds that bodies which do not perform according to the established standards of gender roles are often criticised as immoral. Ironically, a woman's gender identity is never questioned if she acts like a man; her behaviour is considered immoral, but she is still considered a female, as opposed to men, who, if they were to act in discordance with their gender identity, would additionally lose their gender quality, being 'unmanly', 'effeminate' or 'emasculated' (Gilmore 11). Thus, masculinity, though being superior in the gender hierarchy, is in constant need of reaffirmation. Since female bodies lack the instruments of masculine agency, that is masculine physiology, women have to exist in a way that enhances masculine

values on masculine bodies; otherwise, they are outsiders with respect to the established knowledge. This makes unfeminine behaviour by a female body subversive but unmanly behaviour by a male body immoral because it lowers male superiority to an inferior category.

The body problem in Iraqi culture is semiotically constructed from masculinity, not only from a masculine perspective, but rather from the construct of masculinity itself, as it represents physical superiority and moral value. There are three basic somatic manifestations around which the semiotics of masculine agency is made visible in Iraqi society: circumcision, the moustache and heteronormativity.

1.2.1-A: Circumcision

Although circumcision is not mentioned in the Qur'ān, male circumcision is a very strong tradition in Iraq – as in other Muslim countries. Female circumcision is not common; UNICEF recorded that 7.4 per cent of girls undergo female genital mutilation particularly in the region of Kurdistan.³¹ Male circumcision is widely celebrated and encouraged for boys between seven days and ten years old. Scholars of '*Sharī'ah*' and '*Fiqh*' affirm that it is not obligatory, but that it is highly recommended and considered a '*Sunnah*', meaning an imitation the prophet's teaching (Bouhdiba 175). Socially, circumcision is mandatory because it marks the identity of the newly born: a Muslim male. Iraqis call male circumcision '*Ṭuhūr*'; '*Ṭahārah*'; '*Taḥhīr*', meaning 'purity', 'purity', and 'purification' respectively, and consider circumcision as the first step into Islam for a new-born boy. Purifying male genitalia by the act of circumcision is evidence of the intentional linkage between socio-religious identity and male sexuality. Circumcision is publicly celebrated in Iraqi

³¹ See UNICEF press release concerning female genital mutilation in Iraq.

neighbourhoods by the performance of traditional music by a band at the child's house, letting the whole street know that it is not only a boy but a 'legalised' boy.³² This is followed by the serving of sweets and juice to relatives and neighbours, and it is usually accompanied by a big male gathering.³³ This means that society performs the entry of the newly born into Islam even before being capable of pronouncing the '*Shahādah*', which is the first pillar of Islam. According to Bouhdiba:

Circumcision, like excision indeed, is more a practice of Muslims than a practice of Islam. By that I mean that its sociological aspect, its social significance, is obviously more important than the clearly secondary sacral aspect. It is a question of marking membership of the group. The words 'we the circumcised' define a relationship of inclusion within community. It is this that explains, it seems to me, the tenacity with which 'Muslims' and less 'Muslim' cling to this practice. The festivities surrounding it are in fact ceremonies by which young children are admitted to the group. (182)³⁴

This means that the announcement of the boy's identity is done by publicly celebrating the physical mark on his genitals. This celebration is an inscription of righteousness on male genitalia, a manifestation of virility and pride in enduring pain. This virility, which is certified in the circumcision, Bouhdiba continues, is "the open way to marriage" (183), which is a biological and religious requirement for an Iraqi Muslim marriage. Moreover, during the days following circumcision, persons in contact with the purified little 'man' are

³² See Ben-Mordechai's article, which mentions circumcision celebrations where Jewish music can be heard and enjoyed (10–11).

³³ On the festiveness of circumcision in Islam see Bouhdiba 177, where he mentions historical circumcision celebrations.

³⁴ This social nature of circumcision can account for why some Christian boys are circumcised in Muslim countries.

fully aware of and extremely careful with his purified organ and surround the boy with immense attention so that the boy becomes aware of the privilege that this pain entails (183).

It is with the same level of intensity that female genitalia are subject to utmost secrecy; nothing related to female genitals can be discussed or mentioned publicly. Women must go out of their way to avoid any accidental hint of their sexuality, even to doctors. No one should ever know about their menstrual cycles, see their underwear laundry or sanitary towels (if they can afford them). While the masculine body and the identity it represents is publicly celebrated by the circumcised penis, the feminine body and its identity are celebrated with silence. The necessity of announcing the identity of the masculine body and the dispensability of announcing the feminine body and its belonging to the group are discursive statements. They are among the many atomic units that constitute the discourse of corporality in preinvasion Iraq, a discourse formed by the rules of 'honour' and 'shame' as indicated in the title of Al-Khayyat's book. The act of secrecy that veils the feminine body is socially justified by avoiding shame, since anything related to the female genitals or anything evocative of the female sexuality is considered immoral and disgraceful (Al-Khayya 79–90). This binarism does not necessarily create one category ('masculine') as opposed to another ('feminine'); rather, it creates a single hierarchy in which the superiority of the 'masculine' is supported and sustained by the silence, absence, and the void of the 'feminine'.

Al-Khayyat provides detailed information and testimony on the praxis of discrimination between the sexes within the Iraqi social structure from the birth of the child until the age of marriage. She suggests that favouring boys over girls is so deeply rooted in the social imagination that even lullabies address baby boys rather than baby girls and

mothers sing them to their babies regardless of their sex (30). This remark is particularly significant for the development of the specular body image during the mirror phase, as when the child ingresses into the realm of a highly gendered language, such as Arabic, he and she will identify with the masculine pronoun addressed in the lullabies. I have also noticed that some adults address baby girls with masculine pronouns and declensions as a form of play to make the child laugh and interact with the adult. This shows that the narrative that accompanies the child in the phase of recognition of his or her corporality celebrates the masculine body regardless of the child's sex. Therefore, the discourse of the big Other, the adult supporting the child, to which the latter turns to ratify his or her image (Lacan, *Anxiety* 32), and celebrates the masculine body by addressing the child with masculine pronouns and declinations, will constitute the symbolic order for both male and female children. Corporality at the mirror stage, through which an individual constructs his or her identity, in this context, is defined by masculinity, something which will be consolidated in the symbolic order.

1.2.1-B: The Moustache

Although Islam has historically privileged the beard as a symbol of virility (Bouhdiba 34), Iraqi society has privileged the moustache. It is perhaps the utmost indicator of how the symbolic order operates when it comes to the expression of corporality in Iraqi society until the invasion of Baghdad in 2003. Young and adult men are recognised by their moustache and short hair, which are not only symbols of virility but also markers of gender difference and, therefore, of a higher position in the hierarchy of power. Certainly, the sense of fashion has changed a lot in the last few years, but hair style and moustaches for Iraqi males are more than mere fashion. To this day, many Iraqis still consider wearing extremely short hair and

a moustache the right and honourable look for a man.³⁵ Long hair for men was never popular, and with the rise of the religious tide after 2003 it became a question of life and death as in the case of Karrār Nawshī, mentioned above. The moustache issue may not be a life-and-death matter today, but it certainly has great importance in defining the identity of Iraqi men.³⁶

Saddam Hussein, who was well-known for his thick moustache, in one of his most famous official televised speeches, said: “When will moustaches ever shake?” In this speech,³⁷ Saddam Hussein was criticising Arab leaders for not standing up to the Israeli aggression against the Palestinians after the televised shooting of Muḥammad al-Durrah. What he meant was: “when will real and honourable men (i.e., Arab leaders) feel the dishonour and shame that Israelis are causing them?” Saddam’s obsession with virility, manhood, and masculinity and their link to chivalry, bravery and honour was a leitmotif in his speeches. Whenever he wanted to call for men’s honour and bravery, he would praise their moustaches; and when he wanted to demean his enemies, he would insult their moustaches. In one session, during his trial in 2006, when he was held responsible for the rape of Kurdish women by Arab-Iraqi soldiers, his response was:

When we went to liberate Kuwait, I sent an Iraqi officer, who had raped an Arab woman (not an Iraqi, nor a Kuwaiti) to court and he was sentenced to death. And I told them, ‘By God, you hang him in the same place where he committed that crime!’, and he was hanging there for two or three days to serve as an example. [Are you suggesting that] in Saddam Hussein’s time Kurdish women are raped? And [do

³⁵ See Ozernoy’s report, which collects testimonies of Iraqis giving their opinions about the moustache.

³⁶ See Hume’s story for *CNN*, which sheds light on moustache implant industries in the Middle East.

³⁷ "شوكت تهنز الشوارب؟!". See Archives Iraq, 2017, minute: 1:00:55.

you think] he [Saddam] keeps quiet, wearing a moustache and speaking of noble values?!³⁸

For a non-Arabic speaker, the expression ‘wearing a moustache’ which we see in Saddam’s speech may sound out of context, but any Iraqi or Arab familiar with Saddam’s speeches would immediately understand his point: how can Saddam wear his moustache, the symbol of his honour and dignity, while a woman is being raped under his command? Days before the war on Iraq in 2003, Saddam Hussein addressed his soldiers with the line “Iraq is in your moustache”, meaning, ‘Protect Iraq as you protect your honour or as you protect your women’.³⁹ In 2003, ‘Izat Ibrāhīm al-Dūrī, Army field Marshal and Saddam’s closest advisor, made the headlines in the international press for cursing the moustache of Kuwaiti foreign affairs minister, Sheikh Muhammad Sabāḥ al-Sālim al-Sabāḥ, at The Islamic States summit.⁴⁰ The moustache enjoys such importance for Iraqi men that even a unit of the US marines grew moustaches to win locals sympathies when invading the Iraqi town of Fallūjah in 2004.⁴¹

The relationship between moustache and honour has been in the Arab imaginary for centuries. In 1941, Jewish Iraqi author Shalom Darwīsh wrote a short a story titled *Ābū Shawārib* (He With The Moustache) about a policeman who has a very thick moustache.⁴² In the Egyptian countryside, a thick moustache stands for manhood, honour and respect. Egyptians and Iraqis have a saying “On his moustache lands a falcon”,⁴³ to express solemnity and strength. In Lebanon, a very popular song from the seventies sings “Don’t make me

38 My translation of Hussein’s words. See Archives Iraq, 2021, minute: 2:27.

"عراقي ضابط مقدم، من رحنا حررنا الكويت، أعتصب عريبة، مو عراقية ولا كويتية، شكلت عليه محكمة وأنحكّم بالإعدام، وقلت لم والله إلا يُعلق بنفس المكان الي سوى بيها الفعلة. وظل ثلاثة أيام معلق بالمكان أو يومين، حتى يكون شارة. بزم من صدام حسين يُغتصب الكورديات ويسكت صدام حسين ومربي شوارب ويحكي بالمعاني العالية!؟"

³⁹ See *Time Magazine* 16, in which a short piece discusses the moustache in Iraqi politics.

⁴⁰ See Burkeman’s article in *The Guardian*, which offers details of the incident.

⁴¹ See Hume’s story for *CNN*.

⁴² Cited in al-‘Ānī 104.

⁴³ "شاربه\شواربه يورگف عليه الصقر"

swear by the moustache”,⁴⁴ meaning, ‘Your question is so unnecessary that it does not need such a strong oath’.⁴⁵ Abū Shanab (he with the moustache) is a common surname in the Levant region,⁴⁶ and in Morocco there is the colloquial expression, which is also used in Iraqi dialect, ‘If you have real (or strong) moustache, ... (do this or that)’, meaning, ‘If you were a real man, you would do or do not this or that’.⁴⁷ In Iraq, a popular oath among men is to say ‘bishārbī’,⁴⁸ meaning, ‘by my moustache’. This is used when needing to ensure that something is real or definitely true or when making a promise and proving loyalty. There are various sayings that show the importance of the moustache in defining the identity of both men and women. For instance, “manhood is the size of the moustache”,⁴⁹ meaning that the value of someone’s manhood is in his moustache and virility. Similarly, “A woman’s honour is in a good man’s moustache”,⁵⁰ that is, protecting a woman is the honour of the man: if he does not fulfil this duty, he does not have honour. Another saying is, “A man is taken by his moustache”,⁵¹ meaning that a man is lost if his word, honour, dignity, or solemnity are taken.

Accordingly, men’s prestige and power are represented in a traditional sense of honour and virility, both being inscribed on his body by the thickness of his facial hair. These proverbs are very significant statements as they express a social hierarchy of bodies where a moustache occupies a privileged position because it belongs to the ‘him’ who protects, to the ‘him’ who is glorified in religious texts and social standards. This is while ‘she’, all of her, is in his moustache, being part of his body, part of his honour. As in circumcision, the moustache marks, on one hand, the belongingness to the group, and, on the other hand, the

⁴⁴ "لا تحلفيني بالشنب" طوني حنا

⁴⁵ See Hassan Daoud’s article, in which he discusses the relationship between moustaches and Arab sociopolitics.

⁴⁶ ‘Shanab’ is moustache in Levantine and Egyptian accents.

⁴⁷ Moroccan expression "العندك موسطاش الحديد، أجي وقاباني": Iraqi expression. "لو عندك شوارب، ..."

⁴⁸ "بشاربي"

⁴⁹ "المرجلة على قدر الشوارب"

⁵⁰ "الحرمة بشارب الخير"

⁵¹ "الرجال يلزم من شاربه"

superiority and righteousness of that group, which inscribes on the male body and the collective consciousness the understanding that honour is signalled by the facial hair.

On the other side of this equation, hairy females challenge canonical beauty. They are considered unattractive and even dirty. For women to keep long hair on the head and to have a the lack of hair on the body, especially facial hair, are the number one signs of femininity, except for extremely religious unmarried women.⁵² Short hair is unpopular for women in Iraq. Even the name of the short haircut in hairdressing terminology is ‘*wallādī*’, meaning ‘boyish’. The longer the hair, and the softer and lighter the skin, the more sensual and feminine a woman is. The removal of body hair is one of the prime feminine activities and a pillar of canonical beauty.⁵³ One of the most popular Iraqi folk characters is the woman who earns her living by removing body hair off women in the neighbourhood. She is popularly known as the ‘*Hafāfah*’ and is depicted in paintings and in the permanent exhibit at the Baghdadi Museum.⁵⁴ Not removing hair, especially among women between fifteen and fifty years old, can be interpreted as an attempt to imitate men. The canon of Feminine beauty in Iraqi folk culture echoes the Qur’ānic description of beautiful women: in heaven “[t]here are good-natured, beautiful maidens. [...] Dark-eyed, sheltered in pavilions. [...] Untouched beforehand by man or jinn.” (55: 70–74). These dark-eyed females are thought to have fair skin. Although the Qur’ān does not mention removing body hair for women, soft-skinned, big-dark-eyed women with long hair are the utmost expressions of beauty in Iraqi folklore. A classical Iraqi song, one of the most well-known among Iraqis of all

⁵² See Al Shawab’s article, in which she discusses the significance of body hair for young Arab women.

⁵³ See Enloe 28–29. This section of the book shows the life of beauty salons amidst the war and how looking beautiful and feminine is a necessity despite the dangers of military invasion, sectarian conflict and unemployment.

⁵⁴ See al-Āghā’s painting, *al-Hafāfah* (2002), and the Baghdadi Museum Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/AlmthfAlbghdady/photos/170128046497439>. Built in 1970, the Baghdadi Museum collects 385 life-size sculptures depicting scenes of the Iraqi folklore. These scenes show different professions, celebrations, and daily-life activities of the Iraqi society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

generations is ‘She with the dark eyes’.⁵⁵ The description of the woman, addressee in this song, is direct humanisation of the ‘*hūr*’. Nevertheless, blue-eyed and light colour- eyed females are also considered attractive as in Dhū al-Nūn Ayyūb’s short story, *Ṭarīq al-Khalāṣ* (The way out), in which a bride was not approved of because she was not as beautiful as a doll, with perfectly shaped legs, wide hips, pointed breasts, blue-eyes, and skin as white as milk (*al-Qiṣaṣ* 122).⁵⁶

1.2.1-C: Heteronormativity

Iraqi society, Arab and Muslim, is heteronormative; not only binary gender difference is imposed, but also normative femininity is also a subcategory. In other words, heteronormativity in Iraqi traditional society is a heteronormativity of the sexual act, not of gender roles. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Gender Studies*, heteronormativity “denotes the assumption that the sexes are binary, divided into female and male, with complementary roles, and that this is a given, fixed state in accordance with which one should act” (Griffin 2867). Iraqi heteronormativity builds on a hierarchy of gender that is constructed through the heterosexual male gaze, where the position of the sexes is determined from the male perspective in which a woman is a lower category. By being the viewer, with the female as the viewed, the male becomes the active agent in this asymmetrical phallogocentric order (Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” 6–18). The male agent also becomes the only provider of perspective and, therefore, the only agent in the interaction, since he is biologically male. By being viewed, passive, and penetrated,

⁵⁵ "أم العيون السود" لناظم الغزالي

⁵⁶ "إذ لم يكن لها جمال دمية، فليست عبلة الساقين ثقيلة الردفين، ذات صدرٍ ناهد، وعينين زرقاوين، وبياض كالحليب"

the female cannot penetrate, nor provide a perspective and, therefore, she is an object.

Bouhdiba writes

[T]he quranic view is also developed in accordance with another axis, namely, that of the hierarchy of sexes. Indeed, the primacy of man over woman *is total and absolute. Woman proceeds from man.* Woman is chronologically secondary. She finds her finality in man. *She is made for his pleasure, his repose, his fulfilment.* (11)

Where gender hierarchy points to the male as the only agent, being penetrated/penetrable (through vision or sexual act) means being an object and property of the agent, which makes female sexuality and the female body stand not only for male dominance, but also identity. In other words, having the penetrable object attached to the male domain reaffirms masculine identity. In a way, femininity, being passive, viewed, and penetrated, refers to that active, penetrating viewer and provider of perspective; it evokes male generative powers. Moroccan sociologist Abdessamad Dialmy argues that

[m]asculinity is seen as the capacity to act, and the capacity to act is not only the ability to sexually penetrate but also the ability to prevent sexual penetration. Within the Arab epistemology of sexuality that reduces sexual activity to penetration, this act becomes a fundamental condition for the construction and empowerment of the Arab male ego and for securing his mental health (Chelli, 1986: 93). This pattern in the integration of sexuality into the personality of the Arab man makes sexuality the basic determinant of the masculine personality and, moreover, turns sexuality into a pivotal meaning of life for the Arab man. (Dialmy 19)

This passage can explain the complexity of the conceptualisation of virginity and honour killing: it has nothing to do with the woman herself, it is rather about the specular image in which the man, who has to kill her, constructs his identity. Tunisian psychoanalyst Fathi

Bensalama remarks that “the Qur’anic concept of sex—the word *farj*—denotes merely ‘vagina’ in modern usage. Woman has become the totality of *farj* because *farj* is an opening and signifies fragility, that is, a lack” (qtd in Dialmy 16). By being the totality of vagina, the female body is made an extension of the male body; if she is penetrated by another man, a man loses his quality of being able to prevent sexual penetration. His ego is undermined. Therefore, the compulsoriness of heterosexual interaction is in fact one of the social tests and bodily codifications required to prove the manliness of a male, as indicated earlier by Gilmore. This means that veiling women’s sexuality is in fact a confirmation of male generative powers and male authority.⁵⁷ For this reason, I believe that in this specific context – a patriarchal, traditional society – a ‘woman’ can be understood as a phallic symbol, as the activity of her body encodes masculine agency or the lack of it. The works of Fu’ād al-Takarlī (1927–2008), for instance, are a clear manifestation of these notions of sexuality, as discussed further on.

I have so far briefly outlined the highlights of the cultural semiotics of corporality in traditional Iraqi society. As Lotman explains, within the semiosphere, signs are temporally central: they tend to move towards the periphery of the semiosphere – the boundary – as new signs emerge in the centre. Thus, the intensity of the semiosis of corporality fluctuates depending on the time and the position of the subject in the semiosphere. What I have shown are general yet very profound notions of corporality that indicate the rules for the formation of the discourses surrounding the body and its relation to subjectivity in this specific context. This semiotics represents the narrative that supports the specular image in the mirror phase. This is the first mirror in which corporality is constructed. The following section presents an

⁵⁷ Fathi Benslama finds that the origins of this equation go back to the story of the revelation and the *Sīrah*, which he thoroughly analyses in his book *Psychoanalysis and The Challenge of Islam* (2009).

analysis of literary accounts in order to see how fiction deals with these notions of corporality.

2. Iraqi Fiction and the Body

2.1 The Pre-Modern Period – Post World War I

Iraqi literature is known to be concerned with the political complexity of the Iraqi State since its formation in 1921:

The features of Iraqi literature started to take shape after the grand turmoil of the Arab revolution in all the East. Perhaps Iraq was the first of the Arab countries to reflect this historical event in its literature. This tendency, which distinguishes the Iraqi literature from other Arab literatures, persisted and is still persisting until it became its peculiarity (Idrīs 22).⁵⁸

In fact, in Iraq, the act of writing fiction itself was a political necessity at the time for mobilising educated young men to participate in the political movement. Critics agree that the early attempts at writing fiction in Iraq between the 1920s and 1940s belong to the era of initiation, where the distinctive artistic characteristics of Iraqi fiction as such were not determined yet,⁵⁹ especially when poetry was still the dominant genre in Arabic literary scenes in general and in the Iraqi in particular (Bahoora “Iraq” 247). Fiction of this period is considered the foundation of the genre in Iraq in the sense of being artistically-achieving and representative of Iraqi society. Examples include such novels as *Jalāl Khālid* (1928) by

⁵⁸ "ان ملامح الأدب العراقي بدأت تتضح على أثر الهزّة الكبرى التي أحدثتها الثورة العربية في الشرق العربي كله. ولعل العراق كان أسبق البلاد العربية الى تسجيل انعكاسات هذا الحدث التاريخي في أدبه. وهذه النزعة التي ميزت الأدب العراقي الحديث من أدب سائر البلاد العربية، ظلت تلازمه ولا زالت حتى الآن حتى أصبحت طابعه الخاص"

⁵⁹ On the early period of Iraqi literature, see ‘Abd Allāh Kāzīm 221–240; Aḥmad, 1969: 21–54; Bahoora, 2017: 247–250, and Allen 47–48.

Maḥmūd Aḥmad al-Sayyid (1903–1937), *al-Majnūnān* (Two Crazy People, 1936) by ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Fāḍil (1911–1992), and *Ductūr Ibrāhīm* (Doctor Ibrāhīm, 1939) by Dhū al-Nūn Ayyūb (1908–1996). The first Iraqi novel was published in 1921, the same year of the formation of the Iraqi state. The novel in question was *Fī Sabīl al-Zawāj* (For the Sake of Marriage) by Maḥmūd Aḥmad al-Sayyid. All of the above focused on social critique and political issues.

The first half of the twentieth century witnessed a great change in the Iraqi social, political, and cultural fabric. The century began with the defeat of the Ottoman empire, of which modern Iraq was part, after World War I. The British invaded Iraq and established a military mandate, which led to the formation of the Iraqi state and monarchy, then, to the formation of Israel, the two revolutions of 1920 and 1958, and the formation of the Iraqi republic. Such intense political activity was accompanied by a great deal of social change. The literature written during this period reflects a preoccupation with politics and the question of identity. Although these novels share major characteristics as far as content is concerned, they do show differences in style, command of language, and the aesthetics of fiction. They reflect postcolonial anxieties, the struggle of the people for liberation and the conflict between new values versus tradition. The struggle of workers against feudalism is central, except in the works of ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Fāḍil, where middle-class life and intellectual concerns are vitally present. Generally, this period produced reformatory stories, focusing on moral issues, and attempting to raise awareness in the educational sense (‘Abd Allāh Kāzīm 217). A general awareness of women’s rights becomes notable but lacks both deep analysis and serious action against the origins of the problematic question of women. The socio-political movement of that period was dominated by Arab-nationalist men, and women’s participation in it was within that framework of political action. There were certainly some women’s voices, but they were not included as such in the fiction of the

period, especially when knowing that calling for women's rights, such as education and the right to vote, was inspired by male intellectuals (Efrati, "Competing Narratives" 448).

During the early period of the formation of the Iraqi state, the public sphere was segregated. Women gathered in domestic spheres, whereas men gathered in schools, universities, administrative offices, coffee shops and streets. The public debate was in the hands or, rather, the mouths (i.e., the discourse) of '*afandīyah*' – the plural of '*afandī*', educated, Westernised, Arab males of middle social status – and the '*shuyūkh*' – the plural of '*shaykh*' – old men of traditional, notable families or tribes (Eppel 227) – and women who participated in public debates, who were literate members of their families. These women represented only three percent of the female population in Iraq (Efrati, "The Effendiyya" 376), and their participation consisted of reaffirming the discourse led by the male members of their families. These women expressed their opinions in segregated spaces or in mixed spaces only attended by the elite and the rich.

Iraqi authors of the time, therefore, encountered no women outside this strict social protocol to write about. Literary reflections on the human body and physical intimacy are made when the protagonist, a male character, expresses his heterosexual desire to be in contact with a woman. The problem is that righteous women within the household – wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters – are not supposed to have personal corporeal consciousness; their bodies are constructed to enhance the centrality of the masculine body. As Al-Khayyat explains in her book, sexual pleasure is seen as a 'need' for men and as a 'duty' for woman (80 – 81), which makes women perceive sexuality as a social function rather than as a constituent of selfhood. Therefore, a dilemma emerges between the reality of strict social protocol that dictates segregation and chastity, and the need for female characters who can actively interact in the narrative. Iraqi authors had in this period to convey the narrative

outside the socially accepted scheme in order to make the expression of their self/sexuality realistic. For this reason, their work mostly included women characters such as the prostitute, the fallen woman, and the adulteress. The representation of women in the fiction of this era emphasises that the fate women is connected to male sexuality. The authors use this sexuality, moreover, as a safe territory in which to critique social behaviour and offer moral lessons.

Maḥmūd Aḥmad al-Sayyid, in *Jalāl Khālīd* for instance, hardly mentions a woman unless she is a prostitute, becoming one, or is a socially considered a mean or a degraded woman. In *Jalāl Khālīd*, one of the protagonist's disappointments is when the woman he admires, but hardly touches, 'falls into prostitution' – translating the author's expression – to earn her living (al-Sayyid 67). In another of his stories, "‘Ātikah", a woman becomes a sex-worker after being abandoned by her lover.⁶⁰ In another story, Ṭālib Affandī,⁶¹ head of the tribe, brings shame to his tribe by falling in love with a dancer. Al-Sayyid's usage of the prostitute figure, like Ayyūb's, expresses immorality and social decadence as a mechanism of literary dissent against colonialism. However, the work of Dhu al-Nūn Ayyūb offers a more critical dimension when dealing with the body in general and with sexuality and gender issues as he indulges in the psychology of the male protagonist.

Ductūr Ibrāhīm is a confusing bildungsroman in which Doctor Ibrahim hires a biographer to write his life story. The biographer chooses to narrate the story of Dr. Ibrāhīm in two parts. The first is narrated by the biographer, who presents Dr. Ibrāhīm as a hypocrite and an opportunist. The second part is narrated using the first-person pronoun as if Dr. Ibrāhīm himself is narrating; here the reader sympathises with and understands him. On

60 'Ātikah is the name of the protagonist. The word means the one who, when she blushes, becomes extremely red in the face'.

61 The name of the protagonist.

occasions we see Dr. Ibrāhīm being exposed to physical violence and on others we see him expressing his sexuality more analytically. The novel follows Dr. Ibrāhīm's life and his anxieties for freedom and success, from his childhood through his adolescence, and on into manhood. He is born and grows up in a poor religious town, studies hard and manipulates legal procedures in order to earn a scholarship to London. When he comes back to his country, he becomes not only a Baghdadi elite, but also a minister of the kingdom. His story narrates the physical and psychological pains a young boy encounters. His father, who had been in the habit of beating him, is a mean, deceitful man who manages to win everybody's fear and respect by telling ghost stories to the simple-minded and claiming to be a descendant of the prophet's family.

As a young boy, Dr. Ibrāhīm finds comfort and peace in the arms of one of his father's four wives, who would embrace him close to her breasts and expose his father's lies. The two experiences of maximum liberation for our protagonist, however, are his first moments of sexual intercourse. The first one is with a playful prostitute whom he meets on his way to London; the second is his English sweetheart and later wife, whom he meets and marries during the period he spends in London getting a PhD in agricultural engineering. The setting of the novel exposes the major concerns of Iraqi society at the time: the conflicts between nationalism and colonialism, religion and secularism, and the question of class. Ayyūb lays out the Iraqi masculine values of bravery, strength, determination, and the obsession to appear to be living by the book: "...he is an Iraqi at heart; knows how to make from the impossible, the possible; and from the prohibited, a trend; and of what is against the law, what is legal and justified" (Ayyūb 15).⁶² He does not forget sexual repression:

⁶² "فهو عراقي صميم يعلم كيف يصبح المستحيل ممكناً، والممنوع متبوعاً، وما هو ضد القانون قانونياً مشروعاً"

I got into the car and waved to my family and friends, I waved to my father whose eyes were filled with tears. I wished I could dance and jump and shout at him to stop this sadness and depression because I was cheerful and happy to leave that extreme surveillance environment which makes the child grow white hair and kills the young. I actually laughed when they disappeared from my sight, without feeling any pain for leaving them nor sadness for their concern. All the way I was dreaming of only one thing: the glass of alcohol whose description and effects I had read about without being able to pronounce its name, and a woman whose mere shadow and the mention of whose her name set my blood on fire in my veins, and make my body tremble. It would make me start turning right and left checking if someone were noticing what a passion ran through me and what eagerness was taking over my mind. How many times I had to curse women to lift their suspicions and appear as fearful, decent, and graceful! (88–89)⁶³

The last line of this passage shows al-Wardī's diagnosis – cited earlier – of the Iraqi personality: while the Iraqi man loves and desires women, he has to despise them or reject them socially.

Clearly, for Dr. Ibrāhīm, alcohol and sex correspond to the corporal pleasures and desires he has repressed in order maintain his respectable social status. This and the subsequent passages inform the reader of the operation of the symbolic order in which Dr. Ibrāhīm's sexuality is not merely a physical desire for intercourse; rather, for him, the performance of the sexual act gives fulfilment: it marks the personality of a successful man.

⁶³ "وركبت السيارة وودعت اهلي وصحبي، كما ودعت ابي، وكانت عيناه مغرورتين بالدموع، وقد تمنيت أن أرقص وأقفر وأصبح بأبي أن يكف عن حزنه وكأبته لأنني مبنهج مسرور لترك هذا المحيط الشديد المراقبة الذي يشيب الطفل، ويقتل الشاب، وقد ضحكت فعلاً عندما غابوا عن نظري، دون أن أحس ألماً لفراقهم، واحزن للهتهم. وكنت طوال الطريق أحلم بشيء واحد. بكأس الخمر التي قرأت عن أوصافها وأفعالها دون أن أجسر حتى على التلفظ باسمها، وبالمراة التي كان مجرد ظلها وذكر اسمها يلهب الدماء في عروقي، ويرسل رعشة الى جسدي، ويجعلني اتلفت ذات اليمين وذات الشمال خوفاً من وجود من يلحظ ما يخالجنني من عاطفة، وما يخامرني من لهفة. وكم اضطررت ان ألعن النساء في مثل هذه المواقف لطرد الشبهة والظهور بمظهر التقى العفيف الفاضل الأخلاق".

Even though the passage shows the young man as a victim of social repression and surveillance, at the same time, both – repression and surveillance – constitute the supremacy of his body. This is even clearer in the following passage, which takes place during the first stop of his journey to Europe, Syria, where he fulfils his desires by visiting a brothel:

It was an innocent, happy hour, no observer or a slanderer or a meddler could embitter it. It was enough to wash the hardships of real life off my myself, even though it was spent with a professional prostitute. Whatever she was, she was a woman who sold me her time and refused to deceive me in the end. She sympathised with my naivety and received my kindness with kindness. If she were like me, embracing the principles of wolves, she would have known to be evil, and would have stolen my pennies for showing me her body.^[64] Did I reach such badness that a prostitute would want me? I felt I was about to demean myself by myself, so I went justifying her compassion with her enchantment by my strength, beauty, and fine qualities, which charmed the prostitute and captivated her heart. I have heard that prostitutes do fall in love, and when they fall, they fall madly in love. It has occurred to me to take advantage of her compassion to enjoy her body in the future for free. Then I dismissed all these weak thoughts because it is impossible for me cede the control over myself to a woman; what if she kept me busy and destroyed my future. To prevent myself from coming back, I packed my bags and left for Beirut immediately (92).⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Ayyūb uses the word ‘raped’ instead of ‘stolen’, meaning that she could have taken advantage of his naivety and overcharged him for showing him her body, given that she realised it was his first time.

⁶⁵ " لقد كانت ساعة سرور بريئة لا يكدرها رقيب أو واث أو فضولي، كافية لان تغسل من نفسي كل متاعب الحياة الواقعية، على الرغم من كون هذه الساعة قد قضيت بصحبة عاهرة محترفة. ومهما كانت فهي امرأة باعنتني وقتها، ورفضت أن تحتال علي في النهاية، وحننت على سذاجتي وقابلت عطفي بعطف مثله. ولو كانت مثلي تعتنق مبادئ الذئاب لعرفت كيف تسيء إلي وتغتصب دراهمي بحيلة رأيت طلائعها. ترى هل بلغت من السوء أن تفضلني عاهرة؟ هنا شعرت بأني سأنتقص من نفسي بنفسي، فذهب فكري إلى إسناد كل ذلك العطف إلى ما لدي من قوة وجمال، سحرا تلك العاهرة وأسرا قلبها، فالفضل إذا يعود الي لما في من مزايا وصفات، وقد سمعت كثيراً أن العاهرات يعشقن، ومتى عشقن فإنهن يعشقن بجنون، وقد جال في خاطري ان استغل هذا العطف فأتمتع بجسمها في المستقبل بدون ثمن. ثم طردت كل تلك الأفكار

The relation between 'happiness' and 'no observer' indicates the social codification of male sexuality; he is happy for engaging in sexual intercourse without being seen. What shouldn't be seen, here, is the 'demeaning' act, not *sex per se*, rather a sexual act unvalidated by social decorum.

On the other hand, the supremacy of his body is shown by the possibility of his unilateral enjoyment and fulfilment of the sexual transaction, and by the capacity to generate a narrative about his position in this encounter, unlike his female partner whom we do not hear. Similarly, in parallel with his views on his sexual purchase, there are constant demeaning images of his mother and his father's other wives. He sees them as simple-minded creatures who believe in ghost stories, myths and quackery (92). These views on women are soon to be compared with his wife, a British woman in whom he sees an equal and a nourishing source for his narcissistic self (106–108), despite using her for his social and political ascendance (133). He also admires her free mind and body, her fair skin and how she behaves and dresses as freely as if she were in London, knowing that in Baghdad women are not allowed to show their faces (31). Being an object of comparison, admiration or spite, shows how women are the object of the male gaze: they do not see and yet they are constantly seen; they do not speak yet they are spoken about. Ayyūb's usage of Dr. Ibrāhīm's sexuality reveals the hierarchies of bodies and of sexes. In fact, Ayyūb directs an anti-colonial critique towards the Iraqi elite represented in the persona of Dr. Ibrāhīm, who embraces Western values at any cost. His anti-traditional critique is directed towards religious institutions represented by Dr. Ibrāhīm's father. In both cases, Ayyūb uses male sexuality and the female body to crystallise this critique of the political juxtapositions that divided Iraqi society at that time. The figures of the prostitute and the father's wives are

الضعيفة؟ إذ يستحيل أن أقع تحت سلطان هذه الأفكار التي تعطي زمامي لامرأة، وربما اغلت فكري، وقضت على مستقبلي. ولأجل ان أقطع على نفسي خط الرجعة شددت الرجال وازمعت السفر إلى بيروت على الفور."

employed to represent the moral decadence of traditional religious thought; and the immoral opportunist embrace of colonialism and the hypocrisy of the elite are represented by Dr. Ibrahim himself.

It is plausible to say that the idea of the female body being used to victimise women under masculine brutality is a leitmotif in the work of Ayyūb. In his collection of short stories, *al-Ḍaḥāyā* (Victims, 1937), this notion is present on more than one occasion. For instance, in the short story “al-Sāqīṭah” (Fallen Woman), a very bright woman ends up becoming a prostitute after having intercourse with a man who later abandons her. In “Ṭarīq al-Khalāṣ” (The Way Out), a girl commits suicide to avoid being forced to marry an old man, and in “Sharaf” (Honour), a man murders his sister because he sees her speaking to a man. All these stories show how Ayyūb uses the image of the brutalised woman and the brutality of male sexuality as a critique of traditional and religious thought.⁶⁶

On the other hand, there are few authors who did not find their voices within this framework. A good example would be the work of ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Fāḍil, whose fiction reached a mature artistic level in the polyphonic novel (Thāmīr 49), and who intentionally chose not to write fiction about political issues. In the introduction to the 1979 edition of his complete fiction works, Fāḍil wrote about political commitment:

Commitment is a vague term. If we agree that an artist is a human above all, then everything he sincerely and well-intentionally writes is committed. What is important in fiction is the artistic commitment. In other words, commitment should be part of the story, not the story part of it. Moreover, the reader should not feel that the author is dragging him by his nose to a certain opinion; it is the artistic value of the story itself which is what should drag the reader from his inner self to that opinion

⁶⁶ The three stories are discussed in Idrīs 25.

- without noticing it. That is the difference between the story and the article or the public speech. (6–7)⁶⁷

Therefore, unlike his contemporaries, Fāḍil's work rarely includes historical contextualisation of the events occurring in his stories. Fāḍil's work explores the socio-psychological phenomena of the family household in Iraq, for which he is considered a landmark in the history of Iraqi fiction. The polyphonic nature of his work and the historical context of the period in which they were written and published allow us to draw certain conclusions about body representations in his work. In his characters' voices we hear men and women reflecting on their lives, their tensions, and the way these are reflected on their bodies. Canonical beauty and body shape are central to many of his characters; the human body, beauty, and sexuality are employed for moral critique.

In his mythical story "Illāh al-Ḥikmah" (God of Wisdom, 1935), a very wise but ugly young man who is rejected by everyone, especially by women, falls deeply in love with a sweet, beautiful witch who also rejects him for his looks. He asks the gods for a better life by changing his shape. First, he asks the goddess of beauty to give him better looks and she does. He makes love to the goddess of love, who falls in love with him for his attractive looks, not his brains, and wants to become a human to be with him, though he refuses. Not finding happiness in a beautiful body, he decides to become a donkey. Not finding happiness as a donkey either, he asks the gods if he can join them as god of wisdom and they all agree. The story is a moral lesson about the banality of human beings who are obsessed with appearance and who ignore that the essence of true happiness is in the satisfaction of the soul and the mind. There is an inescapable religious component which makes the story accessible

⁶⁷ "الالتزامية تعبير فضفاض. إذا قبلنا ان على الفنان ان يكون إنسانا قبل أن يكون فنانا، فكل شيء يكتبه بصدق وبخلوص نية فهو التزام. لكن المهم في القصة أن يكون الالتزام فنياً، وتعبير آخر أن يكون جزءاً من القصة لا أن تكون القصة جزءاً منه. وتعبير ثالث أن لا يشعر القارئ أن الكاتب يسحب في القصة من أنفه الى رأي معين، بل ان الصواب الفني أن يكون الذي يسحبه من أنف وجدانه الى ذلك الرأي المعين هو القصة نفسها - دون أن يشعر. وهذا هو فرق ما بين القصة والمقالة أو الخطبة."

to a society which identifies with these parameters: first, appearance is mortal whereas wisdom is divine; second, true happiness is in the recognition of the almighty; and third, a beautiful body makes you loved and attractive to both humans and gods. However, on a deeper level, the story also shows that humans do not understand the nobility of the soul; they are physical beings. The masculine human body aspires to superiority through wisdom and beauty, while the female goddess is ready to renounce her godhood for the pleasures of a beautiful masculine body. In other words, even divine femininity, who created the beautiful masculine body, aspires to superiority in being attached to that body.

In another story, “Īlā” (1936),⁶⁸ a five-year-old daughter who is very beautiful and intelligent has everybody’s attention, admiration, and love. At the age of four-and-a-half, her baby brother is born, and once she sees him, she sees “a shouting piece of meat kicking in the cradle [...] he scared her, and she was suspicious of him” (15).⁶⁹ Īlā is so threatened by the presence of her brother that she tries her best to look better, cleaner, and more lovable to her parents. “Mommy! What are you doing with this mean creature? He is crazy and shouts for no reason! And he is so dirty... he does it on himself and in his cradle, he is disgusting and useless. I am better than him, I am well-behaved and beautiful! Why don’t you throw him away?” (16).⁷⁰ After a few months of this fury and jealousy, Īlā gives in to pain and sadness, and dies. Physical beauty is a greatly confusing concept for the character, even to the extent of not willing to live. She sees how the boy gets the family attention even if he is ugly and noisy; a beautiful little girl who is smart is neglected and dies. The story criticises the social problem of favouring male over female children, and it also shows how

⁶⁸ The protagonist’s name.

⁶⁹ “أنها رأت كتلة صارخة من اللحم تضطرب في المهد [...] فرابها أمره واوجست منه خيفة”
⁷⁰ “ماما.. ماذا تصنعون بهذه الخليفة الحقيرة؟ إنه مجنون يبكي ويصرخ بلا سبب! وقدر جداً.. يحدث في ثيابه وفراشه، ونفسي تشمنز منه! وليست فيه فائدة لنا. إني أحسن منه، وعاقلة ونظيفة! فلماذا لا تلقون به في الطريق؟”

even if a female excels at fulfilling social and moral expectations, she remains secondary in the competition with a boy – even if he lacks the social attractiveness.

In another story, “Mashrū‘ Ṭalāq” (Divorce Project, 1940), a young man, bored of alcohol and prostitutes, becomes obsessed with the butcher’s daughter, whom he accidentally meets walking down the street, and impulsively decides to marry. His parents, who do not approve of her because she is only a butcher’s daughter, which, to them, is socially degrading, think that their son deserves a better Baghdadi girl. After months of negotiations, the parents manage to marry him to a girl they find more suitable, who immediately falls in love with her husband; but he does not find her attractive: “she was not ugly, but she was not beautiful. She did not have the sweetness and the allure he wished for in a bride and the one his mother chose, but his shock made him believe she was ugly and hateful” (151).⁷¹ He gets depressed because he does not want to go to the brothel again, and he does not like his wife. He wants to divorce his wife but cannot, now that she has given birth to a baby girl. This example shows, once more, the centrality of male sexuality for the Iraqi family: whether it is the son’s will or his family’s, he must have the best sexual object. For the family, the best sexual object is the one that maintains them within the same socio-economic circle. For the son, the beauty of his bride becomes an indicator of his individuality: marrying the girl that his family chooses for him means renouncing his will – in this case, marrying the butcher’s daughter. At the same time, not being as beautiful as he desires seems to be a sufficient justification for him to reject his bride, which shows the reification of the female body in young man’s struggle with social structure.

⁷¹ "لم تكن قبيحة حقاً، ولكنها ليست جميلة. ليست فيها تلك الحلاوة والجاذبية اللتان كان يتوق اليهما فيتوهم انهما موفورتان في عروسه المنتظرة، حتى لقد أوهمته الصدمة انها قبيحة كريهة."

Nevertheless, there are other examples where masculine supremacy is not as straight forward as in the previous examples. Fāḍil's most praised novel *al-Majnūnān* (Two Crazy People) (1936) in which two intellectuals, a man and a woman, share their views on the meaning of the body, elevates the debate on the body to a more sophisticated level. The novel's Austenesque plot centres on the tension between a man and woman who are equal in education, class and intelligence and who are deeply attracted to each other.⁷² A misunderstanding on the woman's behalf, however, makes her reject the hero at first. As one might expect, the novel ends with both falling in love after the woman realizes her mistake and they live happily ever after. The interest in their story, however, is concentrated in a twenty-pages conversation between Ṣādiq (the man) and Ṣafīyah (the woman) about the differences between men and women. Ṣādiq believes that the focus of female desire is the body, and the focus of male desire is personal glory (412). Ṣafīyah, on the other hand, believes that it is the man who loves a woman for the beauty of her body (414). The dialogue is a clear example the polyphony in Fāḍil's work that Thāmir mentions, as it lays in front of the reader some of the many examples of twisted logic which are so prevalent in conceptualising corporality in Iraqi society.

Firstly, the narrator – through his characters – expresses the belief that the only way a woman can feel a man's love is through the body, that is, through physical attraction. In other words, only beautiful women are qualified to be loved (412). Secondly, man finds glory outside his body; therefore his own appearance is not important (413). Woman, on the other hand, finds glory in the man's body, which is why she is concerned with beautifying herself – to attract him – and, as a man does not need anything other than herself because he owns everything, a woman, unlike him, does not have anything, which is why she is proud

⁷² I say 'Austenesque' as it clearly reminds the reader of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813).

of being next to him – who has everything (414). Therefore, what a woman loves in a man is knowing that he is attracted to her and so what she loves is herself (413). Accordingly, a woman is not concerned with beauty *per se*: her interest in beauty is to get close to man's desire which will fulfil hers. Being an object of physical attraction implies being a subject of affection. Thirdly, men and women are equal because their difference is the essence of their attraction (415). Again, the idea of beauty and physical attraction lies at the heart of human interaction, and being aware of one's own existence is related to male sexuality.

To sum up, this period of Iraqi fiction reflects the supremacy of masculinity and the reification of femininity. Female voices are hardly ever heard and, if heard, they reaffirm the supremacy of the masculine subject. Corporeality in this period is employed to preach and lecture morality in the reformatory sense of the word. Even when the moral lessons are concerned with the social equality of the genders, binarism and the hierarchy of sexes, in which masculinity is superior, is at the heart of conceptualising corporality.

2.2 The modern period – Post World War II

The modern period is claimed to be the period of the pioneers. It the period of the great authors who set the solid foundation of Iraqi literature. Intellectuals of this period were creative, experimental, and widely read. Politically, it was a wildly intense period of ideological formation, political persecution, decadence of the monarchy, military uprising, revolutions, and the formation of the Iraqi republic. It coincided with both the rise of Pan-Arab nationalism and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It was also an era that saw the flourishing of education and women's movements, though simple if compared to European women's movement of the same period. The Iraqi Women's Union was founded in 1945.

The union sought to increase cooperation among different women's associations in Iraq and thus to strengthen women's efforts toward raising their social, civil, and economic position, as well as improving their health and legal status. It demanded that its constituent societies rise above sectarian, ethnic, and religious differences. Initially, it demonstrated considerable tolerance for political differences. (Efrati, "Competing Narratives" 446)

This means more female voices are present in the literary scene. However, although this union overcame ideological differences at the beginning, soon the government's restrictions on leftist organizations led to the dismissal of leftist representatives from its administration, on the one hand, and to the persistent split between the left and the traditional women's movements on the other. Consequently, traditional women thinkers led the movement and focused efforts on social welfare; this is except for Nazīhah al-Dulaymī, who led the leftist Women's League Society. Nevertheless, both fronts' leaders believed that the women's movement in Iraq was inspired by male activists who, Efrati continues, opposed "veiling and seclusion, polygamy and male privileges in divorce, forced marriage, marriage without previous acquaintance, and large differences in age between spouses" (448). This highlights the deeply rooted patriarchy in the Iraqi moral system. The call for women's rights needed to be approved of by male social representatives for women to take the initiative, which, in turn, proves that masculinity determined the system of thoughts and values.

Literature of this period differed from earlier works in style and maturity; it moved from a moralistic tone to one of poetic realism where symbolism and high concern for aesthetics dominated most works in fiction. Poetry, however, was still the leading literary genre and was undergoing a revolutionary period after the introduction of the free verse. This literary revival witnessed a great deal of creative production that lasted up to the late

1970s, reaching its highest point during the 1960s. Most of the prominent works in modern Iraqi thought, art and literature belonged to these three decades, after World War II. In this humanistic fertility, various factors conditioned the representation of the body, including political struggle between anti-colonial nationalist and modernist masculinity. Literary critic, Shujā‘ al-‘Ānī suggests that the concern for political statements was greater than the art of writing: “Iraqi literature is one of the Arabic literatures most concerned with politics and social reform. This leads to a general tendency to instruct, to the extent that Iraqi authors often sacrifice the aesthetic content in favour of the social” (5).⁷³ The lack of interest in creating proper aesthetics urged authors to be influenced by European modernist literature, which was not flattering for women either: “Like the modernist tradition in Europe, literary innovation in Iraq and the Arab world was often profoundly masculinist” (Bahoora, “The Figure of the Prostitute” 42).⁷⁴

The body, within these parameters, served as a stage on which to expose, question, and evoke ideological and moral lessons about society, sexuality, disability, politics and gender issues. The major topics that fiction intended to reflect on were the human condition in the face of poverty and social injustice, the call for women’s rights, the introduction of secularism, and the critique of ideological opponents. Although women’s rights were on the authors’ agenda, authors paradoxically degraded the image of female bodies and their use by representing female bodies as objects for their anxious heterosexual male desires, or the focus of human misery. There were two aspects in which the human body was employed to

⁷³ "أن أدب القصة في العراق، من أوفر الآداب العربية اهتماماً بأمر السياسة والإصلاح الاجتماعي، وقد كان من نتائج هذا النزوع ان غلب على القصة العراقية الطابع التعليمي، بحيث أدى ذلك بالكتاب العراقيين في كثير من الأحيان الى التضحية بأصول الفن القصصي وعناصره لحساب المضمون الاجتماعي."

⁷⁴ Regarding the modernist tradition in Europe, Bahoora clarifies in a note: “As Marianne DeKoven (1999, 176) writes, aesthetic modernism in Europe has largely been understood as a masculine, male-dominated movement—experimental, forward thinking, and progressive: “Despite the powerful presence of women writers at the founding of Modernism and throughout its history and despite the near-obsessive preoccupation with femininity in all modernist writing, the reactive misogyny so apparent in much male-authored Modernism continues in many quarters to produce a sense of Modernism as a masculinist movement”” (19)

instruct about poverty and social injustice: first, physical pain, disease, and functional diversity, and second, sexuality. Examples found in stories by post-war authors such as Shākir Khiṣbāk (1930–2018), ‘Abd al-Malik Nūrī (1921–1998), Ghā’ib Tu‘mah Farmān (1927–1990), Fu’ād al-Takarī (1927–2008) and Mahdī ‘Īssa al-Ṣaqr (1927–2006), focused on how poverty and social status interfere with intimate life and jeopardize the future because they drive men to violence, humiliation, regret and tragic fates.

In Khiṣbāk’s story “al-Kasīh” (The Cripple, 1953), a poor disabled young man ends up committing suicide because of the humiliation of being unable either to support his family or to avenge his murdered father. The story explores the burden of poverty upon the community of functional diversity in a strict society where a man’s honour is measured by his ability to protect and provide for his family. Being a cripple adds a dramatic dimension and shows the tragic destiny of a young male, who must support and protect his widowed mother and orphaned sisters. Khiṣbāk’s criticism, however, is not directed towards the system of thought that burdens human beings with strict social norms, but rather to the ruling political class and the administration that protected the feudal system, which made poverty automatically translate in fiction into victimisation. The moral of this story amounts to political propaganda against the monarchy and its feudal allies. It evinces solidarity with those who do not fit into a structure of normative behaviour, in which a dignified male supports and protects the family. The question of disability, therefore, is raised for solidarity and sympathy with the protagonist and at the same time maintains the message of pity and charity that deepens the already rooted sense of normative bodies – the strong, the virile, and the proud – where functional diversity is excluded.

Ghā’ib Tu‘mah Farmān, who is popularly known as the father of modern Iraqi fiction, intensively focuses on illness and disability. In his short story, “‘Ammī ‘Abrnī” (Help me

Cross, Sir), from *Mawlūd Ākhar* (Another Baby, 1959),⁷⁵ Khaīrīyah, is a blind young woman who cannot find love because she is poor and disabled. Indeed, Farmān's works are crowded by characters who suffer constant physical pain or disability, which adds to their misery and marginalisation. His novel, *al-Nakhlah wa al-Jīrān* (The Palm Tree and the Neighbours, 1966) tells the story of a marginalised group of people drowned in poverty, deprivation, and misery after the war and the end of the British colonisation of Iraq. These people struggle to survive, and their bodies add more hardship to their dark lives. Salīmah, a poor and infertile baker, works all day for a few coins that barely feed her and her dead husband's son, who kills a man for questioning his masculinity. Her neighbours are the limping Assūmah and Maḥmūd, son of the cock-eyed man. They all live in exhausted, wounded and aching bodies that represent their exhausting, aching existence.

In *Haṣīd al-Raḥā* (Mill Harvest, 1954), a collection of short-stories, Farmān presents various characters, especially men, who are physically ill or in pain, along with their troubled lives of striking workers, grieving lovers, and lustful old men with erectile dysfunction. Another example of Farmān's work is *Ālām al-Sayyid Ma'rūf* (The Pains of Mr. Ma'rūf, 1980). Mr. Ma'rūf suffers from a stomach ulcer. He refuses to marry because of his illness and the burden of supporting two sisters and a blind mother. Again, the aching body represents an aching existence. Shākir Khiṣbāk, 'Abd al-Malik Nūrī, Fu'ād al-Takarī and Maḥdī 'Īssa al-Ṣaqr, like Farmān, see the dark and miserable human condition reflected in chronic illness and functionally diverse bodies; the worse the physical condition, the more miserable the characters are.

Sexuality, assessed within the same moralistic scale, distinguishes between male and female. Sexuality became a handy tool in the laborious task of the '*Tajdīd*' movement,

⁷⁵ Cited in al-'Ānī 143.

marked by social and cultural renewal in literature and thought after World War II (Bahoora, “The Figure of the Prostitute” 42). Male sexuality is a representation of man’s struggle in life and nature and adds burden to existential anxieties in post-colonial Iraqi society, while female sexuality is depicted in prostitution, sexual deviation and death is employed to represent social decadence. Issues related to sexuality – namely, sexual perversion in women (zoophilia, paedophilia, homosexuality, and even adultery are all considered sexual deviations), male sexual anxiety, women as sexual objects, women as victims of rape and social/family violence, and prostitution, are used to expose social and class problems.

Shujā‘ al-‘Ānī’s study offers numerous examples of short stories and novels which depict female sexual deviance. Much like other authors of the period, al-‘Ānī defines female sexual deviance as any sexual practice that is not between heterosexual married couples (40-44). He dedicates a chapter to ‘Women and Illegal Relationships’ (127–140), referring to heterosexual unmarried sex, adultery and honour-killing. In all cases, he diagnoses women’s sexuality outside heterosexual marriage as a reflection of the social class struggle (52), and the stressful expansion of urban life which inhibits men’s ability to satisfy their wives sexually (55).

In “Şirā’” (Struggle, 1947) by Shākir Khaṣṣbāk, a sexually deprived female babysitter takes sexual advantage of a little boy ends up becoming a prostitute (al-‘Ānī 40). In *Ramād* (Ashes, 1950) by ‘Abd al-Razāq al-Shaykh ‘Alī, Ḥalīmah engages in homosexual intercourse to take revenge on her cheating husband (43). Maḥdī ‘īssa al-Şaqr’s story “‘Uā’ al-Kalb” (Barking, 1953) is a critique of Arab aristocracy, who are allies of the British mandate. It is told from the perspective of the male servant, who is fascinated by the beauty and the uncovered white skin of the healthy, chubby, and rich ladies of the family he works for, and their party guests. His fascination turns into resentment and disgust when he

discovers his mistress's sexual intercourse with her pet dog. In a subtle way, the author juxtaposes the servant's sexual deprivation with the abused dog; in a way, he sees how a rich woman would rather have intercourse with a dog than with a man of a lower class, perhaps to avoid and prevent a scandal; or perhaps the author wanted to make a moral judgement against the corrupt ruling class, or perhaps the servant feels looked at as a sex toy or a dog, helplessly obeying his masters in whatever way and whenever they want (al-*Ānī* 43–5).

Male anxiety around intercourse has been recurrent theme in Iraqi fiction since 1950s. It is the maximum expository resource by which to critique severe social constraints concerning sexuality, marriage, and rape. In fiction, when there is a claim for the individual's right to free sexuality, it means freedom for male heteronormative sexuality from social constraints and segregation, maintaining male supremacy. Therefore, although male sexual anxieties are used to criticise reactionary social phenomena, literary works that depict male anxiety about sexual intercourse depict women as sexual objects. Fu'ād al-Takarlī was the pioneer in exposing female bodily reification by men. He is also considered one of the most celebrated pioneers of the Iraqi and Arab literary scene (Caiani & Cobham 195). His novels and short stories are mirrors, reflecting Iraqi sexual anxieties. In *Başqah fī Wajh al-Ḥayāt* (Spitting in the Face of Life, 1948), a father is tormented by his sexual urges towards his daughters. He is constantly obsessed with imagining them in their undergarments or naked. Occasionally he sneaks up on them while they are changing or busy with the housework; sometimes he fantasises about them. Eventually he kills the oldest daughter because he cannot have sex with her. Although it was written in 1948, the author did not publish this novel until the year 2000, avoiding the controversy it might have caused then (Caiani & Cobham 195). In *al-Wajh al-Ākhar* (The Other Face, 1960), an ordinary working-class man is constantly staring at and fantasising about women's bodies; depending on his mood, he either sees them as stupid animals or as an expression of kindness and salvation. His

wretchedness and misery are dramatized by his life among so many ill and weak bodies; those who are disabled, those who suffer from terminal illness, his wife's complicated pregnancy, miscarriage, and eventual blindness. He starts to fancy his teenage neighbour when he learns that she is being forced by her family to marry a sick old man. These texts among others, depict the miserable life of a poor, lustful man surrounded by visible but codified bodies, limited in mobility and consenting to sexual violence; all this makes al-Takarlī the Iraqi author who has offered the best exploration of rape psychology.

His masterpiece *al-Rajʿ al-Baʿīd*, (The Long Way Back, 1980) shows how sexuality represents political identity within the political turmoil of Iraq in the early 1960s, when the Baʿath party defeated the communist government.⁷⁶ It exposes how male sexual anxieties and political power reify the female body and instrumentalise male sexuality to mark ideological difference. Most importantly, it shows the supremacy of the masculine subject and the signification of the codes of corporality in Iraqi society.

Munīrah, the central female character in this novel, arrives with her mother at her aunt's house after being beaten and raped by her 18-year-old nephew, who represents the new political power. She is also desired by her two cousins. One cousin, Midḥat, a young, modern progressive intellectual, is lost between moral dilemmas and the new emerging political power. The other cousin, Karīm, is a weak, futureless young man under this new political power. Despite the general agreement among commentators in seeing Munīrah as “a symbol of Iraq, the Iraqi Communist Party or even of the 1958 revolution hijacked in 1963 (Caiani and Cobham 219), I read Munīrah as a possible promise of change as regards the well-being of the Iraqi people; the three men around her are Iraq's political actors:

⁷⁶ This novel was originally written between Paris, 1966, and Baghdad, 1977, but was not published until 1980 with an extra chapter added at the end of the original text. *al-Rajʿ al-baʿīd* has been translated in English as *The Long Way Back* by Catherine Cobham in 2001. However, I use my own translation of the cited extracts to highlight some details that are unclear in the translation.

‘Adnān represents the strong emergent power, Midḥat represents the defeated intellectual modern left, and Karīm is the passive, uninvolved youth. Aet among these three young men, Munīrah’s fate is tragic: The first, ‘Adnān, rapes her; the second, Midḥat, marries and abandons her when he discovers that she is not virgin. The third, Karīm, wants her to love and save him. Each of the three masculine figures sees Munīrah through an anxious, ideological sexuality. Munīrah describes her condition: “I was, somehow, subdued, and I didn’t want to handle it. Am I not the girl of this country, hanging eternally between death and prostitution?” (*al-Raj‘ al-Ba‘īd* 262).⁷⁷ Munīrah is referring to the condition of women in Iraq where, they are always seen as sexual targets. Resistance means misery and death; giving in to sexual violence makes them whores. But if they are lucky, they live simple, married lives, happily ever after under the husband’s command. A raped woman in Iraqi society is either murdered by her family (a phenomenon known as ‘honour killing’), or treated like a prostitute – again, she is either dead or a whore. Rape is a crime condemned by the Iraqi constitution since 1958, but Iraqi social decorum dictates utmost secrecy, otherwise the woman publicly becomes a dishonoured unmarriageable, which would bring a shame to the whole family which only her blood can cleanse.

For these reasons, Munīrah keeps her rape crime secret and decides to marry her modern, progressive cousin who does not believe in legal or religious marriage anyway – at first. He loves her and believes in mutual love and respect. She chooses him, hoping that he will save her from her from social damnation and scandal. On their first night as a married couple, just as he is penetrating her body, he realises she is not virgin, but he continues. It is then that his existential nausea and moral dilemmas begins:

⁷⁷ "ألست فتاة هذا البلد، المعلقة دوما بين الموت والعهر؟"

When everything had finished, he left the room walking around in a very dark side of the house. It was after three a.m. and the night was weighing on the frightening world. He was distracted, dispersed. He wanted to go downstairs but he couldn't, he stood in a corner away from the terrace, leaning his back on the cold wooden railing. He was shaking. His guts and chest were in flames. He did not want to see anybody. Ever since that moment that feeling never left him. He did not want to see anybody. He was disgusted, humiliated, and he wanted to be in eternal silence. Then, when he was staring at the light coming from their room, a phoney sense of nausea attacked him. (320)⁷⁸

These moments of gloomy nausea occur just after feverish moments of love and impatience to consummate the marriage, and are followed by Midḥat abandoning his new bride. al-Takarlī writes:

She was squeezed in his arms, loose under him, her breath trickled with unknown flavour. He pushed himself away from her, lifted his chest of her naked chest. He filled his eyes with seeing her like this; *his Munīrah, his wife, his lover*. She had tender skin and round breasts and belly. Her hip bones attracted his attention and he noticed her bringing her thighs closer. She was squeezed, speechless under him. She was telling him with her brown vinaceous body something he did not understand.⁷⁹ And when she pulled him to her, as if she did not want him to learn more about the

⁷⁸ " حين انتهى كل شيء خرج من الغرفة يتمشى في ناحية من الدار دامسة الظلام. كانت الساعة قد تجاوزت الثالثة صباحاً والليل جاثماً على الدنيا المرعبة، وكان موزعاً مشتتاً. أراد ان ينزل فلم يستطع ووقف في زاوية بعيدة من الطارمة مستنداً إلى المحجر الخشبي البارد. كان يرتجف، وأحشاؤه وصدرة تقور. لم يرد أن يرى بشراً. دهمه هذا الإحساس لحظتين ولم يفارقه. لم يرد أن يرى بشراً. كان مشمنزاً، مهاناً، يريد أن يخلد إلى صمت أبدي. آنذاك، وهو يتطلع إلى ضوء غرفتهم الخافت، هاجمه غثيان مزيف."

⁷⁹ Brown vinaceous (Arabic: Asmar Khamrī) is a shade of brown skin, a sign of exotic beauty, which, perhaps, like Khamr (wine), is forbidden.

secrets of the body, he felt her opening her thighs again to contain him... (318, emphasis added)⁸⁰

The curious aspect about this possessive passion is that it never existed between the two during their courtship. She became his when she was 'squeezed' naked in his arms. These two passages depict the physical and political position of the female body within the paradigms of Iraqi social mandates; her body is the property of the man who decides to have her, and it is the key to her humanity.

She is not a virgin. Therefore, she lacks honour and needs to be punished by him or by any other volunteer in the family. That is the acknowledged formula. It places honour in the organ of a female virgin and assigns its protection to her until it is decided. [...] From a perspective deeply anchored in his being, she had lost the sign of womanhood, wifehood, and motherhood in this society. (410–411)⁸¹

Such lines synthesise the complexity surrounding the body in Iraqi society on two levels: first, the fossilized conception that semanticises female subjectivity as a sexual object and instrument which is a material and symbolic property of a male patron; and secondly, the intense sexual terrorism – discussed in the following chapter – and political employment of sexuality as an instrument of social and political dominance of private and public moral systems. This terrorism consists of the fear of sexual harassment, rape, illegal sex, prostitution and, most importantly, the fear of sexual scandal of any kind. Male heteronormative sexuality occupies the superior position in the gender hierarchy and

⁸⁰ " كانت معصرة بين ذراعيه، متلاينة تحته، تتلاحق أنفاسها ذات النكهة الغربية. ابتعد عنها قليلاً، رفع صدره عن صدرها العالي، أخذ يتملى من رؤيتها هكذا. منيرته، زوجته، حبيبته. كانت رقيقة الجلد، ممثلة النهدين واليطن. جذبت نظره لحظة عظمنا حوضها ورأها تغلق ببطء فخذها. كانت معصرة، لا تتكلم، تحته. كانت تقول له بجسمها ذي السمرة الخمرية، شيئاً لم يكن يفهمه. وحين جذبت إليها كأنها لا تريد منه ان يطيل النظر في خفايا الجسد، أحس بها تعيد فتح فخذها لتحتويه..."

⁸¹ " إنها ليست عذراء، فهي فاقدة الشرف ويجب ان تعاقب على يده أو على يد أي متبرع آخر من العائلة. هذه المعادلة معروفة. إنها تضع الشرف في عضو الأنثى العذراء، وهي توكل لها ان تحافظ عليه إلى حين من الزمن مقرر. [...] إنها، من خلال منظور متوطد في نفسه وفي جنوره، تعد قد فقدت دلالتها كامرأة في هذا المجتمع وكزوجة وكأم."

possesses a social, legal and moral right to decide over other bodies. Raped women, prostitutes, and other women constituted as 'fallen' are like second-hand underwear: no one would wear it. Regardless of ideological tendency, Iraqi culture places personal honour and dignity in the female patroness's genitals.

Al-Takarlī is not the only author to link sexuality to existential dilemmas. 'Abd al-Malik Nūrī in "Ghathayān" (Nausea, 1952) also addresses this theme.⁸² The protagonist confuses the emptiness of his life with the desire for sex, something which he tries to resolve by visiting a cheap prostitute. In "Kāna Dhālika Yawm Jumu'ah" (It was on a Friday), another nauseous young man, motivated by boredom and exhaustion from chasing the meaning of life, harasses a woman sitting next to him at the cinema who proceeds to make a big scene about it.⁸³ Mahdī 'Īssā al-Ṣaqr also linked sexuality to existential dilemmas in stories such as "Bukā' al-Aṭfāl" (Baby Cry, 1950) and "al-Ghil" (Venom, 1955). In both, married men turn to their past to meet lustful prostitutes to make sense of their miserable lives. In "al-Ghil" (Venom) we hear the protagonist's thoughts explaining why he goes back to his old prostitute, whom he had used to visit regularly for three years before getting married: "I want to free myself from everything" (7).⁸⁴ The climax of the protagonist's nausea comes after intercourse when he starts to feel conscious of his body and its visibility to everyone: "I feel all that dirt covering all my body ... I need to change these clothes ... all of it, even the shoes ... and rub my body till it gets red... but how can I wash off the shame? How can I switch it to a different feeling?" (8)⁸⁵

⁸² Discussed in Aḥmad 243–248.

⁸³ Cited in al-'Ānī 62; Aḥmad 262–264.

⁸⁴ "أريد أن أتحرق من كل شيء"
⁸⁵ أحس كأن تلك الأقدار تغطي جسدي كله ... يجب أن أبدل كل هذه الثياب ... كلها حتى الحذاء ... وافرك جسدي حتى تحمر البشرة... لكن الشعور بالخزي كيف اغسله؟! كيف أبدله بشعور آخر؟"

In all three stories, part of the protagonists' distress and boredom which leads them to feel imprisoned is their unsatisfying emotional life. The protagonist in "Ghathayān" is abandoned by the young woman he adores; in "al-Ghil" the protagonist hates and pities his wife; and in "Bukā' al-'Atfāl" the protagonist is sick of his wife, whose breasts are too dry to feed their new-born, who cannot not stop crying. On a superficial level, intercourse with prostitutes is a relief from uneasiness, an act of rage against the meaninglessness of life, a way to find their happy past and free selves. On a deeper level, these men are unable to confront an overwhelming situation and they turn to their sexuality to recover or remind themselves of that sense of superiority and selectiveness their gender enjoys. Once again, women and female sexuality do not represent otherness opposing male sexuality, but rather the instrument by which male identity is examined by the male subject himself. Iraqi novelist, Ali Bader criticised this generation of 'nauseous' authors in his humorous novel *Bābā Sartre* (2001), where he draws a caricature depicting them as patriarchal sex maniacs, who read only book covers and spend hours discussing existentialism – which they learned about from titles and resonant slogans while lost in cafes and bars with prostitutes and corrupt politicians.

Other instances of reifying the female body were intended as social critique, as in Khashbāk's "Ḥayātun Qāsīyah" (Hard Life, 1959),⁸⁶ which tells the story of Ḥalīmah, a young woman abused by her family and taken sexual advantage of by the neighbourhood grocer. Like Ḥalīmah, Khadījah in Muwafaq Khidīr's story, "Fatātu al-Maktabah wa al-Qiṭṭah al-'Ashiqah" (The Librarian and the Cat in Love, 1967),⁸⁷ is a woman whose "tragedy is embodied in her ugliness and her crisis is her desperate need for love."⁸⁸ Khadījah realises

⁸⁶ Cited in al-'Ānī 46.

⁸⁷ Al-'Ānī 49.

⁸⁸ Al-'Ānī 49.

"فمأساتها تتجسد أيضا في قبحها وأزمتها ماثلة في حاجتها القصوى إلى الحب"

that a bookkeeper has been nice to her just because she is a client, whilst she had thought that he was romantically interested in her. Additionally, both protagonists suffer from a lack of normative beauty. Neither story details the looks of these two women, but the reader is led to this conclusion from the rejection of their male beloved. Ugliness, no matter how subjective, adds to women's reification. To the grocer, Ḥalīmah's ugliness makes her unworthy of marriage, and he considers her no more than an opportunity for free sex. As al-ʿĀnī puts it, in Iraqi fiction, "[a] woman in the city is nothing but a body, twisted with desire, nothing but a whore..." (57).⁸⁹ He attributes these representations of women in the post-WWII period to the many socio-political changes that urged authors to pursue openness in discussing sexuality and women's rights in the spirit of modernity and social reform (70). Haytham Bahoora, however, suggests that post-war authors chose the figure of the prostitute to bring up questions of sexuality and women's rights:

The prostitute, I argue, offered Iraqi men writers and intellectuals a fungible construct through which to articulate the contradictions and anxieties of the historical moment and project their national hopes, fears, and fantasies. Since the prostitute existed outside established social and moral regulation, her deployment by men writers reveals an unsettled economy of virtue whereby she could be at the same time instrumentalized for narrative purposes, pitied, and viewed as a threat to male dominance, suggesting a deeply embedded ambivalence toward women's equality and liberation in the cultural imagination. ("The Figure of the Prostitute" 42–3)

Despite my agreement with Bahoora's claim, I argue that it is not only the prostitute figure that served postcolonial authors in Iraq in projecting their political anxieties, but also the female body in general. Unable to calibrate the deeply rooted notion of superior masculinity

⁸⁹ "ذلك ان المرأة في المدينة ليست سوى جسد شيق يتضور من الشهوة، ليست سوى مومس"

within the frames of new modern political identity, authors made the female body a stage on which political statements could be exercised. The human body in general, as we have seen so far, represented moral positioning. The female body was instrumentalised to uncover the anxieties and the struggles of masculine political identity. The figure of the prostitute offered a dimension of plausibility to the narratives of this period since women were secluded from the public sphere and there was no chance for male characters/authors to share intimacy with the female body other than in marriage or prostitution. Even female authors underpinned the universality of the male voice in the representation of women. Iraqi author Muḥammad Khiḍāīr writes:

During the years of [literary] formation (1920–1945) and the years of [literary] ascension (1958–1979) the discourse in writing women characters in Iraq remained a hostage to the monolithic masculine narrative discourse, which preserved the feminist narrative under its control, until female authors (especially the exiled) restored the hostage discourse to their ownership during the years of change (1991 and later), like a rib ripped off the body of male discourse. (2013)⁹⁰

Other literary and gender studies critics agree that until the 1990s Arab, and thus Iraqi, women's fiction did not propose discourses of otherness where the female body represents the women's voice (Majaj et al. xxvii–xxix). Earlier fiction consolidated the narrative of sensuality and inner feminine voice, which did not correspond to the reality women were living behind the doors of their husbands' or families' houses.

Few exceptions, however, appeared sporadically among Iraqi women poets and fiction writers who were politically involved and reflected their feminist concerns in their literary

⁹⁰ " ظلّ الخطاب المكتوب عن شخصية المرأة في العراق، طيلة حقبة التأسيس (1920 - 1945) وحقبة الصعود (1958 - 1979) رهين الملكية الأحادية لخطاب الرجل الروائي، الذي حصر عصمة السرد النسوي في يده، قيل أن تستردّ النساء الكاتبات (المهاجرات خاصة) في أعقاب حقبة التغيير (1991 وما بعد) خطابهن المملوك وتنسبه إلى عصمتهن، مثل ضلع مقتطع من أضلاع الخطاب الرجولي."

productions, such as the poet Nāzik al-Malā'ikah, the storyteller Sāfira Jamīl Ḥāfiẓ, and the lawyer Ṣabīḥah al-Shaykh Dawūd. Such works experimented with new representations of the female body. Ḥūrīyyah Ḥāshim Nūrī's story "Bā'i'at al-Damm" (Blood Seller, 1951) narrates the story of a young woman who sells her blood to save her brother's life.⁹¹ She keeps on selling her blood until she loses strength and dies of anaemia. Shocked by his sister's death, the brother commits suicide, and his body is found with his sister's name written on his chest with blood. In its criticism of the glorification of masculine values, the condition of women, and the health system in Iraq during the 1950s, "Bā'i'at al-Dam" offers a symbolic image of the damage patriarchal values cause in society. Sāfirah Jamīl Ḥāfiẓ's story "Dumā wa Aṭfāl" (Toys and Children, 1952) is an introspective journey of a young woman,⁹² who realises that society sees her as a body/toy which serves for sex and procreation. Women writers including Salmah Sāliḥ, Maīyādah al-Rubay'ī, Suhaylah al-Ḥusaynī, Safīyah al-Dabūni, May Muẓafar, and Luṭṭīyah al-Dulaymī, among others, wrote about women's endurance in the trials of family and marital lives. Such works denounce the social reification of women, but they hardly explore the female body as a sight for resistance. Instead, they emphasise equality and women's rights within what traditional standards allow. Literary production by women of this period is lesser in quantity than that of male authors. The first Iraqi novel written by a woman, *Man al-Jānī* (Who is the Culprit, 1954) by Ḥarbīyah Muḥammad,⁹³ was only preceded by some short stories by Sāfira Jamīl Ḥāfiẓ in 1950. By the year 1972, almost twenty years after the publication of the first novel by a woman, only five novels of the total published Iraqi novels at that time were written by women (al-Dādīsī 227–228).

⁹¹ Cited in al-Ṭālib 84–85.

⁹² Cited in al-Ānī 18–19.

⁹³ Cited in al-Dādīsī 227.

Despite being a period of flourishing and consolidation of literary production in general and fiction in particular, male supremacy continues to be central to the conceptualisation of corporeality and to the writing about the body. Even though society and cultural processes have undergone notable changes, binarism and sexual hierarchies continue being signifiers of morality and political positioning, which will be accentuated even more in the following period.

2.3 The Ba'ath Era

With the emergence of the Ba'ath government in the late 1960s, many political, legal, and social reforms concerning gender took place. The Ba'ath government intended to change the situation of women, but its political propaganda and fluctuating attitude confused the issue of gender reform. The Ba'ath government made education for boys and girls compulsory up to the age of eighteen; women were encouraged to enter the labour force; nurseries and kindergartens were made public; and the government paid for maternity leave. In 1978, the 1959 Civil Code was put into effect in ways that favoured women's status within family household and conjugal life (Rohde 184). By the 1970s, Iraqi women could legally vote, study, work, divorce, own property, and run for political office. Although these legal amendments to improve women's conditions in education and work helped to bring women into the public sphere, they did not, however, radically change society's image of the female body and women's gender position in the hierarchy of sexes. Al-Khayyat writes that

a major problem remains: that of male disapproval of the changes directed towards improving women's position. Education for girls is still primarily as an additional qualification for marriage and a way of gaining increased status. [...] Although education has broadened women's horizons, they are still subject to restrictions at

home which guard their reputation (and hence their family's reputation) with a view to enhancing their marriageability. (197)

Al-Khayyat confirms that there is a perpetual self-reproducing masculine domination within each Iraqi, constructed from the encounter between normative Islamic and Bedouin cultural heritages, which inhabit the Iraqi collective consciousness:

I have shared and experienced all the problems of the women of my country, problems that result from their oppression by the patriarchal system in which they live. This oppression is practised upon women by both sexes. In fact, women probably feel a greater direct oppression by members of their own sex than by men, as women practise social control by adopting male ways of thinking and male roles in policing each other. [...] The system of male domination in Iraqi society uses not only Bedouin social values but also Islamic ideology as tools to control women. (9–11)

Unconsciously, female bodies practise masculine policing, both religious and social, on female bodies. This shows that the gradual modernising of society and the expansion of education and urban life hardly had any influence on women's subjectivity. Since the education received was still monitored by masculine dominance, women were still perceived as reproductive sex tools.

During the early years of the Iraq-Iran war, "Iraqi society was militarised to an unprecedented degree [...] The available data suggest that almost 40 per cent of the Iraqi male adult population took part in the war" (Rohde 188–189). In every aspect of social life, war was the priority. Although the Ba'ath government promoted gender equality to encourage women to cover the vacancies caused by military recruitment, war propaganda and rhetoric evoked masculinist nationalism, heroism, and traditional values. Newspapers,

magazines, schoolbooks, children's literature, fiction, and poetry alike increasingly glorified the sanctity of Iraq's just cause.⁹⁴ War propaganda accentuated masculinity and traditional nationalistic values, i.e., considering being a soldier an act of prestige and honour:

Iraqi propaganda produced a never-ending flow of richly pictured articles commentating the boldness and heroism of the ever victorious Iraqi men fighting at the front-line, including gruesome photos of slain Iranian soldiers scattered around on the killing fields. Saddam Hussein and high regime figures were depicted in war-related contexts, wearing military uniforms, meeting the troops, decorating soldiers for outstanding bravery, talking about the war. This obsession in itself indicates that a gendered hierarchy of social status was being reinforced in the press during this period, with men/soldiers at its top and women/civilians confined to auxiliary positions. (Rohde 190)⁹⁵

The traditional segregation of private from public spaces became a plan to reinforce the nationalistic agenda. Civilians – women and children – within the territory or household were separated from soldiers – men guarding the gate. Men protected their belongings – land, state, culture, women, and children – from the murderous enemy. Propaganda narratives romanticised this segregation by feminising the land and accentuating the warrior's chivalry:

The war became an act of love, carrying overt sexual connotations, between a male soldier and his beloved, the homeland. In the early years of the Iran-Iraq war, the

⁹⁴ For detailed figures of literary war propaganda see Al-Hassan 7–10.

⁹⁵ Even though Hussein and many high figures in his government were no military men, see Ghousseub and Sinclair-Webb 236–250, chapter 10 explains how and why the Ba'ath regime popularised the image of military men. In fact, it was the Ba'ath party who introduced conscription after taking over the communist government in the military uprising in 1963; up to that date joining the military service was voluntary.

equivalent of romantic and patriotic love was apparently applied in the Iraqi press as a tool to mobilise the male population. (Rohde 193)

This enhancement of masculinity managed not only to recruit soldiers, but also turned the war into an issue that was as personal as one's own sexuality. Poet Yūsuf al-Şā'igh uses an extraordinary metaphor that shows how war, masculinity and the feminisation of the land are connected in a love triangle:

An opportunity,

for masculinity and love..

O mother of Maryam...

let the little one,

asleep,

in the bed of her childhood...

I will love you more,

when I come back,

from the war victorious

and you love me...

I ...

Still,

call the bullets,

our neighbourhood girls..

and call the cannons

our cousins..

and between each shot

and shot..

I love you more....

O mother of Maryam..

let the little one,

asleep,

in the bed of her childhood...

Wash the doorstep...

and wash yourself..

and rest... (al-Şā'igh 246–247)^{96 97}

This three-dimensional voice – soldier, father and lover – portrays the war rhetoric around the figure of soldier. He is the all-in-one man who bleeds for his country, gives the little ones their childhood, loves his wife, and, significantly, tells her to wash herself, as if he is purifying the land (the wife) and preparing it for the act of making love. Towards the mid-to late- 1980s, the distinction between solid manhood on display in the front-line, and tender

⁹⁶ "فرصة، للرجولة والحب.. يا أم مريم... خلي الصغيرة، نائمة، في فراش طفولتها... سأحبك أكثر، حين أعود، من الحرب منتصراً، وتحبيني... أنني ... ما أزال أسمي الرصاص، بنات مملتنا\ وأسمي المدافع أبناء عمي ...\ وما بين إطلاقه، وإطلاقه، أحبك أكثر... يا أم مريم .. خلي الصغيرة، نائمة، في سرير طفولتها... واغسلي عتبة الباب، واغسلي، واستريحي ..."

⁹⁷ I use a poem as an example instead of fiction owing the difficulty in finding sources published during the eighties and nineties. There is an unofficial censorship of literary texts produced during that period as they are accused of being war propaganda praising the Ba'ath regime. The texts published during that period and cited in this research were borrowed from private personal libraries belonging to friends and family.

motherhood displayed in taking care of children and household, became a motif in press and literary productions.⁹⁸ The government encouraged women to abandon those vacancies they filled in the early years of war for the sake of conception and childcare, which further fortified masculine values.

The representation of the body in this period did not escape the heteronormative masculine perception of bodies and sexes. Even the most revolutionary authors maintained the heteronormative binary scale of values in which women are represented as either a lustful body, innocent virgin, loving mother, or a sexual victim. Political persecution, wars and ideological conflict were widely present. As in the 1960s, patriarchal values concerning the female body and sexuality continued to mirror party politics.

‘Azīz al-Sayyid Jāsīm’s work is an example on how the human body is a materialisation of party politics and patriarchal values.⁹⁹ Jāsīm’s three novels, *al-Munāḍil* (The Militant, 1972), *al-Zahru al-Shaqī* (Suffering Primrose, 1988), and *al-Maftūn* (Bewitched, 2004),¹⁰⁰ depict the suffering of the militant Iraqi youth before, during and after the formation of the Iraqi republic in 1958. These novels share some major characteristics. In all works, the heroes are young male militants disenchanted by the revolution they fought for, as its outcome was feudal and dictatorial. The disenchantment comes as a result of severe interrogation and torture in political detention. Sexuality mirrors the characters’ political corruption, psychological damage, and moral positioning. In *al-Munāḍil*, the hero, Babel, abandons political militancy after being tortured in prison and lives his disappointment with

⁹⁸ Examples of Iraqi press in Rohde 190–197.

⁹⁹ ‘Aziz al-Sayyid Jāsīm (1941–1991) was a political activist, thinker, and author. He participated in the 14th of July revolution in 1958, and he wrote political propaganda to overthrow the monarchy. At first, he was a member of the Iraqi Communist Party, which he abandoned in 1960 and dedicated his life to political writing. He was persecuted and jailed by the monarchy, the communists, and the ba‘thists. He disappeared in 1990 and his family believes the ba‘thist government executed him.

¹⁰⁰ The introduction to this novel by the author’s brother, scholar and writer Muhsin al-Musawi, indicates that this novel was written in 1987 but not published until 2004 due to the political persecution against the author at the time.

a constant physical illness. Delāl, who was a female militant, chooses traditional marriage and housekeeping over political militancy to avoid rape in political prison. Ideologically committed women chose to renounce commitment because they saw themselves as penetrable bodies, a powerful political weapon in Iraq. Jamīlah, the prostitute, represents the people crushed by feudalism, which, in turn, is represented by deviant men practising torture and rape. The feudal lord is depicted as an animal who is openly homosexual and uses his tendencies to intimidate and bring shame to his victims, the noble heterosexual heroes. Scenes of masturbation in prison show heterosexual heroes expressing their sexuality as an act of political anarchism as it breaks with the taboos of the established repression (Ben Idrees 82). Homosexuality, masturbation, and the word ‘castration’ in this novel are linked to corruption and injustice.

In *al-Maftūn*, sexual castration represents political frustration. The protagonist, Yūsuf, a young revolutionary militant, suffers an unusual mental condition in which he is viciously virile for six months and completely impotent for the other six months of the year. This condition is a result of two traumatic events he witnessed as a child: his father (the assistant of the feudal lord) abusing his mother and fellow farmers, and severe torture and rape in prison. During the months of impotence, Yūsuf is a sweet and very attractive man who, despite having many female lovers, only truly admires his male therapist, Hārūn. In the months of virility, Yūsuf is an aggressive man who, emotionally, verbally, and sexually abuses his lovers to satisfy his need for revenge on the man who raped him in prison. His revenge is culminated by deflowering the daughter of his rapist in the garden under the latter’s window. Therefore, once more, the body is employed as a materialisation of moral and ideological commitment in which homosexuality translates corruption, castration, oppression, and moral decay. Prison and rape are the only weapons in political and personal wars. In other words, ideology is enacted throughout hostile sexual politics.

During the Iraq-Iran War, censorship and restrictions on the content of literary texts became an obstacle. Any artistic and literary production that did not directly serve war propaganda was considered unnecessary and, therefore, not published (Rohde 188). Consequently, public opinion and literary production matched the government's orientation in a unilateral hegemonic discourse. It would be unfair, however, to consider all war literature as propaganda, as is the case in literary retrospective criticism, where Iraqi authors, texts, and publications of this period are practically banned from today's book market and libraries. Combat consumed the lives of almost a million soldiers on both sides; real lives of young soldiers and their families were radically affected, and some of the artistic concern was undoubtedly real and some literary texts tried to produce different masculinities. There were works presented male characters who did not entirely fit within the hegemonic discourse of male supremacy. Rather, these were men who were tired of nationalistic political propaganda, and were subdued by a history of political persecution, wars, poverty, and sexual deprivation. Al-Rikābī's "Kitābah Amrīkīyah" (American Writing, 1981), "Ḥā'ṭ al-Banādiq" (Shotgun Wall, 1982), "al-Khayyāl" (the Cavalier, 1983), "'Ish al-Waqwāq" (Cuckoo's Nest, 1983), for instance, focus on the emotional shortcomings that war causes to the soldiers and their families. 'Abd al-Satār Nāṣir's book of short-stories *Nisā' min Maṭar* (Women of Rain, 1987) deals with marriage and sexuality from the perspective of vulnerable masculinity.

Throughout the 1990s, Iraq entered a new political conflict with the United States of America which led to the second Gulf War, genocidal economic sanctions, and the invasion of Iraq in 2003. This conflict intensified notions of traditional masculinity. Both the ultra-nationalist and anti-colonial discourse surrounding these confrontations were extremely masculine. Scholar Laura Sjoberg writes:

In wartime Iraq, the discourse of the government and the media focused on masculinity. Men were encouraged to behave in the tradition of Islamic-citizen-warrior. Terms like honour (sharaf) and manliness (rujula) were given as guidance for how people should behave during war. The government of Iraq frequently criticised the United States' apparent lack of manliness in attacking [...] Iraqi women and children, contending that the United States lacked the masculinity and chivalry to behave in a war as 'real men should'. Further, the government of Iraq baited its enemies by insulting their masculinity. Days before the ground war started, Saddam Hussein could be caught on television and radio explaining to Americans what it meant to be a real man in combat. He claimed that, in the coming war, Americans would 'be taught a lesson in manliness and real combat, and certificates of this lesson will be their blood, shed in rivers in which they will swim as floating corpses.' (136)

Such masculinist and hyper-gendered discourse was by no means unilateral. American and Western media discourse was also gendered and sexualised, a phenomenon which will be examined in the following chapter. The religious campaign imposed by the government, the censorship and political supervision of every aspect in literary and artistic production, and the lack of any source of information other than the ones authorized by the government, created a hermetically sealed semiotic space in which the notions of corporality explained above were constantly reproduced and consolidated.

The Ba'ath government, after the two Gulf Wars and the uprising in 1991, considered the country in a constant state of war and, therefore, that every aspect of public and private life was to act in accordance. The US-Iraqi conflict between 1990 and 2003 is central to the evolution of the body as a concept for the Iraqis because they lived it at the core of their physicality. On one hand, the numbers of the dead, the disappeared, and the permanently

disabled soldiers were astonishing, the Desert Storm was considered a military success as Bourque describes it:

The Iraqi Army was for the time being no longer a threat to its neighbors and back on its side of the Kuwaiti border. While difficult to estimate accurately, its combat losses were great. Between 25,000 and 50,000 Iraqi soldiers were dead; another 80,000 were prisoners; and another 150,000 had deserted or escaped from their military units. The coalition had destroyed around 3,300 Iraqi tanks; 2,100 other armoured vehicles; and 2,200 artillery tubes, leaving the Iraqi Army at about 30 percent of its prewar strength. (455)

On the other hand, the very nature of the military attacks was just as devastating, destroying the very infrastructure of the country, leaving Iraqis without basic services such as clean water, electricity, or functioning hospitals. The use of depleted uranium caused grotesque malformations among new-born children and increased the number of patients with cancer. The lack of basic medications for children and adults increased the number of deaths and aggravated the pain of diseased bodies. The economic sanctions caused a shortage in basic nutritional products, leading to problems of under-nutrition in children and adults. Ordinary Iraqi citizens lived global politics within their own bodies. Iraqis starved, suffered physical pain, illness, disability, and deformation. With no electric power it was almost impossible to see, study, conserve food, provide cool air in the summer or heat in winter. The lack of clean water caused serious problems of dehydration and infection by contaminated water. This prolonged exposure to stress made the Iraqis feel disabled even though they possessed all their bodily organs. This sense of physical disability caused by both western hegemony and

local dictatorship, which incorporated sexualised and gendered violent discourse, weighed heavily on the psychological reaction among the population.¹⁰¹

This systemic violence is physical, psychological and, most importantly cognitive. The historical sacred masculine self that was at the centre of the Iraqi personality is now facing a counter discourse of vulnerability – which is not only linguistic – dismantling that superior self. The problem concerning the body in the Iraqi collective imaginary is that historical/ethnic tradition and religious biopolitics have epistemologically constructed the body on the basis of masculine heteronormative discourse in which morality is inscribed on the body through the values of pride, virility and strength. Socially, all bodies are expected to enhance these masculine values. The texts of literary narratives in Iraq, since the formation of the state up to the late 1990s, reflected this discourse as well as potentialising a discourse of religious and social male superiority in the depiction of functional diversity and sexual politics.

Functional diversity was used as a dramatic instrument of social criticism to show a wounded or broken masculinity, victimised women, or a miserable life. The visibility of functional diversity does not provide a profound analysis of disability and the desire to surpass the difficulties in being a functionally diverse individual. On the contrary, disability in this context is a mere physical handicap and a source of stress and trauma. Characters who are functionally diverse suffer, feel inferior and are in constant need of others. The discourse concerning functional diversity shows physical disability as an impediment to happiness, intimacy, and fulfilled life; it positions physical disability in stark opposition to the full

¹⁰¹ On the mental and psychological impact of the war and sanctions on the Iraqi people, see Younis and Aswad 54–58.

bodily function which allows people to defend themselves, have intimate lives with other people, and ultimately, to be happy.

Sexual politics made bodies visible in Iraqi literature in order to stage state politics. The confusion of the political scene in Iraq was represented in the disturbed sexual relationship between the male subject, the active social agent, and the female object, lived in a subaltern world whose centrality evolves around its custodian, i.e., the one who owns the access to the female object, or the decider of such access. This makes the male body a thinking body, a body that reflects its state of mind in harmony with its sexual activity. The female body is constantly sexually active independent of its state of mind; it is always there to reflect the owner's state of mind (i.e., the husband, the lover, the rapist, or the guardian).

The mechanisms in which men and women relate to each other derive from male sexuality exclusively, since female sexuality does not imply active subjectivity. The female is an indisputable given object for the male subject to deal with. Michel Foucault writes that “in sexual behaviour there was one role that was intrinsically honourable and valorised without question: the one consisted in being active, in dominating, in penetrating, in asserting one's superiority” (*History of Sexuality*, vol. II 216). This fact becomes explicit when authors deal with the problem of rape; the focus of the narrative is on the effects of rape on the victim, but the nature of the rape act itself is supposed to be self-explanatory. In the examples examined in this chapter, rape crimes are employed in order to embody the evilness of the political opponent who destroyed poorer people's lives. In other words, the message behind rape crime narratives is that political opponents are rapists – as in the case of *al-Rajʿ al-Baʿīd* – whereas in *al-Maftūn* the good man uses rape as revenge after turning into a bad man. It is understood that rape is a sign or a symptom of evil instead of being seen as evil, that is, there is no objection to rape itself but to the system that brings it about.

This, to conclude this chapter, is how the semiotic space of Iraq operated before 2003. These coordinates in which bodies are organised constitute the mirror in which the specular image of an individual is constructed. Towards the late years of the Ba'ath era the semiosphere of the Iraqi culture was an isolated system where semiotic structures are extremely defined and consolidated owing to the lack of contact with outside inputs, and to the imposed performativity of its own semiosis. When this happens, Lotman writes, "the system gains the advantage of greater structural organisation but loses its inner reserves of indeterminacy which provide it with flexibility, heightened capacity for information and the potential for dynamic development" (*Universe of the Mind* 128). This means that even though the analysis exhibited above corresponds to the hegemonic cultural and political discourse, it constitutes the social grammar of corporeality with which bodies communicated and were understood. The depiction of both functional diversity and sexual politics reveals more than the hegemony of a normative body, the male, heteronormative body, characterised by pride, virility, and strength. It also shows the semiosis of corporeality in the status quo, the way bodies interact and mean; the way they are seen, perceived and lived.

III. Operation Feminise

The Body in The Discourse of The War on Terror

In the previous chapter, we saw the order in which bodies, their conceptualisation and representation are organised in the corposphere of Iraqi culture and literature. We have seen how they are constructed and how they operate so as to signify in a hermetically sealed semiosphere, particularly towards the last two decades before the invasion of Iraq in 2003. This chapter presents the second analytical bloc, the corposphere of the discourse of the War on Terror, by which I mean the media, cultural, military and political discourse that accompanied and supported the invasion of Iraq, and which presented war as “essential, inevitable, and having goals that are achievable and good for world peace and progress” (Khamas 51). As Mohanty, Pratt, and Riley argue, this discourse shows that “US wars continue to use gender, sexuality, race, class, nationalism, imperialism – and even invoke women’s liberation – to legitimize and continue those wars” (2). The semiosis of corporality in this sphere, I argue, strategically interrupts, and drastically alters the conceptualisation of corporality in the first sphere. The military tactics, the media and the cultural production that promoted and justified the war and invasion of Iraq created a semiotic space around the corporality of the Other, namely, Iraqi, Muslim, terrorist, target of war and invasion. The specular image of the body generated in this semiotic space conflicts with the one created in the first. The task, here, is not to look at the totality of opinions surrounding the invasion of Iraq even though this research is built on complete awareness of the magnitude of anti-war movements both in the United States and Europe. The task is rather to spot the utterances and phenomena which constitute the ‘statements’ in the archaeological sense which Foucault

defined, and which I explained in the first chapter. This way we can delimit a discourse of corporeality which can interact with the discourse of corporeality in the first bloc. Therefore, the following selection of analysed statements is based on the criterion of whether these statements interrupt or influence the semiosis in the first semiosphere.

The invasion and its socio-psychological consequences were the crucial historical events where new representations of the body in contemporary Iraqi fiction originated. These new representations come in response to both the traditional patriarchal and the imperialist colonial discourses. The effectiveness of this war depended, among other things, on political bodily praxis, incorporated in a political and cultural discourse using the traditional patriarchal image of the body as a corrective instrument by which to create a new social docile body to shape Iraqi identity, features of which are detailed further in this chapter. The phrase ‘docile body’ originates with Foucault, who writes about how the machinery of power defines “how one may have hold of other bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines” (*Discipline and Punish* 138). In this chapter, I argue that the propaganda discourse of the war on terror, in both media and fiction, have used the representation of the body as a discursive weapon to target Iraqi identity.

1. War & Media

Although the military damage of the invasion was clearly destructive, the use of language in the narratives of the war on terror had as much effective impact on the Iraqi identity as the horrors of military operations. In his seminal work, *Covering Islam* (1997), Said illustrated the role that mainstream Western media and the institutions that generate knowledge had played in determining the meaning of Islam, Muslims and the Arab worlds, reducing them

to simple, ideologically articulated concepts that serve imperial ends. In the same direction, this chapter shows how ‘covering’ Iraq, during and after the 2003 invasion, covers up, shadows, and semiotically disrupts the complex socio-cultural and political construction of corporeality. In *Imagining Iraq* (2011) Suman Gupta writes:

[...] it is obvious that the invasion of Iraq has come to be constructed as the ‘Iraq war’ generally, in mass media as much as in various kinds of retrospective accounts as in academic writing as in popular discourse. The ‘Iraq war’ is now standard shorthand for the invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003–4. (141)

This construction of war allows us to articulate an experience that differs from the reality of an invasion. To defeat or to be the victor in a war is a legitimate outcome. The outcome of war is either defeat or victory. To defeat in an invasion, on the other hand, can be interpreted as either a crime on the behalf of the invader or a victory for the resisting invaded people, if they defeat the invader. It suits the purposes of some mainstream Western media to construct the Iraq invasion as part of a just and legitimate war on terror, as it obscures and diminishes possible notions of criminality in the military operations. This construction of war is a discursive statement which will organise the scenery where bodies operate. Visibility in the wars against Iraq has been a crucial element of military strategy. As Caroline Brothers reminds us, “[i]t was in the Gulf [war] that photography’s power to deceive reached its apogee. [A]nd the arrival of ‘instant history’ as television cameras relayed the world’s first live televised war, dazzled reporters and viewers alike” (Brothers 210). The spectacular nature of the wars on Iraq breaks the chains of significations in the Iraqi semiosphere, moving corporal perceptions from the hermetically sealed private corpusphere to the world-wide televised spectacle of coercion. In the *In Frames of War* Judith Butler writes:

The operation of cameras, not only in the recording and distribution of images of torture, but as part of the very apparatus of bombing, make it clear that media representations have already become modes of military conduct. So there is no way to separate, under present historical conditions, the material reality of war from those representational regimes through which it operates and which rationalize its own operation. The perceptual realities produced through such frames do not precisely lead to war policy, and neither do such policies unilaterally create frames of perception. Perception and policy are but two modalities of the same process whereby the ontological status of a targeted population is compromised and suspended. (29)

The visibility of bodies was central in this operation of confusing material and representational realities since images of bodies materialised a reality that was intended to be imposed. As Jan Mieszkowski explains in *Watching War* (2012), the operation of cameras and visual technology are openly linked to the White House and Pentagon performances (6), and this ‘real-life’ war coverage, showing live combat videos and graphic mutilations of bodies, has played a major role in confirming to spectators who is the ‘real’ winner of this war (100–101). The visibility of bodies was not only significant in showing the ‘war’ to the world; as Roger Luckhurst explains, “soldiers were given access to pornography online in exchange for proof of being in the field, the mark of authenticity rapidly becoming traded snaps of corpses, body parts, and the ruined bodies of Iraqis” (359).

However, it is one thing to be the eye that sees the visible bodies, and it is another thing to be the seen body itself, looking at it through the other’s eye. Images of deaths, casualties, imprisoned and tortured bodies alongside the constantly juxtaposed images of ‘us’ and ‘them’ in the orientalist discourse of ‘war’ constructed a constellation of signs that deliberately altered the established conceptual body. This process of alteration of the

perception of bodies, this confusion between representations and material realities of the body implies a transfer of signs between two symbolic orders, one of which is proper of the invaded culture and its system of knowledge, and the other is the imposed discourse of the powerful. Moreover, the second is created from the latter's defects. As Butler and Susan Sontag have argued, it is vitally important to consider war footage an interpretative instrument for "framing reality", presumably from a discursively articulated gaze. Additionally, according to Teun Van Dijk:

Engaging in discourse means engaging in interpretation processes and social interaction, and a description of the cognitive and social contexts, therefore, is not a task that lies outside of discourse analysis. This does not mean that discourse analysis has as its proper task the full description of cognitive processes and social situations, which are objects of research for psychology and sociology. Rather it is interested in the systematic relationships between text and context. That is, it wants to know how cognitive processes specifically affect the production and understanding of discourse structures and how discourse structures influence and are influenced by the social situation. (30)

Thus, to understand the effectiveness of the imagery provided by media and literature, we need also to understand the social situation in which a message was produced and more importantly the social reception of media itself and its impact on society.

Under the Ba'ath government all Iraqi media institutions operated on state funds. All non-Iraqi and non-ally sources of information were banned. In 1986, the government passed a treason law which prescribed imprisonment and the death penalty to anyone who insulted the Ba'ath party leadership. 'Uday Hussein, son of Saddam Hussein, was the head of the Journalists' Union and the president of one of the only two functioning television channels.

He also headed some of the newspapers which emerged in the nineties. Satellite TV reception and broadcasting were banned. Internet access was only legal in 1999 within the use of government institutions exclusively (fanack.com: 2017).¹⁰² Iraqis, therefore, since 1979 – as explained in the previous chapter – had no source of information other than the government’s voice and communicated no message other than what the government wanted. This censorship created a unified public image of the Iraqi identity that was seen only from the government’s perspective. Even though it was an imposed image of the self, Iraqis settled for this hegemonic image at least publicly in order to fit in or not to raise suspicions.

After the invasion, Iraq witnessed an unprecedented media boom: “a dizzying array of information flooded Iraq’s airwaves” (Ricchiardi 8). Even before the restitution of security and even before the formation of a new government, private journalism flourished at such unexpected speed that, by the year 2004, there were over 200 newspapers, approximately 80 radio stations, and 20 television channels. The market for satellite dishes and reception devices for private use flourished in a matter of weeks. Most of those newspapers, radio stations and television channels were financed by either a new Iraqi political party or by pro-coalition organisations (fanack.com), all in the name of freedom of speech and the recovery from decades of censorship, ‘introducing’ Iraqi people into the democratic experience. Internet access was facilitated at accessible prices and cell phones were introduced for private use for the first time. The Iraqi household, in a matter of a few months, started to receive news, music, video clips, films, TV programmes and pornography from all over the world. In addition to the destruction caused by military operations, the lack of security that continues to this day and to political confusion, Iraqis also suffered a bombardment of information, particularly of that transmitted through images. After a decade of Ba‘ath

¹⁰² *Fanack* is an independent, online media organization committed to publishing and disseminating analysis about the Middle East and North Africa.

nationalistic and patriotic discourse about this unjust ‘war’ which the nation faced and was about to face, suddenly, news about the same war came alongside MTV video clips, romantic comedies, cooking shows, sitcoms, nude scenes, explicit violence and endless news-tickers.

Iraqi psychologist Fāris Naẓmī argues that this sudden and constant massification of the media has inhibited the ability of moral and intellectual critique in the Iraqi society (*al-Aslamah al-Sīyāsīyah* 16). That is, after years of wars, economic sanctions, and deprivation – alongside political instability and a lack of security – the media boom brought a very attractive, intriguing but sedative opportunity to escape the post-invasion reality. The media boom offered new realities by numbing the sensorial reception of the sudden and ‘excessive’ access to foreign cultures.¹⁰³ The bombardment of information made Iraqis see themselves both in the news and in the public opinion of these foreign cultures which offered different voices, different narratives, and different mirrors. The unified Iraqi self-concept that was built during years of dictatorship had now been shattered by bloody violence on the streets and cognitive violence on screens, in newspapers and in books.

2. Bodies in the War on Terror Narratives

Since the Gulf Wars, discourse surrounding war in the media, televised and written fiction and video games – as well as military practices and enacted policies against Iraq on the ground – initiated a process of depicting the Iraqi self in a demeaning manner. Such processes engaged the representation of the body through three main strategies:¹⁰⁴

1. Sexual terrorism
2. Orientalist, colonial gaze

¹⁰³ Excessive, that is, in comparison to the previous decades of censorship.

¹⁰⁴ The term ‘strategies’ is inspired by Ella Shohat’s term ‘Textual/Sexual Strategies’. See Shohat, “Gender and Culture of Empire” 679

3. Necropolitics and cognitive marginalisation.

I shall discuss each strategy in detail in the following sections of this chapter and I shall provide case studies of each in media and fiction. Representation in the discourse surrounding the war on terror created a dichotomy of bodies, a separation between those bodies which are to be rescued and those bodies to be doomed. The bodies to be rescued are of two kinds, the first being those which represent the non-white victims of terrorism. These are vulnerable bodies or, as Rachel Rosenbaum – echoing Spivak’s question – call them, subaltern: “I want to ask, “can the ‘subaltern body’ speak?” as a way to measure the silence and call forth how ideas about the worth of particular bodies as less valuable than others come to circulate through the ordering of certain violence as ‘terrorism’” (37). I subscribe to Rosenbaum’s definition of subaltern bodies as less valuable, silenced bodies, which Fanon had already described as a rational dehumanisation of black skin, and the experience of which he described in his commentary on his body: “A feeling of inferiority? No, a feeling of not existing” (Fanon 118). This ‘subaltern body’ constitutes a central figure in contemporary Iraqi fiction as we shall see in the next chapter.

The second kind of rescuable bodies concerns those who fight terrorism. These I call ‘the saviours’ bodies’; they are often represented as exceptional bodies, those which become the referent to which all other categories are made peripheral. These bodies represent the moral values of freedom, success, and dignity, advocated by pro-war politics. Finally, the bodies to be doomed are simply the terrorists’ bodies. Rosenbaum continues:

In post 9/11 contexts, Euro-American technologies of discourse have installed terrorism as distinctly different from other forms of racialized violence, such as gang crimes, many mass shootings, and police brutality [...] Terrorism here acts as a way to (re)define what whiteness and citizenship means. The meanings of whiteness in

the United States currently exclude Muslim bodies, further evidenced by the possibility of introducing “MENA” (Middle Eastern or North African) as a new category on the U.S. Census [...] The U.S. public similarly reads bodies for signs of disorder as a way to order national and moral understandings of violence and citizenship in a post-9/11 world, in this context manifesting in acts like interpreting Arab language or a woman wearing a hijab on an airplane as a threat to safety [...] 9/11 created a figure of transnational terrorism as distinctly foreign and distinctly Muslim that has come to be synonymous with the definition of terrorism itself. (39–43)

Even though the Euro-American context is witnessing today new forms of terrorism like massive shooting and government building assault by armed conservative white men, the terrorist’s body in cultural productions is still, for the most part, foreign and coloured, and is ideologically visible as different, being Muslim, or Chinese, or Russian, or south American, or even white European – such as the Irish Republican Army – as the post-Trump period has brought other ‘colours’ of danger. The saviour’s and the terrorist’s bodies are constantly othering one another and throughout this process the image of the terrorist becomes more and more dehumanised, as will be evident in the examples below. In certain examples, contemporary Iraqi fiction provides a subverted notion of dehumanisation, dehumanising instead the saviour’s body. This will be seen in the next chapter.

2.1 Sexual Terrorism

Sexual terrorism is perhaps the most effective strategy in the attack on identity. It is affected via both practical and verbal discourse in the war on terror. However, as far as this research is concerned there are no academic or journalistic opinions which directly approach the

subject of sexual terrorism within the discourse of war on terror. Academic research has provided definitions of sexual terrorism as a socio-political mechanism of male domination over female bodies. I shall adumbrate these definitions in order to show both the mechanisms of sexual terrorism and how discourse surrounding the war on terror has engaged these mechanisms. Carole Sheffield defines sexual terrorism as

[t]he system by which males frighten, and by frightening, dominate and control females. It is manifested through actual and implied violence. All females are potential victims – at any age, any time, or any place, and through a variety of means: rape, battery, incest, sexual abuse of children, sexual harassment, prostitution, and sexual slavery. The subordination of women in all other spheres of society rests on the power of men to intimidate and to punish women sexually. (171)

This definition highlights the basic concepts which pertain to this research: fear, violence, subordination, intimidation, punishment, and the investment of sexuality in all of these. It reduces, however, the practice of sexual terrorism to the domination and control of women only. Although I share Sheffield's view, I believe that the discourse of the war on terror engaged mechanisms of sexual terror on a larger scale and using a more meticulous methodology.

Ayanna Spencer defines sexual terrorism as “a culture or climate of fear of sexual violence perpetrated by men that alters/informs women's ability to freely and safely navigate the world” (22). She adds that sexual terrorism “is maintained and constituted through language at an internal psychological level. Language is not a by-product of sexual terrorism; it is a way to police and discipline women” (27). Spencer's definition adds to Sheffield's a socio-discursive dimension where not only does praxis prove violence, but language also

reinforces the hierarchy in rape culture because, through language, victims interiorise a subordinated self-conception and aggressors interiorise power.

Nerea Barjola provides an even more Foucauldian approach and describes sexual terrorism as a disciplinary strategy. She writes that it is “a corporeal politico-sexist technology. The discipline of sexual terror is precisely a punitive measure that society will implement through stories about the sexual danger” (30).¹⁰⁵ According to Barjola’s definition and to Foucault’s views on discipline, sexual terrorism is a mechanism within the microphysics of power that creates docile bodies and, hence, docile selves. My principal objection to these scholars’ definitions is that they universalise an understanding of patriarchy in which they reduce and dichotomise sexual terrorism to male-dominance and female-subjugation, reflecting only one aspect of the multifarious dynamics in a society. The definition I offer of sexual terrorism, however, extends to an epistemic violence which implies a sexual investment that operates by feminising the attacked subjects physically and/or verbally in order to intimidate, punish and subjugate them. Sexual harassment and rape constitute sexual terrorism regardless of the victim’s sex or gender identity because feminisation as a method of punishment or intimidation reinforces the patriarchal values of gender hierarchy. Both violence and discrimination against the LGBTQI community constitute sexual terrorism since both are motivated by the sexual orientation and gender identity of the victim. Non-consensual sexual humiliation, whether verbal or physical, constitutes sexual terrorism as it uses sexuality in demeaning the other. Feminising assertive masculinity in the traditional patriarchal sense for the ends of humiliation and thus subjugation is also sexual terrorism as it breaks chains of signification and inverts the

¹⁰⁵ In the original text Barjola uses the term ‘politico-sexista’. Although I am aware that ‘politico-sexist’ is unfamiliar in English, I maintain it to mean a corporeal technology that enacts discrimination on two levels: ideological and sexual: “*la disciplina del terror sexual*: una tecnología corporal político-sexista. La disciplina del terror sexual es, precisamente, una medida punitiva que la sociedad implementará a través de los relatos sobre el peligro sexual.”

position of the signifiers of gender codes. Accordingly, sexual terrorism is the use of the other's sexuality to subordinate them. Sexual terrorism is not sex-based; it is, rather, a holding of one's sexuality against them, a strategy used in conflict by agents of power in order to dominate.

I argue, then, that war-on-terror discourse has proved sexual terrorism a strategic tactic prior to, during, and after the invasion of Iraq. During the second Gulf War, both American and Iraqi media depicted the conflict in gendered paradigms where aggression/defence is (hyper-) masculinised and the victim/enemy is feminised (Sjoberg 135). Just like the classic story of Europa's abduction, in the narrative of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Shaykh al-Şabāḥ described it as an act of rape; from his viewpoint, Iraq is the masculine rapist and Kuwait is the feminine victim. The US, by contrast, is the noble male defender (Sjoberg 135). Steve Niva suggests that the Gulf war was a competition between two masculinities within superior-subordinate dynamics: "the contrast between the tough but tender and technologically sophisticated Western man and the hypermacho Arab villain from an inferior civilisation owes its considerable pedigree to the discourse of Western superiority that Edward Said called Orientalism" (qtd. in Sjoberg 119). Laura Sjoberg adds:

The American story of the Gulf War was not simply of American maleness, but of (masculine) America's ability to save (feminine) Kuwait – the strong, powerful (manly) state(s) defend(s) the powerless, defenceless, and innocent (feminine) state from the aggression of the mean (hypermasculine) state which has attacked it. In international dialogue about the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, there was very little discussion of the possibility that Iraq may have had some legitimate grievance with Kuwait, even if invasion was inappropriate way to redress such grievance. (119)

This passage may sound simplistic if this version of the story of the Gulf war is not juxtaposed with the Iraqi government's version of the same story. As in the Iran war, Iraq presents itself as the noble man defending his female, honourable land and fighting for its legitimate rights against the emasculated evil enemy, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Considering the significance of masculine values to the confirmation of the Iraqi self and to Hussein's discourse, gendering war discourse by the opponent offers an effective strategy by which to escalate tension and the motivation for war, since the conflict becomes a matter of self-reaffirmation and of proving power between two 'representative' heteronormative masculinities.¹⁰⁶ Gendering war discourse, then, means challenging or questioning the opponent's masculinity. America's manly power to save female Kuwait was confirmed by the superior strength of its technological sophistication. Iraq did not have military capacities to face the coalition forces and, therefore, was unable to defend its honourable manhood and protect its female land and oil. Iraq had no option other than taking 'the death road' in order to prove its manly values.¹⁰⁷ I hereby suggest that the possibility of gendering war discourse is a premeditated mechanism by which to induce the Iraqi government to fight.

Throughout the 1990s and after the 2003 invasion, the American media frequently adopted the demeaning analogy of sexual intercourse in the discourse of war (Sjoberg 138). Adult TV cartoon *South Park* depicted Saddam Hussein as Satan's homosexual boyfriend, and the fact that his face was not a cartoon drawing but rather a cut-and-paste of an actual

¹⁰⁶ The use of the word representative highlights the fact that it is so only for that ideological ruling class. I do not claim these masculinities to be representative of either Iraqi or American societies. Rather, I suggest that these governments considered themselves to be representative of their population.

¹⁰⁷ I am using the expression 'death road' as a play on words by which to suggest that, to Hussein, the decision to invade Kuwait was taking the 'high road' but in fact it only led to the 'Highway of Death' where more than a thousand Iraqi soldiers were killed.

picture of Hussein's face is highly significant as it consolidates a ridiculed image of the real person. Judith Gardiner observes:

Unlike every other character in the film, including presiding President Clinton, Saddam has a photographic rather than a cartoon face: this is unequivocally the historical figure Saddam Hussein, former ruler of Iraq, and he is exoticized and racialized in both Third World and U.S. terms: when courting Satan, he dances surrounded by veiled Arabian beauties, but he also breakdances in African American style. (55)

Moreover, the film *South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut* was repeatedly shown to Saddam Hussein during his captivity (Irvine 2009), presumably as a method of torture. Beyond ridiculing an enemy and a dictator like Hussein, the joke is offensive on every possible level: first, he is made homosexual, which *to him* is the greatest attack on his masculinity; and second, it shows that colour and homosexuality are objects of ridicule, mockery and evil; then, he is made Satan's boyfriend, and Satan represents Allah's first enemy. As a devout Muslim – as Hussein considered himself to be – being Satan's boyfriend is the greatest of insults, as it means being ally to Allah's enemy and committing the second great sin in orthodox Islam, homosexuality. This sexual and ideological humiliation was used, then, to “corroborate United States’ [classical conservative, white male, heteronormative] militarism” (Gardiner 55).

Furthermore, Thomas Friedman refers to Saddam as Sodom in his article *Sodom Hussein's Iraq*, in which he compared the Iraqi people to the people of Sodom when he cited, Stephen P. Cohen:

It's really an Abraham-like situation, when God told Abraham he would not destroy Sodom if he could find just 10 good men there. Are there 10 Iraqi refuseniks who

dare to say, ‘Enough is enough,’ and will whisper to Blix the truth? Is there one?’
(qtd. in Friedman).

Not only does he say that Saddam Hussein is a sinner and a vicious dictator but he also insinuates that the Iraqi people themselves enjoy being sodomised by a vicious sinful dictator, which shows the author’s homophobic attitude towards the ‘other’, the population of Iraq. Laura Sjoberg lists more examples of sexual analogies within the discourse surrounding the wars on Iraq:

In discussing the possibility of overthrowing the Saddam Hussein regime, the US discussed its frustration that it had “penetrated” Saddam Hussein’s “inner sanctum” [...] the United States “sexed up” its claims; to “sex up” means to make more tantalizing or exciting [...] In response to Iraq’s perceived participation in terrorism, country singer Toby Keith wrote a song that was the top selling single in the US in 2002. It threatened to “put a boot up your ass, it’s the American way” [...] a former member of a UN inspection team has made a living telling sordid (and obviously false) sex stories about Iraqi punishments for weapons inspectors [...]. (138)

The term ‘sexed up’ was also used by British media to refer to the ‘dodgy dossier’ which the British Prime Minister Tony Blair presented to the security council in February 2003. The Blair administration was accused of manipulating figures, exaggerating the threat from Iraq.¹⁰⁸ ‘Sexed up’ in this case meant to make war and invasion appealing to the international community in order to persuade them of the justification for going ‘into’ Iraq.

The examples mentioned so far reveal the phallogentric ‘statements’ articulated within the discourse of the war on terror.¹⁰⁹ These statements are especially offensive to the strict

¹⁰⁸ For the full BBC report, see Gilligan 2003. For the full Gillian resignation statement, see Gilligan 2004.

¹⁰⁹ ‘Statements’ in the Foucauldian sense, that is.

heteronormative masculinity framework in Iraqi political identity as they feminise a masculinity which, by its nature, is constantly reaffirming itself by, among other things, suppressing femininity, which is considered by most Iraqi families to be of the utmost privacy and intimacy. It is the repressed self of the society, as discussed in the previous chapter. Feminising the dominant masculine scandalises Iraqis who believe in traditional values because it implies the uncovering of the utmost repressed intimacy. Femininity, in this sense, becomes the Freudian uncanny for the Iraqi self. Publicly ridiculing and questioning a sexuality that is socially considered superior and righteous is a transgression against the basic structures which preserve identity, and is a mechanism by which to induce fear and shock. Such practice constitutes sexual terrorism since it uses sexual fears in order to subordinate the other.

Homeland: Iraq Year Zero (2015) is a documentary which shows in detail the life of an Iraqi family a few weeks before and after the invasion.¹¹⁰ In the post-invasion section, members of the family express their fears concerning the future of the country under the presence of the American troops. One of these fears is pronounced by an eleven-year-old boy. He is concerned about the presence of the Americans: “people say, they [the Americans] have specific binoculars that allow them to see people naked” (part II, min.: 10:57). Even if only a rumour, this statement nevertheless shows the fear of intimacy being uncovered by Americans and of forced nakedness. Different family members express their fears concerning a phenomenon that began during the first two weeks after the invasion, the abduction of women who were later either found raped and murdered, or who were never heard of again. A Human Rights Watch report shows that sexual violence and the abduction of women and girls was becoming a major problem in post- ‘war’ Iraq. The report shows

¹¹⁰ Directed by ‘Abbās Fāḍil.

there were twenty-five credible cases of sexual violence and abduction only between May 27th and June 20th of 2003, that is, a few weeks after the invasion. I myself recall that the frequency of female abduction news lasted until October of the same year. The report shows that in some of the cases, girls were abducted by organised criminal groups. Such groups abducted young and old females, forcing them subsequently into prostitution, sex-slavery, and erotic dancing for male audiences who would pay to watch, have sex, or both. The report also confirms that sexual violence and the abduction of women and girls had a great impact on Iraqi families, promoting a fear which made women and girls reluctant to leave their homes:

Throughout the city, Iraqis talk of women and girls being seized from public locations, particularly while walking down the street, even in broad daylight. Out of the thirty or so women and girls Human Rights Watch interviewed in Baghdad, virtually everyone cited fear of abduction and sexual violence as justification for not returning to or looking for work, holding children back from school, and in many cases, preventing young women and girls from leaving the house. In late May, women and girls were rarely seen outside in Baghdad, even during daylight hours when male shoppers and workers crowded the sidewalks and streets. Although by the end of June women formed more of a public presence, they continued to tell Human Rights Watch that they limited their movements and remained afraid. Because of the real or perceived prevalence of such attacks, women and girls clearly believe they are more vulnerable than they were before the war. (Human Rights Watch 8)

The report also shows that many victims were reluctant to file complaints for cultural reasons, such as discrimination and physical violence by the victim's own family, being

forced to marry the perpetrator or being a victim of honour-killing. Although rape and abduction are considered crimes under Iraqi law, nevertheless the cultural stigma and shame are attached to the victim more than they are attached to the rapist (Human Rights Watch 1).

The controversy surrounding rape in Iraqi society is never concerned with the victim's well-being: rather, it is about the shame that rape brings on others, such as the victim's family and society. For traditional Iraqi families, rape means forcibly violating the intimacy and the privacy of a man's honour. Whether the perpetrator is punished or not, the victim – like Munīrah, whom we saw in the previous chapter – becomes a worthless being in the public estimation if the news of her rape becomes public. Being violated shows a sexual transgression against not only the victim but also, and arguably most importantly, the dominant masculinity. This means that, in post-invasion Iraq, organised female abduction and rape took on an especially terrifying aspect not only for women, but also and especially for those men who were vulnerable to insecure circumstances. If any female member of his household was abducted and/or raped, he would be at a loss as to how to defend his honour. Sexual violence against women targets male pride and morale as well as subjugating women because it entails having one's women subjugated by an outsider, which in turn implies the males' incapacity to overcome the basic task of proving his manhood, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Another example of sexual terrorism is the detention of female family members by US troops in order to put pressure on suspects. This act directly implies the almost certain possibility of female detainees undergoing physical violation, torture, abuse, and rape – especially after Abu Ghraib. In fact, the news from Abu Ghraib in May 2004 makes for the most significant case of sexual terror – as well as the other two narrative strategies – in the discourse of the war on terror. The news that arrived from Abu Ghraib went out to the Iraqi people, showing images of physical abuse and torture performed by US soldiers against Iraqi

male prisoners. The bodies in these images illustrate the axis that sustains the news because, from these bodies, meaning is still inferred, and interpretations are still being made.

Furthermore, in effect, these images represent the field where the ultimate fear of feminisation comes into language. The debate surrounding Abu Ghraib has been laid out in three different frameworks: mass media presented Abu Ghraib as a scandal and a failure of the US administration to handle the issues after the supposed liberation of Iraq in 2003. Investigative journalism and academic scholarship saw it as a regular military procedure of executed by an orientalist and colonial scheme, insisting that there is nothing scandalous or exceptional about it other than the reinforcement of American exceptionalism. An example of this perspective is offered by the contributions of Jasbir Puar, who argues that the torture at Abu Ghraib instrumentalises the bodies of the heteronormative Iraqi sexuality as they mirror US citizens being “sexually exceptional”. Puar argues:

The ‘sexual torture scandal’ at Abu Ghraib, the US military prison in Baghdad, is an instructive example of the interplay between exception and exceptionalism whereby the deferred death of one population recedes as securitization and valorization of the life of another population triumphs in its shadow. This double deployment of exception and exceptionalism works to turn the negative valence of torture into the positive register of the valorization of (American) life; that is, torture in the name of the maximization and optimalization of life. (Puar, “Feminists and Queers” 47)

Days after the publication of the Abu Ghraib pictures, the Bush administration detached itself from the incident, arguing that they were individual crimes that do not represent “the *nature* of the American people”.¹¹¹ This detachment increased the distance between the spectator

111 This is discussed in Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* 80; and in Žižek, ‘What Rumsfeld Doesn't Know That He Knows About Abu Ghraib’.

and the photographed bodies and at the same time connected them within a hierarchical structure. Isis Nusair argues that “[t]he act of taking a picture automatically implies distancing the self from its objectified other, and the process of reproducing these orchestrated images marked and recorded these representations of absolute and essential *difference from and domination over* those others” (185). Clearly the pictures materialise the assemblages of contrasted bodies and present the segregation of bodies between those to be protected (dominating, smiling, dressed and protected; I find the use of rubber gloves particularly exemplary) and those to be doomed (grotesque, mocked and ridiculed, violated and sexualised, racialised and subjugated). A question arises here: was Abu Ghraib necessary to racialise and subjugate nations in the US imperialist project of invading Iraq? Were the second Gulf war and the genocidal economic embargo not enough to dismantle the nation-state? Can Abu Ghraib be subscribed under what Hannah Arendt termed the banality of evil, the “failure to think” (xiv), or to see the tragic absurdness of it? Was it in fact a collection of individual crimes that did not represent the spirit and the intentions for which the war was waged? If so, one must admit that the Abu Ghraib case was an instance of racism resulting from an evil system of thought abusing its position in power, and that the war actors must take action. If not, one must reconstruct the account and offer another interpretation of what happened at Abu Ghraib.

A third party within scholarship interprets Abu Ghraib as a premeditated political tactic designed in order to create a security apparatus. Seymour Hersh, in a series of articles on the case of Abu Ghraib, has shown how the sexual humiliation of Iraqis was already discussed among pro-war conservatives in Washington months before the invasion:

The government consultant said that there may have been a serious goal, in the beginning, behind the sexual humiliation and the posed photographs. It was thought

that some prisoners would do anything—including spying on their associates—to avoid dissemination of the shameful photos to family and friends. The government consultant said, “I was told that the purpose of the photographs was to create an army of informants, people you could insert back in the population.” The idea was that they would be motivated by fear of exposure, and gather information about pending insurgency action, the consultant said. If so, it wasn’t effective; the insurgency continued to grow (Hersh).

Steven C. Caton’s and Bernardo Zacka’s article ‘Abu Ghraib, the Security Apparatus, and the Performativity of Power’ suggests that the apparatus of security in Abu Ghraib lay in the photographs rather than in torture itself:

The intent of the indexicality here is far from documentation; although the viewer is to assume that the victim was being tortured, in fact something else was happening: The scene was staged for the camera. It is not as if a play were going on, a make believe of torture, that was then documented or recorded by the camera, but, rather, the scene was enacted specifically to be photographed. The photograph iconically performs the torture, and we would argue it is of an ontologically different status from the other Abu Ghraib photographs,¹¹² which were intended as documents and incidentally performed abuses as a by-product of their representation (208).

Such interpretations indicate that capturing pain is not as visually spectacular as sexual humiliation in ‘a society of spectacle’, in which, as Sontag writes, “each situation has to be turned into a spectacle to be real – that is, interesting – to us” (*Regarding the Pain of Others* 97).

112 The authors are referring to the famous Abu Ghraib photograph in which a hooded person is standing on a box, simulating a crucifix with electric wires hanging from him.

Caroline Brothers informs us that “[m]eaning inheres not in the photograph itself, but in the relationship between the photograph and the matrix of culturally specific beliefs and assumptions to which it refers” (23). Taking into account the Iraqi context in the previous twenty years prior to the invasion – the religious background which established hostility towards the body, Iraq’s severe political and cultural censorship, the various atrocities from the two Gulf Wars, hundreds of thousands of war prisoners, a severe economic embargo, mass graves, depleted uranium, etc. – one can see how sexual humiliation arguably makes a more visually spectacular choice for staging torture – if it were staged – than the exposure to the images of death, disability or malformation. On staging torture for the Abu Ghraib photographs, Slavoj Žižek writes that

the main complication is the contrast between the “standard” way prisoners were tortured in Saddam's regime and how they were tortured under U.S. occupation. Under Saddam, the accent was on direct infliction of pain, while the American soldiers focused on psychological humiliation. Further, recording the humiliation with a camera, with the perpetrators included in the picture, their faces stupidly smiling beside the twisted naked bodies of the prisoners, was an integral part of the process, in stark contrast with the secrecy of the Saddam tortures. The very positions and costumes of the prisoners suggest a theatrical staging, a kind of tableau vivant, which brings to mind American performance art, “theatre of cruelty,” the photos of Mapplethorpe or the unnerving scenes in David Lynch's films. (“What Rumsfeld Doesn’t Know”)

The insistence on the act of recording more than on that of torture here is intended to evidence the hypothesis that, if the scene was set for the camera, then there is of course a discernible – indeed, obvious – purpose in taking the photographs.

This raises a question: for whom were the Abu Ghraib photographs made? According to Roland Barthes, a photograph has three basic elements: The Operator (the photographer), the Spectator (us, the picture's audience), and the Spectrum (the photographed object). Barthes explains that he chose the word 'Spectrum' for the photographed object because it shares its root with the word 'Spectacle', a word which points us to the purpose behind taking the photograph in the first place (Barthes 9). As far as the spectrum is concerned, US soldiers' and Iraqi prisoners' bodies constitute the Spectrum. *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008) – an Errol Morris documentary which investigates the case of Abu Ghraib by interviewing the US Military Police Officers (hereafter 'MPs') who appear in the pictures – shows soldiers confess to taking the photographs. There were more than three digital cameras that belonged to three different MPs for different reasons. Sabrina Harman, sergeant MP, who appeared in most pictures smiling and pointing thumbs up, said she took the pictures to document what was going on so that she could report it once she was back from duty. The rest of the soldiers testified that Charles Graner, specialist MP – who appeared in most pictures with rubber gloves on – took most of the pictures, saved them on his laptop and distributed them to anyone who wanted a copy of them. When soldiers were asked *why* Graner took the pictures, they said they did not know. In this instance, then, the Operator and the Spectrum are ostensibly the same. The question remains, however, who was meant to see Abu Ghraib, or, more accurately, who the US soldiers were posing for. Possible Spectators could include the soldiers' superiors, soldiers' families and friends, fellow American soldiers, or perhaps even terrorists. If Hersh's hypothesis was true, that the pictures were necessary to recruit informants, this raises the problem of how the photographs came to be leaked, assuming that the leak was not part of the plan.

Susan Sontag compared the photographs of Abu Ghraib to two incidents: the first of these is the example from World War II in which German soldiers took snapshots of

executioners among their victims in Poland and Russia. The second incident focuses on one photograph in which an American grins beneath a naked, mutilated body of a black person who hangs behind him from a tree. Sontag writes: “The lynching photographs were souvenirs of a collective action whose participants felt perfectly justified in what they had done. So are the pictures from Abu Ghraib [...] The pictures taken by American soldiers in Abu Ghraib, however, reflect a shift in the use made of pictures -- less objects to be saved than messages to be disseminated, circulated” (“Regarding the Torture of Others”). If the photographs do constitute a message to be disseminated and circulated, then the question is posed again, of whom they are for. In order to answer this question, I should highlight first that, as far as this research is concerned, an extremely limited number of studies on the case of Abu Ghraib have explored the position of the Iraqi spectators. This omission seems almost to say that the case of Abu Ghraib was meant to target Western societies, as if the whole war-on-terror discourse had only Western citizens as recipients. Where do the Iraqi people fit into the Abu Ghraib equation? Most of the studies on Abu Ghraib, both in English and in Arabic, address Western societies. What about the impact of Abu Ghraib on the rest of us? How are Iraqi people, who have never been to Abu Ghraib, addressed? What is the impact of Abu Ghraib on Iraqi spectators?

In *On Photography* (1971), Sontag writes that “[b]y disclosing the thingness of human beings, the humanness of things, photography transforms reality into tautology”. This is why “photographs do not explain, they acknowledge” (Sontag 111). For an Iraqi eye, who outlived the Ba‘ath era, the pictures reiterate the shock of a broken totem: the pride invested in manhood. The circulation of these photographs disseminates a new corpo-reality in which the masculine body, the body that was so celebrated, and that Saddam Hussein filled the entire public space with, is now made public with a different signification. “In the form of photographic images, things and events are put to new uses, assigned new meanings, which

go beyond the distinctions between the beautiful and the ugly, the true and the false, the useful and the useless, good taste and bad” (Sontag, *On Photography* 174). The leakage of the Abu Ghraib pictures is similar to Hussein’s strategy of imposing his image on the public space: both reflect an ideological image of the nation. It is as if the prisoners at Abu Ghraib and their families suddenly became the whole population of Iraq, which in turn makes the Iraqi spectator part of the picture, just as Saddam Hussein wanted the image of the unbreakable patriarch to be the image of his people. So, was that the message behind the broken totem?

In discussing Abu Ghraib and the ethics of photography, Judith Butler writes that

it appears that the US soldiers exploit the Muslim Prohibition against nudity, homosexuality, and masturbation *in order to tear down the cultural fabric that keeps the integrity of these people intact* [...] The scene of torture that includes coerced homosexual acts, and seeks to decimate personhood through that coercion, *presumes that for both torturer and tortured, homosexuality represents the destruction of one’s being* (*Frames of War* 89 – 90, emphasis added).

With that said, and going back to Sontag’s observation that the photographs functioned as a message to be disseminated, torture at Abu Ghraib, I argue, did not target inmates, but rather the interstices of Iraqi society itself. The operation of Abu Ghraib aims at the symbolic disfiguration of the proud, patriarchal image, which leads then to the collapse of the semiotic space in which the national identity is configured. In order to understand how Abu Ghraib operates, we must look at it as an Iraqi microcosm in which the bodies of the Iraqi prisoners – who were, for the most part, randomly and collectively taken off the streets (*Standard Operating Procedure*, min.: 19:46) – became representative of the Iraqi people, since “the body informs the torture, but the torture also forms the body. That is, the performative force

of torture not only produces an object but also proliferates that which it names” (Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* 87). Torture in this case is not defined as merely the infliction of pain on the prisoner’s body: it is also the infliction of humiliation, shaming, a crushing of the pride invested in the masculine body. The mocking of the stripped male bodies, the pointing at their genitals, the simulated masturbation and simulated homosexual acts, place Iraqi masculinity in the reversed position of its gender hierarchy; instead of being the only active agent, as discussed in Chapter II, it became a penetrable, passive object which belongs to the penetrating active subject, that is, it became feminised.

Puar writes that

it is precisely feminizing [...] and the consequent insistence on mutually exclusive positions of masculine and feminine, that strips the tortured male body of its national-normative sexuality. This feminizing divests the male body of its virility and thus compromises its power not only to penetrate and reproduce its own nation (our women), but to contaminate the other’s nation (their women) as well. (*Terrorist Assemblages* 99)

These practices constitute sexual terror, in which the sexuality of Arab and Muslim bodies is invested in the dynamics of domination and subjugation. The attack on the national-normative sexuality is an attack on the national-normative authority, which held together the social integrity of the Iraqi people. Feminizing the heteronormative masculine authority fragmented the national conceptualisation of the body; and, consequently, the integral notion of selfhood was fragmented. Moreover, the picture of the man on the leash who is clearly exposing his genitals, for instance, does not show how the Iraqi prisoner was mistreated or looked at by American soldiers in prison. It rather shows how invasion actors want the Iraqi

subject – prisoner or spectator – to look at himself. On the psychic and psychoanalytic powers of photography, Laura Mulvey claims that the image

triggers the spectator's stream of consciousness into an internal verbal interpretation.

[...] To decipher, the spectator must also 'read' *mise en scène*. [...] images do not represent the world but reveal symptoms of material repressed in the unconscious or ideology. [...] They materialise cultural worlds, redolent of myth and social fantasy, that are opened up for the spectator's curiosity and desire. (*Visual and Other Pleasures* 140–1)

Once the Iraqi spectator juxtaposes such images with the specular image of his body sustained by its semiosphere, the chains of signification around their body will collapse. This cognitive violence comes alongside the discourse of freedom, victory and liberation pronounced by the supposed liberators and the emergent political groups, not to mention physical, usually armed, violence and necropolitics. The contradiction between the discourse of liberation and the violent practices of necropolitics and sexual terrorism has a cognitive reaction similar to recognising one's image reflected in two different broken mirrors; the optical illusion creates a deep sense of distortion. The same discourse that brings freedom, victory and liberation threatens established values, reduces mobility and dismantles the structures of national identity.

2.2 The Orientalist Gaze

It is no news that the discourse of surrounding war on terror engaged a colonialist rhetoric of white, condescending authority in order to justify invading countries accused of financing or protecting terrorism. A large body of literature in postcolonial studies has examined the war on Iraq and analysed its colonialist mission. The colonial gaze by its nature constitutes a metanarrative that constantly reproduces binary divisions which define the coloniser by

their difference to the colonised and *vice versa*: “‘good versus evil’ and ‘us against them’” (Nusair 179). Most of the narratives within the discourse of the war on terror prior to and after the US invasion of Iraq construct an image that not only depicts Muslims and Arabs – Iraqis in particular – as terrorists and primitive people: it also presents them as a dehumanised, depraved species. In the allegations of detainee abuse at Abu Ghraib a sergeant MP testified as follows: “After working at the prison for so long, the dogs came not to like Iraqi detainees. They [the dogs] did not like the Iraqi culture, smell, sound, skin-tone, hair colour or anything about them” (AR15-6 2005). Such testimony categorically dehumanises Iraqi prisoners and indicates a positionality on behalf of the speaker that looks to animals and other humans as inferior beings. The fact that the MP sergeant did not explicitly offer his own opinion but rather expressed the attitudes of the prison dogs distances the speaker from the detainee and puts the dogs and the detainees on the same level. The fact that the speaker refers to the dogs’ feelings and not to those of the detainees shows an empathy which prefers the dogs to the detainees, who – in the context of this testimony – have become a third, strange party, i.e., neither dog nor human. The speaker is not merely saying: ‘even dogs do not like Iraqis’; he is also saying that Iraqis are the kind of animals that even animals do not like. This testimony does not trouble itself with the question of how dogs can like or dislike a culture. In addition, traditionally, although it is changing in the past few years, dogs are considered impure animals in Islam.¹¹³ Therefore, by giving equal prominence to the prison dog’s opinion as well as to that of to sergeant MP him or herself on Iraqis and Iraqi culture, smell, sound, skin tone and hair colour, the speaker is establishing a cultural confrontation in which his culture is supposedly on the righteous side of this confrontation, and in which the other culture is dangerous.

¹¹³ For more about dogs and other animals in Islam, see Waldau and Patton 149–179.

Eman Khamas claims that there is a cultural discourse of war on terror which she defines as

essentially neo-colonialist, and the identity of the Oriental Other remains derogatorily stereotyped, inferiorly positioned and appositionally situated vis-à-vis the West. A new essential trait added to the orientalist clichés of inferiority, exoticism, eroticism and inertia and so forth is that the neo-Oriental is [someone or something] *dangerously psychopathic*, who threatens the lives and cultures of the civilized people, because he/she is essentially sick, culturally and psychologically disturbed, suffering from an acute inferior complex and schizophrenia [...] The authoritative Western knower practices epistemic violence, mutes the victims, confiscates their voices, distorts their images when he/she assumes a role model and presumes that he/she knows what is best for the Others. (373–374)

Accordingly, imagery and representations constitute the scenery before which this epistemic violence is made visible. Nicholas Mirzoeff reminds us that targeting prisoners' sexuality is "acting out a centuries-old pattern of latent Orientalism" (180). Such a pattern is enacted, as Said showed, since "medieval Christianity held Mohammed responsible for "lechery, debauchery, sodomy, and a whole battery of assorted treacheries" (qtd. in Mirzoeff 180), an image which somewhat continues to perpetuate itself in the present day.

Thus, bodily images, body representations and body politics – and particularly sexual politics – are at the heart of the discourse of the war on terror and through them we can articulate the orientalist colonial gaze. Within this frame of representations, the saviour creates the image of those bodies to be *rescued* as weak, primitive and hypersexual, and of

those ‘*to-be-rescued-from*’ as dehumanised, violent and sexually perverse.¹¹⁴ I hereby provide three examples to show this triangulation of bodies and how they interact in the cultural discourse of the war on terror. The juxtaposition of these bodies creates an epistemic image of the Arab/Muslim body in which the qualities ‘Arab’ and ‘Muslim’ are used interchangeably. This itself also serves to offer a justification for violence and hatred towards inferior bodies. It is this same juxtaposition, furthermore, that contemporary Iraqi fiction aims to subvert, as analysed in the next chapter.

2.3 Necropolitics & cognitive marginalisation

Another discursive strategy used by the discourse of the war on terror is explained by Mbembé’s idea of Necropolitics: “Sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die” (11). The orientalist and colonial discourse of the war on terror creates, through media and art, an image of Arabs and/or Muslims being violent, regressive, against progress and of being psychologically disturbed, whilst at the same time eliminating the possibility of perceiving them as non-violent, healthy, and potentially happy individuals. Logically, if the ‘evil Other’ imagery is constantly reproduced, then the chances of that Other being good are minimised and, therefore, combating it can come to appear justified. If knowledge of ‘the evil Other’ is repeatedly consolidated, ‘the good Other’ (i.e., the good Iraqi) remains unknown. I call this process of excluding the good Other, ‘cognitive marginalisation’. The more this discourse is reproduced, the less probable it is for Arabs and Muslims to be deemed worthy of living. Cognitive marginalisation is, therefore, a discursive mechanism of which use is made by

¹¹⁴ I use the term ‘rescue’ in the sense of ‘colonial rescue’ posited by Shahnaz Khan and Eman Khamas, who claim that the discourse of the war on terror in Afghanistan and Iraq respectively re-enacts a colonial rescue of Afghan and Iraqi women. Mohanty, Pratt, and Riley also use the same term (4). Lila Abu-Lughod thoroughly challenges this narrative of rescue in her book *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (2013).

necropolitics. It constitutes the exclusion of certain realities from being acknowledged in order to achieve a political interest, that is, to narrate one side of history as if other sides to the same history do not exist. The following examples of media and fiction provide a testimony on how even non-propagandistic literature justifies the war on terror by cognitively marginalising the good Other.

3. Three Examples

This section shows examples of three categories: TV series, fiction and video games. These examples have aroused great interest in the spheres of mainstream media, literary criticism, and on social media. I also refer to some films and film adaptations but do not study them as a separate genre because there are already two visual examples, TV series and video games. The selection of these examples was made based on Stahl's observation:

During the 2003 invasion of Iraq in particular, opportunities abounded for the citizen to play the "interactive war," which appeared across a range of fields, from military recruiting to journalism to consumerist practices. This interactive mode modified the usual narrative filters to promote first-person fantasies of war. [...] At its core, however, this new orientation toward war is a symbolic shift, described by dominant narratives of war, ways of imagining war, and the integration of the experience of war with established entertainment genres. (*Militainment, Inc.* 3)

By citizens, Stahl most probably means American citizens and citizens who are not living in war zones, as this interactive mode becomes hardly relevant if one is already under such fire

as bombs, arbitrary shootings and raids, among other military operations.¹¹⁵ This interactive mode is, nevertheless, significant because it, firstly, transforms the war from being a spectacle of violence that citizens can watch into an act in which they now participate. Secondly, it does not merely participate in influencing the citizen's relationship with the soldier, as Stahl argues: it also participates in what Viet Thanh Nguyen calls "an industry of memory" which "includes the material and ideological forces that determine how and why memories are produced and circulated, and who has access to, and control of, the memory industries. Certain kinds of memories and remembering are possible because an industry of memory depends on, and creates 'structures of feelings'" (107). Stahl examines the invasion of Iraq within the cultural phenomenon of "militainment", which he defines as encompassing two aspects: the "'writing' of the citizen's relationship to war" [and] "the symbolic construction of military activity. This includes the dominant generic alignments, narratives, images, and language choices that not only paint a picture of a state of violence but also work to articulate the citizen subject within it" (15). While Stahl is interested in the gradual yet immediate effect of militainment, Nguyen foresees the long-term and more profound impact of the depiction and integration of the experience of war. "Countries with massive war machines not only inflict more damage on weaker countries, they also justify that damage to the world. How America remembers this war and memory is to some extent how the world remembers it" (Nguyen 108).

Thus, the examples discussed here are samples of these massive entertainment genres which show "[t]he intensification of the relationship between the Pentagon and the entertainment industries" (Stahl, *Militainment, Inc.* 3), as such samples embrace and sustain the discourse of the war on terror, in addition to shaping the memory of the war and invasion

¹¹⁵ Long reports and chronicles such as *Fiasco* (2006), *The Assassins' Gate* (2005), *Blackwater* (2007), and *Crónicas de Iraq* (2006) contain detailed records of these operations using the testimonies of Iraqi citizens as well as those of American soldiers and officials.

for those who did not live it. On the other hand, if psychoanalysis has taught us anything, it is that the fantasies and symbolic shifts which Stahl refers to, do not operate in straightforward ways: “Fantasy usually remains unconscious; it is separate, it does not arrive at the message, at the Other’s signified [...]. The object in fantasy is the alterity – image and pathos – by which an other takes the place of what the subject is deprived of symbolically” (Lacan, *Desire and Its Interpretation* 309–312). This means that it is not enough to look at war propaganda as an archive where ‘statements’ as ultimate units and functions of discourse can be found. This is especially true when, as Stahl argues, the consumption of militainment culture has fluctuated throughout the invasion and occupation of Iraq, and the decline in the consumption “may have simply been a result of fatigue rather than a critical reassessment” (142). Therefore, some of the texts discussed here are close to being war propaganda, such as John Updike’s *Terrorist* and video games. Others – such as veterans’ fiction, *Homeland* and *Saturday* – appear to be, and are known to be, critical of the institutions of war, yet they still engage in the discursive strategies I have explained above, which means that, even when being anti-war or at least being critical of war leaders, the representation of the Other remains demeaning and reifying. This paradox is what this chapter tries to highlight, and what further studies should challenge; it is not enough to say that propaganda is merely colonial, warmongering lies: it is also important to challenge the kind of memory produced by the war machine.

The following analysis by no means suggests that this is the totality of the discourse surrounding the invasion of Iraq. It is rather an attempt to frame the discourse in favour of the war in an industry of memory as seen and read by a witness of the invasion. The discourse framed here participates in the constitution of the semiosphere of the discourse of the war on terror which clashes with the semiosphere described in the previous chapter.

3.1 *Homeland*

The television series *Homeland* (2011–2020) is a show which has been well-received, and which has won many prestigious awards, such as the Peabody in 2012, and the 69th and the 70th Golden Globe Awards in 2012 and 2013. Former United States president, Barak Obama – who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009, and announced the withdrawal of the American troops from Iraq in 2011– claimed himself to be a ‘big fan of the show’ (Massad), which increased the show’s popularity and complicated its interpretation in terms of racism and Orientalism – as Massad’s article shows. It was and still is viewed by millions of people around the world and has generated a lively debate on Orientalism and Islamophobia. These supposedly received active resistance within the same show as, in the fifth season, there was graffiti in the background of certain scenes reading in Arabic ‘*Homeland* is racist’.¹¹⁶ *Homeland*, which is an adaptation of Israeli TV series *Hatufim, Prisoners of War* (2010), subscribes to Jack Shaheen’s list of *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (2001), in its reinforcement of the orientalist and imperialist stereotypes, “in particular those that dehumanize and injure innocent people” (16). Its approach to representation, however, challenges the rhetoric of ‘saving the barbarians’, by showing that the war on terror was exclusively a reaction to 9/11, and that the only motivation for war was to defend the American nation from future terrorist attacks, not to save the barbarians. The series specifically shows that the leaders of the war did not care at all about the culture or the freedom of the oppressed and what they really cared about was how to protect their own children and country.

In contrast to the ‘man-against-man’ rhetoric and the sodomite analogies used in the second Gulf War and the 2003 invasion, *Homeland* instrumentalises the representation of the

¹¹⁶ For further details on the controversy, see Claire Phipps’s article in *The Guardian*: <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2015/oct/15/homeland-is-racist-artists-subversive-graffiti-tv-show>.

body and, most importantly, sexuality in camouflaging orientalist and colonial discourse. It shows that the war on terror was a woman's war and, more specifically, a white, blonde, bipolar woman's war against patriarchal stereotypes and mental illness. Carrie Mathison is a CIA agent diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Other than the foregrounded opinion that the representation of mental and bodily health in this series "become battlegrounds for the series' overarching questions about state surveillance and citizenship" (Bevan 145), I believe that mental illness in this particular case becomes a metaphor for the supposedly unseen confusion and difficulty in making decisions suffered by 'war heroes'. The discourse of the war on terror is often reluctant to admit mistakes, let alone war crimes; such incidents are usually blamed on isolated, individual criminality as in the case of Abu Ghraib, or on mental illness, as in the cases of multiple shootings performed by white non-foreign individuals.¹¹⁷ Carrie's mental condition, I argue, is invested in the media's operation of creating narratives that divert the blame from war offenders by rationalising a justification for why such offences were committed. Those not familiar with the series can read the summary below.¹¹⁸

James Castonguay explains that "*Homeland* opens up the theoretical possibility for subversive meanings through its brief explicit criticisms of US politics and policies, yet these meanings are outweighed by these contexts of reception and *Homeland's* representation of

¹¹⁷ See Duxbury, Frizzell and Lindsay's article, which shows how "[r]eferences to shooters' mental health enable media narratives that redirect blame from White shooters by framing them as sympathetic characters" (791).

¹¹⁸ The series opens with Carrie on a mission in Iraq, where she learns from her asset that an American soldier has been converted to Islam and has become an al-Qaeda member. A few years later, an American marine, Sergeant Nicolas Brody – who had been reported missing with his partner, a black marine named Tom Walker, during their service in Iraq – is now rescued from Syria where he was kept hostage to al-Qaeda leader Abu-Nazir. Although Brody is received as a war hero by the government and his family, Carrie suspects that he is a converted and radicalised soldier and that he may be planning a terrorist attack. Being denied the authorisation to investigate, she begins a programme of unauthorised surveillance and telephone bugging on Brody and his family. Brody narrates a story in which he and Tom were taken hostage by al-Qaeda, who severely tortured the two marines. After several days of pain and starvation, Brody was compelled to kill Tom. Under the impression that Brody himself was dead, Brody's wife had begun a relationship with Brody's own best friend, Mike Faber, who had also been a marine serving in Iraq. Unlike Brody, Faber had returned from war safe and sound. The series shows that, as Carrie had suspected, Brody had in fact converted to Islam and was attempting to carry out terrorist attacks in the US under the orders of al-Qaeda leader Abu-Nazir. Carrie, however, manages to dissuade him from his course of action.

the ubiquitous Muslim enemy” (144). These ‘subversive meanings’ and ‘explicit criticism of US policies’ can arguably be seen in the way Carrie is treated by her superiors, and how “US discourses of surveillance [apply] to other women in *Homeland* as well as Carrie” (Bevan 150). Nevertheless, the criticism of superiors and war leaders – no matter how far back it goes into the history of writing about war – does not imply a positive representation of the Other. From the very first episode, the Muslim, the coloured and the Arab body (or body language) become symptoms and evidence of perversion, primitiveness or even monstrosity. Being a suspect of terrorism, Brody’s bodily praxis is considered informative of what might he be up to. For instance, the CIA detects a certain movement that Brody performs with his fingers (S1–E1, min. 50:37). Carrie suspects that he is sending a coded message. Also, in S1–E1, minute 29:33, during the first intimate encounter between Brody and his wife, Jessica, which they unknowingly conduct under Carrie’s secret watch, Jessica sees Brody shirtless for the first time and she is shocked by the scars of torture which cover his body. At first, her eyes tear up out of shock and compassion whilst she mouths: “What *they* did to you?”¹¹⁹ Then, she begins passionately to kiss him and to embrace him as if she were trying to compensate these scars with signs of passionate love. Gradually, Brody gets aroused, and his lovemaking becomes violent and painful for Jessica – and for Carrie to watch. In another incident, Jessica comes into the bedroom to sleep and finds Brody laying on the floor in a foetal position with a pillow under his head, which has been their sleeping arrangement since the violent sex incident. She approaches him in a very conciliatory and patient voice, telling him that, during the eight years of his absence, a lot has happened, about which they need to talk, so, whenever he is ready, she is too. She gently caresses and kisses him and tells him that she wishes to try having sex again. She amorously kisses him

¹¹⁹ Emphasis added as the use of pronouns ‘we’ vs. ‘they’ and ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ throughout the series is relevant to the analysis.

and tries to take his shirt off, but he refuses and orders her to take hers off. At first, Jessica is surprised but she takes it off at Brody's insistence: "please, take it off." Brody puts his hand in his pyjama pants and Jessica offers to assist him with his erection: "Let me ...", to which Brody coldly says: "No, it is better if you don't" (S1-E3, min.: 30:45). Then, he masturbates in front of her. Jessica and Carrie – the latter watching and listening from her home – get very uncomfortable. Jessica, in the future, will refer to these frustrating incidents disparagingly, saying: "you can't even fuck your wife" (S1-E4, min.: 38:10).

What we learn about Brody is that not only did *they* (al-Qaeda) severely torture *him* – as his memories and the scars on his body show – but *they* also twisted *his* sexual appetite in such a way that he is no longer able to "fuck [his] wife", who, according to Dana's friend (i.e., Brody's teenage daughter's friend), clearly "has got this whole MILF thing going" (S1-E3, min.: 07:30). The viewer is automatically introduced to a set of perspectives which are constantly juxtaposed: the first is that of the 'normal', perfect family, represented by a 'MILF',¹²⁰ a war hero and their children – a school athlete and girl with a mind of her own. The second is of a strange, twisted, and possessive male figure who is clearly traumatised and who experiences difficulty in adapting back into what used to be his normal life. Brody's stigmatized sexuality is at the same time contrasted with that of a wealthy Arab prince, who is presented as virile both by showing him having intercourse with a prostitute he usually visits – while organizing a transaction to finance a terrorist group – and by his ruthlessly killing her when he realises that she is a CIA asset (S1 – E3). There is, on the one hand, the depiction of Muslims as castrating maniacs since '*they*' emasculate and twist '*our*' men's sexuality, and '*they*' 'fuck' then kill '*our*' women, who are attempting to help fight terrorism. This image of castrating maniacs is materialised in the representation of Farid, the Arab

¹²⁰ A popular acronym that stands for 'Mother I'd Like to Fuck', used to describe, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "A sexually attractive older woman, typically one who has children".

prince; Abu Nazir, al-Qaeda leader in Syria; and in Haqqani, an Afghani terrorist. These three figures are useful examples of how *Homeland* represents Muslim males: violent, perverse and deviant; obsessed with pornography, Sodomy, rape, and prostitution. Even those who collaborate with the CIA, and those who are well educated in the scientific and cultural domain are suspects of terrorism and perverted conduct.

On the other hand, rejection or loss of sexual appetite for the hypersexualised mother figure is a symptom of Brody's deviance: his conversion to Islam and his becoming a terrorist have turned him against the normal ideal, represented in Jessica. Not only have *they* emasculated *our* men, *they* have also deprived *our* people – represented in Jessica and her children – of their rightful pleasure. Although the show might appear, superficially, to be simplistic in its staging of an opposition between good guys and bad guys, throughout the series there is a recurrent and overt fixation on how *they* want to jeopardize *our* sex life. This fixation is materialised in scenes such as the one where Haqqani, an Afghani terrorist, is shown engaging in sexual intercourse with his wife in front of his hostage Saul Berenson, the Middle East division chief at the CIA, and Carrie's boss (S4 – E7, min.:34:38).

It is also present in the numerous insinuations of homoerotic attachment between Brody and his jailer Abu Nazir, where, it is imagined, the "charming" Abu Nazir has bewitched Brody with his virile teachings and love for his son Issa, which is how he has manipulated Brody into converting to Islam and into carrying out terrorist attacks in the U.S. Brody confesses to Carrie: "I loved that man" (S1–E7, min.: 48:48). In S2, E10, Abu Nazir refers to this homoerotic insinuation, speaking to Carrie, who is now his hostage, as follows: "so *you* love him *too*?" (min.: 27:09). He then adds: "Sometimes, when you are *breaking a man*, an emotional transference takes place. For me, with Nicholas it was quite powerful, it

was a really a *kind of love*” (min. 27:21, emphasis added).¹²¹ This scene synthesises the discussion which I posit in this section: the breaking of manhood throughout the series seems to be a key issue in the relationship between the three prototypical bodies mentioned above: the saviour, the rescuable and the terrorist. For Abu Nazir, from the way he pronounces the speech above, breaking a man is, as it were, just something he does. The expression “sometimes” in the first sentence explains this: the phrase “sometimes an emotional transfer takes place” leaves the question of precisely when this might happen unanswered. Abu Nazir routinely breaks men and, only sometimes, an emotional transfer takes place. This means that part of being a terrorist is the deliberate breaking of the victim’s manhood. In the case of Brody, the breaking of his manhood is represented in the way he has expressed this *trauma*. He sits for hours in a corner in the house, not being able “even [to] fuck his wife” and loving his torturer.

For Carrie, the saviour, Brody’s broken manhood represents the ultimate danger. She understands that, by breaking his manhood, Abu Nazir can manipulate and control Brody, leading him to perform terrorist attacks against the US government – which he would have carried out if it weren’t for Carrie’s love, which turns him back into a patriot. This representation, apart from being deeply Islamophobic, is a classic generalisation on behalf of the western discourse of the war on terror and, to a certain extent, as put in the words of Leo Braudy, a shared belief among scholars who believe that

[i]n such societies, the seamless identification of the warrior image with general masculinity thus preserves a sense of male uniqueness, as does polygamous marriage and the requirement that women show virtually nothing of their bodies or faces. The result is an overcompensation familiar in warrior societies, where the combined fear

¹²¹ Nicholas is Nicholas Brody.

of women (as weakeners of male sexuality) and disdain for them (as representing the softer virtues of domestic life) results in the need for a sexual subordination that re-establishes male honour at the top of the ladder of being. (548)

Braudy is discussing Islamic fundamentalism as personified by al-Qaeda. In the chapter 'Parting Words: Terrorism as a Gender War', he equates the idea of a fundamentalist society with that of a warrior society, where the emphasis on fighting is "about masculine tribal self-esteem" (546). The cited passage shows a genuine belief that the West sees Muslim men are violent by nature. The identification that Braudy refers to implies a deep conviction that to be a man is to be ready to fight, that is – according to what he says – that violence and sexuality are linked at the heart of the Muslim personality. In other words, the characterisation of Abu Nazir and the passage above imply that, on the one hand, Muslims connect sexuality with violence and violence with sex and that, on the other hand, to be a man is to be male. Being a male means being dominant and, therefore, to defeat such enemy, one needs to defeat their masculine self-esteem, i.e., to feminise them. In the series, it is not clear whether Brody's trauma is caused by being exposed to war and torture or by his broken manhood, as all of these symptoms disappear after Brody starts a romance with Carrie. In this way Carrie uses her sexuality to 'wash off' Abu Nazir's sexual effect of her soldier and by having intercourse with him, she is giving Brody the sexual subordination he needs in order to re-establish his honour and restore his broken manhood, making him a man again so that he can fight again.

The overly generalised belief that Muslims and Arabs – or men in general – see themselves as symbolically aligned with the penis in a heteronormative existence returns us to the question of why Abu Ghraib was thought to be effective, as the sexual humiliation of male its bodies represented the loss of their masculine quality, thereby stigmatising the whole construction of manhood, consequent to which a national sense of self could be made to fall

apart. It similarly evokes centuries of orientalising representations of Middle Eastern male sexuality which were systematically created by colonial artistic production. In his book, *The Homoerotics of Orientalism* (2015), Joseph A. Boone suggests that

the ghostly presence of something ‘like’ male homoeroticism [...] haunts many Western men’s fantasies and fears of Middle Eastern sexuality. While the association of foreignness with exoticism and perversity is a phenomenon common to most cultures, the phantasmic intensity in which Western imaginations have associated the Muslim world with male homoeroticism is noteworthy. (xx)

Consequently, no Arab or Muslim male character in the series presents a sexuality which is not stigmatised. One is either a homosexual,¹²² like the Saudi diplomat who collaborates with the CIA to protect his reputation (S1–E8), or he is a castrating maniac, like Abu Nazir and Haqqani. He may also be a porn or prostitute addict, like Farid (S1–E2 & 3), or a corrupt politician, like the Iraqi MP who uses sex to get the CIA to protect him and the public money he has stolen (S5–E7). Also, one may be sexually manipulated, like the virgin, whose first sexual encounter is with Carrie Mathison, CIA station chief, who decides to sleep with him to get information about his uncle, Haqqani, a terrorist group leader (S4–E4). All these men and women use their sexuality as an instrument of war and aim at the enemy’s sexuality in order to disarm them, just like the publication of the Abu Ghraib pictures aimed at male sexuality in order to disarm a civil society.

Homeland’s orientalist gaze is not limited to Muslim or Arab male sexuality; throughout the series, Muslim female sexuality is equally misrepresented. All female Muslim characters are sexually silenced except for one. They all wear the hijab and all of them, except for one, willingly collaborate with the CIA. Fara Shirazi, for instance, is the

¹²² I do not believe that homosexuality is a stigma, I am saying it is presented in the series as if it were a stigma for Muslims.

only veiled character who has lines. She helps the CIA to decode intelligence on Iranian spies whose entities finance terrorist groups. She helps the CIA in exchange for protecting her and her sick father from terrorists. She is a valuable member of Carrie's team and yet she was sacrificed by the CIA, who let Haqqani murder her instead of the American President (S4–E10). Throughout season five, Fara is eroticised by her appearance in the sexual fantasies of Carrie's associate, Max (S6–E9, min.: 25:20), who has been silently in love with her. The show presents, then, a veiled, hyper-sexualised, and intelligent female character who is presented as the “good savage”, being an innocent Muslim victim, whose body is to be rescued but in the end is sacrificed. All veiled Muslim female characters in *Homeland* are like Fara in the sense that they are invariably depicted as quiet, motherly figures who are trying to keep their families safe and who choose to help Carrie because, like them, she is a woman trying to protect her family.

On the other hand, the only unveiled Muslim and Arab woman is journalist and Oxford graduate, Roya Hammad, a descendant from a wealthy Palestinian family, who has lost land during the occupation. Roya is a successful journalist; she is tall, with straight, long, black hair; she always wears a suit jacket and pant along with light make-up, unlike all the other Muslim female characters. However, this character, who appears to be a strong and independent woman, is demonised throughout season two. Roya is Abu Nazir's messenger to Brody when he becomes a Senator. Roya helps Abu Nazir out of spite, hate, and vindictiveness. When the CIA catch her for spying and helping terrorists, she turns into a psychotic, demonised figure who shouts unintelligible things, supposedly in Arabic (S2–E10). This shows that, for *Homeland*, Muslim women are of two kinds: the exotic collaborator in need of protection, and the vindictive psychotic. It is curious to note that the latter is the more educated and successful woman of the two.

The series' season four poster expresses its tone strikingly:



FIGURE 1 HOMELAND SEASON 4,
POSTER RETRIEVED FROM WWW.IMDB.COM

The poster instantly evokes the story of Little Red Riding Hood, Carrie here being the young girl – symbolising relative innocence and hope – and “carrying” the food supplies or cookies – in other words, good things – in order to help the weak and sick woman get better and stronger. But first Carrie must deal with the big bad wolf first. As in the different versions of the story, the wolf is not interested in the sick woman in bed as, even if he were to devour her, he would still wait for the younger flesh. Consequently, the sick woman is silenced either by either being locked up in a closet, or by being devoured. Similarly, the red colour evokes the dresses of the handmaids in *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) where, despite being of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, June, the survivor – in the television adaptation (2017 – 2021) – is also a white American female. The poster shows the faceless and voiceless Muslim women, locked up in their dark veils, a darkness which evokes the presence of its imposer. Amidst this army of faceless women stands Carrie, challengingly embracing her difference by showing her face, her blond hair, and her red scarf. Mariam Karim explains:

The campaign's poster draws on the implications of 'third world' vs. 'first world' difference through its use of colour and juxtaposition. Presented in deep black, the burqa-clad women are all standing facing forward while Claire Danes looks back and gazes resistively straight at the audience in her bright red scarf and peeking blond hair. By separating Carrie from her imagined Muslim female counterparts, the poster presents a strong contrast that isolates and labels one party as privileged and the other as voiceless, oppressed and in need of outside intervention. Similarly, the teaser also reinforces such distinction of privilege through the dramatic visual portrayal of Carrie's act of unveiling. *Homeland's* insertion of the non-Muslim character Carrie Mathison in conflated Muslim spaces illustrates a striking colonial framework that subjugates Muslim women's imaged bodies for the glorification of Carrie's Western efforts of feminist-based resistance. (Karim)

Homeland offers a classic case of orientalist discourse that essentialises Otherness in the veiled-women figure. However, a different class of Otherness is generated when Carrie appears veiled in this poster and in many scenes throughout the series with a different scarf and hair colour. Carrie's otherness is not only a privileged otherness, as Karim suggests above. It is also a justified and accepted otherness since this veiling is assumed to be done for a good cause, that is, the cause of rescuing Muslim women from the reason for the imposition of the veil, the terrorist. The iconography of the poster establishes the hierarchy in which bodies relate to each other as their difference in colour, shape, fabric, and style distinguish not only cultural difference but power unbalance, because Carrie's veil here allows her to produce a subjectivity *vis-à-vis* the other veiled women by looking the same but different. As Meyda Yeğenoğlu explains, the veil creates an exteriority that enables the subject, the European subject, "to produce himself *vis-à-vis* another while simultaneously erasing the very process of this production" (Yeğenoğlu 41). That is, even though all women

in the poster are veiled, there is a hierarchy in the representation that reflects a hierarchy of worthiness of the body, placing Carrie's body, the saviour's body at the top, and the rest of the veiled women's bodies – those to be rescued – second. The terrorists' – those to be doomed, whether male or female – remain at the bottom.

In her book, *Colonial Fantasies* (1998), Meyda Yeğenoğlu examines the “sexualised nature of Orientalism” (2) which lies in the very structure of the colonial and orientalist discourse, where “Otherness is achieved simultaneously through sexual as well as cultural modes of differentiation [...] In addressing questions of sexual difference, it needs to be recognised that fantasy and desire, as unconscious processes, play a fundamental role in the colonial relation that is established with the colonized” (Yeğenoğlu 2). Abu Ghraib and the discourse of rescue clearly show how these processes are articulated: their logic results in the feminisation of the Other. Yeğenoğlu suggests that the veil is a colonial fantasy underpinned by structures of unconscious desire. Colonial discourse in *Homeland* instrumentalises the representation of silent, veiled women who stand for the passive female Other longing for the active masculine Other to rescue them, that is, to penetrate through the veil that makes them invisible. It also demonises and frames male sexuality as perversion, as unnatural and monstrous in order to veil its humanity and unveil it at the same time. *Homeland* and the other examples in the following sections show a fixation on the idea that Muslim males are obsessed with the Other's sexuality. They are not obsessed with female sexuality but instead are preoccupied with its male counterpart – and are particularly obsessed with castrating the Other. My argument is that, in the discourse of the war on terror in *Homeland*, the desire to castrate the Other functions as the Muslim man's veil. That is, in harmony with Yeğenoğlu's idea of the unconscious desire to veil the oriental through sexual difference, the Muslim man's veil is his fear – or envy – of the Other's ‘healthy’ sexuality and that is why he needs to castrate the Other.

According to Yeğenoğlu's views, the unconscious processes of fantasy and desire establish sexual differences in colonial discourse. Dylan Evans defines fantasy as "a defence which veils castration. [...] Lacan recognises the power of the image in fantasy, he insists that this is due not to any intrinsic quality of the image itself but to the place which it occupies in a symbolic structure; the fantasy is always 'an image set to work in a signifying structure' (E, 272)"¹²³ (61). Fantasy in the discourse of the war on terror entails symbolically veiling male and female Others through their corporeality. The female Other is veiled in her representation of the rescuable subject wearing the Islamic veil, and the male Other is veiled in the representation of his monstrous sexuality, envious of the Other's 'normal' sexuality. In his fantasy, the saviour needs the envious gaze of the Other, as he, the sovereign, unveils the veiled Other.

Yeğenoğlu adds:

The look that filters through the tiny orifice of the veil is the statement of the absent and invisible other and this statement can be translated, to borrow a formulation from Bhabha, into: "as even now you look/but you never see me." In other words, the invisible other speaks from its absent location. The counter gaze of the other should be located in this absent-presence, in this space of the in-between. It is the veil which enables the Oriental other to look without being seen. This not only disturbs the desire of the Western/colonial subject to fix cultural and sexual difference, but also enables the colonial other to turn itself into a surveillant gaze. It is in this space of absent-presence that there emerges the challenge of the "invisible," "hidden" other. (63)

¹²³ E in the cited dictionary refers to Lacan's *Écrits. A Selection*, Trans. Alan Sheridan, London: Tavistock Publications, 1977.

Yeğenoğlu's analysis shows that what is at stake here is the gaze of the colonial Other. The colonial subject, the one looked at from behind the veil, fantasises about being the object of the gaze, yet at the same time his desire is to be looked at as he sees himself: becoming the surveillant eye enables the colonial subject to access and reproduce knowledge, which I believe is the ultimate desire in any discourse of dominance, as it determines the view of the gaze of that which is behind the veil.

Additionally, with regard to cognitive marginalisation, alienation takes place also in the use of spoken Arabic. None of *Homeland*'s cast speaks good Arabic: even characters who are supposed to be Arabs or who are supposed to know Arabic mumble unintelligible sounds, assuming that they sound Arabic. According to www.statista.com in 2019,¹²⁴ there are 315 million native speakers of Arabic, and none of them is adequately represented in the series. This misrepresentation also takes place in other television and cinematographic productions: scenes that are supposed to take place in Middle Eastern Arab cities are filmed in Eastern European cities, as in *Homeland*, or in Moroccan villages as in the film adaptation of *The Yellow Birds*, in which 'Iraqi' characters openly speak the Moroccan dialect. As the film was recorded in Morocco, where the world's largest film studio is located, one cannot help but wonder whether it was cheaper for the producers to use Moroccan actors who spoke Moroccan dialect, or whether they were unaware of the complexity of spoken Arabic. In both cases, not only do the decision makers (un)intentionally choose inaccurate locations and the wrong spoken languages, but they also prove themselves to be indifferent about the audience's knowledge and reaction. It is as if they either disregard the possibility that Arab viewers might watch these productions, or they in fact want them to see themselves misrepresented in these stories. Either way, the deliberate misrepresentation of the language

¹²⁴ Information retrieved on March 28, 2019.

alienates and dehumanises its speakers, as it shadows and confuses their identity and the geography of their existence.

3.2 Fiction

In *Imagining Iraq* (2011) Suman Gupta writes that “in literature the invasion of Iraq has been unquestioningly constructed as ‘war’ (i.e., implicitly as a more or less equitable military engagement between opposed alignments), largely by drawing upon a tradition of war literature” (141). Gupta focuses only on literature – poetry, theatre and fiction – that is written in English by British and American authors. He adds that there is more difference between ‘war’ and ‘invasion’ than a mere confusion of terminology:

‘war’ suggests a predominantly military engagement and involves highlighting military operations, while ‘invasion’ suggests that the integrity of civil domain has been disrupted. Designating the invasion as ‘war’ shows preference for confining attention to the military aspects and having the reassurance of regulatory principles to refer to. Contemplation of ‘invasion’ is more disturbing, blurred, unregulated, intractable. Preferring ‘war’ is a matter of rhetorical management or rhetorical choice (141).

In other words, presenting invasion as ‘war’ means addressing the military reality out of the very many realities which are affected within the war on terror. Following Gupta, then, the term ‘fiction of the Iraq invasion’ is precise for two reasons, namely because, on the one hand, it was a military invasion, and, on the other hand, because it was also a semiotic invasion, since the political and cultural discourse that accompanied the invasion interrupted the chains of signification established within the Iraqi semiosphere. Gupta sees that the fiction of the Iraq invasion can be divided formally into genre fiction – mainly thrillers – and

literary fiction or ‘novels of ideas’ (167). For this analysis the fiction of the Iraq invasion is either pro- ‘war’ or anti- ‘war’ fiction.

Nevertheless, regardless of its political positioning, the fiction of the invasion shares similar characteristics and engages the same discursive strategies when it comes to the representation of the Other. War in invasion fiction is a sexual challenge in which the loser, that is, the Other or the terrorist, is a pervert, a castrating freak, a bitter, miserable and violent being who cannot or does not know how to enjoy sex. The winner, being the saviour, on the other hand, is ‘straight’: he not only enjoys sex but also understands its mechanisms, and he is aware of the Other’s sexual envy and resentment. This analysis is focused on four samples of fiction written in English about the Iraq invasion. Two of them, Ian McEwan’s *Saturday* (2005) and John Updike’s *Terrorist* (2006), are written by award-winning authors whose names are guaranteed bestsellers in the book market, and both were published after the invasion. The other two are Kevin Power’s *The Yellow Birds* (2012) and Phil Klay’s *Redeployment* (2014), both written by veterans who served in Iraq. Both of these works received a wide, positive critical reception: *Redeployment* was a National Book Award winner, and *The Yellow Birds* was a finalist. These two pairings of books came out in two different but equally significant periods in the history of Iraq. The first pair of books were published while Iraq was still under military occupation and on the verge of the outrageous sectarian violence that the invasion unmistakably provoked. The other two were published during the time of ISIL’s peak fame. Finally, all four texts received a massive media response, being acknowledged for being representative of their genre. The texts show a subtle and straightforward engagement of the mechanisms and strategies of the war on terror discourse, described earlier in this chapter.

Similar to other Ian McEwan works, which “transmute into metafiction of masculinity, confronting and ironically reframing the repertoire of symbolic gestures and

narrative tropes through which tales of masculinity and male agency are told” (Knights 122), *Saturday* tells a story set within a realm of privileged masculinity in a post-9/11 context. The novel narrates a day in the life of a white, middle-aged, wealthy, British neurosurgeon, who excels in practically everything: in intelligence, in humanity, in love, in respect for women, in fatherhood, and in rationalism. All of these are manifested on that one Saturday, his day off, while touring around the city of London running his errands: his squash game, visiting his mother – who has dementia – at a nursing home, buying groceries for dinner, cooking for his family and enjoying a family dinner at home with his beloved wife and kids. That Saturday, however, is an unusual one; it is February 15th 2003 – the day on which massive protests were staged around the world against the Iraq invasion.¹²⁵ Critics have spotted the legacy of Modernism in the novel, comparing it to *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) in the sense that it echoes its structure and raises questions at the turn of a new century where cultural, social and political views are in movement after a singular, cataclysmic incident: in the case of *Mrs. Dalloway* this is World War I and, in *Saturday*, it is the rise of terrorism.¹²⁶ Although *Saturday* majestically questions Western material rationalism, which is represented in Perowne and his mistaken sense of superiority, it maintains the othering mechanisms proper to the discourse of the war on terror.

¹²⁵ For those unfamiliar with the text, that dawn, Henry Perowne is so anxious he gets out of his bed at three in the morning, as if his body has had a presentiment of an unusual day ahead. His day works out as planned, except for a couple of incidents which he finally overcomes. The first of these incidents involves the sight of a strange plane in the London skies; this alters the sense of security in its inevitable evocation of 9/11. After this, Perowne experiences a minor car accident with Baxter, the terrorist. Here Perowne humiliates Baxter, even though he is aware of the latter’s medical condition. After that, Perowne has a discussion with his daughter, Daisy, about the Iraq invasion, whether it is right to invade or not. Then, the final incident, the attack on his household by Baxter, who punches the grandfather and forces Daisy to strip naked in front of her family under the threat of a knife. The point – one of the points – seems to be that the terror threat that has been flying overhead in the London skies has finally come from within. A British man terrorises a British family because he is humiliated.

¹²⁶ For comparative studies on Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* and McEwan’s *Saturday*, see Starck, Hirota, and Adams.

The novel's temporal setting, the day on which anti-war movements and people around the world are protesting the invasion of Iraq, is juxtaposed with Perowne's thoughts about the invasion and about the Arabs. While he is in his car, he sees a group of veiled women passing and the narrator describes them as "three figures in black burkhas [...] huddle together on the pavement [...] They turn his stomach" (124). Perowne gets so uncomfortable at the sight of them that his muscles tense up and he thinks to himself: "How dismal, that anyone should be obliged to walk around so entirely obliterated." (124). His disgusted look at these three 'black columns', arguing about what might be an address, makes him think they are looking for a doctor's clinic: "They are sisters perhaps bringing their mother to her last chance." (124). McEwan's brilliant capacity to condense a history of inherited colonial othering and to represent it in a few lines is source of fascination. Not only can McEwan make us see a western perception of the veiled woman as repulsive, disoriented, and desperate: he also makes us see how a certain class of Western man, a man of science sees himself as the ultimate desire of this woman. Perowne's assumption that these women are looking for a doctor for a 'last chance' is based on a genuine belief that his sovereignty comes from his deep knowledge of science, and that – as a doctor – makes him the possessor of what is desirable, the knowledge of the human body, health, wellbeing and sex. Only he, a doctor, or a doctor like himself – armed with unattainable Western scientific knowledge – can offer this 'last chance' to the tottering oriental black figure. This is a reading that can confirm Yeğenoğlu's theory of colonial fantasies. Unfortunately, this excellent embodiment of the colonial which McEwan presents to us is not refuted by any counter-discourse within the novel other than that of Daisy, Perowne's daughter. We comprehend the critique of Perowne's masculinist, materialist and rational thinking, but nevertheless the figure of the veiled woman is here once more instrumentalised in an ideological conflict. In other words, McEwan uses the veiled women figure to expose the colonial legacy behind the war on terror

and Western supremacy discourses but, at the end of the day, he – despite his intentions – consolidates it.

On another occasion, we see Perowne describing a patient of his, who is an Iraqi professor:

Miri Taleb is in his late sixties, a man of a slight, almost girlish build, with a nervous laugh, a whinnying giggle that could have something to do with his time in prison. [F]or a man approaching his seventieth birthday, Taleb has an unusual appearance—a childlike smooth skin and long eyelashes, and a carefully groomed black moustache—surely dyed (61).

Miri is an unusual name in Iraq; Taleb on the other hand is common. Considering the discussion of masculinity in Iraq in the previous chapter, and of in-prison torture in this one, this paragraph particularly stands out: it implies that, to Perowne, torture in prison is feminising and that the extra care for the moustache is an overcompensation for that wounded masculinity. As in *Homeland*, it shows the Arabs – who tortured Miri in prison – as castration freaks: to win they need to break their victim's manhood. What Abu Nazir does to Nicolas Brody, so Hussein's jailers do to Miri Taleb. The scars on Taleb's buttocks (63) rather than any other part of his body suggest that the torture targeted his Iraqi manhood more than his political positioning. Nevertheless, the reader gets to hear the Iraqi professor's voice:

it's only terror that holds the nation together, the whole system runs on fear, and no one knows how to stop it. Now the Americans are coming, perhaps for bad reasons. But Saddam and the Ba'athists will go. And then, my doctor friend, I will buy you a meal in a good Iraqi restaurant in London (63).

Although these words come from a character with a PhD in Ancient History, it seems that the doctor is unaware of the history of Iraq, which calls for no such optimism. *Fiasco* (2007)

can show how uninformed such optimism is. Nevertheless, what matters here is that these are the only two scenes in the novel in which an Arab or Muslim character can be seen: three ridiculed, veiled women and a girlishly built, seventy-year-old man who is happy about the Americans removing Saddam, even if for the wrong reasons. Strangely enough, everything around Perowne confirms that the invasion should happen, except for his daughter and her grandfather (Perowne's father-in-law) who represent the European left, the poets and the visionaries, who are presented as the real victims and the only saviours.

In another incident in the novel "*Perowne, dressed for combat on court, imagines himself as Saddam*, surveying the crowd with satisfaction from some Baghdad ministry balcony: the good-hearted electorate of Western democracies will never allow their governments to attack his country. But he's wrong" (60). The only combat Perowne can dress for is a squash game. For his amusement, Perowne imagines himself as the villain, as the one who would break his victim's manhood to secure his own. It is hard to tell who is being ridiculed in this scene: Perowne whose manhood is secured on a squash court, imagining himself as Saddam, or Saddam whose sense of manhood is so childish it could be secured in a game of squash. In both cases Saddam – as opposed to the sovereign West, represented in Perowne – is the reference for stigmatised masculinity.

Elizabeth Kowaleski Wallace argues that "what disturbs this novel is less an anxiety about personal safety in a world of destabilized politics and more a psychological condition that sociologist Paul Gilroy, in a recent, provocative monograph, has called "postcolonial melancholia"' (466), a condition which Gilroy articulates to describe how

the life of England "has been dominated by an inability even to face, never mind actually mourn, the profound change in circumstances and moods that actually followed the end of empire and consequent loss of imperial prestige." Thus, postcolonial melancholy describes the "shock and anxiety that followed from the

loss of any sense that the national collective was bound by a coherent and distinctive culture”. (466)¹²⁷

Wallace sustains her argument on the observation that, through Henry’s life style and stream of consciousness, “*Saturday* is mostly devoid of London’s vibrant multicultural scene, the ongoing legacy of an empire whose demise has been much lamented” (465), and that “[o]n the rare occasions when *Saturday* acknowledges London’s multiethnic inhabitants, it reads the men as intruders on, and monopolizers of, public space (148), and the women as victims of oppression (124)” (467). This melancholy and the endorsement of the discourse of the war on terror of Henry’s behalf become more evident in the long argument Henry has with his daughter, Daisy (192 – 198), where Perowne not only firmly argues why ‘Western affectation’ should be imposed on others (197), but also expresses his outrage against anti-war demonstrators, calling them the ‘iPod generation’ and reducing them to prioritising “ecstasy clubbing and cheap flights and reality TV” (197). Perhaps part of Perowne’s anger and anxiety comes from the fact that younger generations do not see war with the same romanticising lenses through which military operations were depicted, as in the narratives of the ‘Great War’ for instance, which may also explain Daisy’s remark on older generations being generally in favour of the invasion (196).

The end of the novel is highly significant. The unity and reconciliation in the family who together defeat terrorism represents a reconciliation between material rationalism and empiricism; scientific discourse and the humanities; and the political right and left. All of these fall into a harmony of love and life. In the end, scientific knowledge wins over ignorance, as do goodness and beauty over terrorism – even if that implies unethical practice at times because “[h]ere is a chance to turn one country around. Plant a seed. See if it

¹²⁷ Kowaleski cites Gilroy in her articulation of the definition of ‘postcolonial melancholia’.

flourishes and spreads” (196). All Perowne’s superior knowledge confirms his sovereign manhood, which explains the lovemaking at the end of that Saturday. “He closes his eyes. This time there’ll be no trouble falling towards oblivion, there’s nothing can stop him now” (289). The words ‘this time’ and ‘now’ imply that something has happened to make things different ‘this time’, perhaps ‘now that the war is happening, and terrorism is being taken care of’. Perhaps it is also possible to interpret the lovemaking and the fact that the terrorist is softened by the poem which Daisy recites as a message to make love, not war; that only beauty and love can bring out the goodness among people: All you need is love. The question remains: who decides whose love and beauty will bring peace; will all mentally disturbed terrorists respond as well to a Victorian poem?

Saturday can be read as conforming with the colonial gaze of the Oriental other or, at least, as dealing with it superficially – since the only voices that contradict Perowne’s endorsement of the invasion are those of his daughter, an Oxford graduate, and her grandfather, an ageing poet whom he does not take seriously: “Perowne can’t see how poetry [...] can occupy a whole working life, or how such an edifice of reputation and self-regard can rest on so little, or why one should believe a drunk poet is different from any other drunk” (201). Therefore, to Perowne, the anti-war narrative maintained by Daisy and her grandfather is a sign of their democracy and wellbeing: in his argument with his daughter, Perowne says “Radical Islam hates your freedom” (197). He does not say ‘our freedom’, he says ‘your freedom’ as in ‘your freedom which I am responsible for’. By not offering an equally solid discourse against the war, not only does *Saturday* frame Muslim or Arab male sexuality as either incomplete or perverted; it also cognitively marginalises the Other.

Other readings of *Saturday* are also possible, such as that of Martin Ryle, who argues that “*Saturday* is very much about the pressure that public histories and emergencies exert upon the happiness and self-esteem of the private citizen” (25), and that “Perowne articulates

that anxiety [about his privilege] directly in just one scene, but the novel's central narrative thread confirms that the source of its political energy lies in unease about class difference, much rather than in anything to do with Iraq" (26). However, such readings ignore, on the one hand, how these public histories and emergencies also tragically influence the happiness and self-esteem of millions of 'Other' private citizens whose lives should be paralleled with Perowne's. On the other hand, Ryle's observation about class difference urges the reader to wonder, in a fast-moving globalised world, how we can think of class difference without having anything to do with military interventions in energy-producing countries, whose natural resources are a game changer when it comes to economic status and class distinction. Even though the novel is more concerned with the private citizen's happiness under the pressure of public histories and emergencies, setting the novel with the Iraq invasion in the background of this private citizen's day implicates the citizen's happiness and self-esteem in a moral conundrum, which needs to be addressed.

John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006) is a similar case, though told in a more straightforward style and in a much less elegant narrative. Artistically, Updike's twenty-second novel could be easily discarded; critics have described it as follows: "*Terrorist* [...] may not be first-rate John Updike. [...] he's been spinning his wheels for a while" (Leonar); "he [Updike] might be forgiven for resting on his well-earned laurels" as "the plot creaks a little..." (Poster). This is why "[m]aybe it is a little hard to believe ..." (Stone) because "[t]hough Mr. Updike manages to extract a fair amount of suspense from Ahmed's story, he does so with the heavy reliance on unbelievable coincidence" (Kakutani). A larger study of the novel indicates that

[o]nly a very generous reading of Updike could credit *Terrorist* with deconstructing the colonial binary. In spite of his apparently genuine attempt to displace reductive readings of Islamist violence, 'Islam' does ultimately emerge as Other in Updike's

novel, its practitioners sometimes drawn in commonplace Orientalist stereotypes.
(Hartnell 135)

Politically, all the critics cited above, among many others, do see that, although *Terrorist* might not be a masterpiece, it still responds to social concerns. The novel displays the basic arguments which the colonial discourse used in favour of the war on terror. Through the depiction of basically two Muslim-Americans, *Terrorist* justifies the war, suggesting that Islam is a hate-mongering religion, and that the faithful of the religion are necessarily violent, regressive, and envious people who oppose progress and freedom because their religion, the only source for building their identity, disallows their freedom. Hartnell observes that “Updike claims that *Terrorist* ‘is really not so much a political take . . . this is more a religious novel, it is about the lengths to which the central protagonist will go to defend his faith” (142).¹²⁸ By making it a novel about religion rather than politics, Updike complicates the problem from being one Muslim young man’s to a problem concerning all the faithful who embrace that religion. The novel follows Ahmed, a teenage African-American Muslim, born to an Irish mother, a nurse, and an Egyptian father, an exchange-student who abandons both mother and son to go back to his country. The novel suggests that Ahmed’s turn to fundamentalism is a psychological reaction to the lack of the father figure, and he compensates for this lack in finding refuge in the presence of God, in whom he finds “an invisible but palpable companion” (39).

Again, as in *Saturday*, we see a Muslim character who is disoriented and lonely, with the exception that this time he willingly turns to fundamentalism and repression in order to fill this fatherless void. He is “another needy, surly, misguided teen-ager about to float away in the morass of the world” (*Terrorist* 40), according to Jack Levy, the school’s councillor.

¹²⁸ Hartnell cites Updike’s interview with Tom Ashbrook.

Ahmed falls into extremism via the preaching of Shaikh Rashid, a Yemeni Imam who teaches Ahmed religion and persuades Ahmed to perform a terrorist attack by driving a truck equipped with a bomb into New York city. Shaikh Rashid – “a man slight and slim as a dagger, with dangerous slyness about him” (145) – finds in Ahmed’s lack of a father figure the opportunity to brainwash him. Ahmed is saved by Jack Levy and he decides to forgo the attack. As mentioned earlier, the novel’s scheme is not a brainteaser: White, Jewish, and American is Good; and Black, Arab, and Muslim is Evil. However, what concerns this analysis is how, like our other examples, it engages the three discursive strategies that feminise the Other.

Throughout the novel we can hear Ahmed’s thoughts about gender, sex, race and religion. From the very first line the reader can sense Ahmed’s tension and hatred towards people and the way they enjoy their bodies: “*Devils*, Ahmed thinks. *These devils seek to take away my God*. All day long, at Central High School, girls sway and sneer and expose their soft bodies and alluring hair” (3). The fact that this line is the opening line of the novel makes this a major statement: this sad ‘Muslim’ cannot stand, it seems to say, seeing other people happy because his religion makes him miserable and resentful towards those who are happy and free. Even in his relationship with his mother, Ahmed’s resentment towards bodily pleasures is accentuated:

Ahmed sees his mother as an ageing woman still in her heart a girl, playing at art and love-for she is alive lately with the preoccupation in which her son detects a new lover, though this one, unlike the run of them, does not come around and to the apartment and vie with Ahmed for dominance of the premises. *She may be your mother but I fuck her*, their manner, and this too was American, this valuing of sexual performance over all family ties. [...] Ahmed doesn’t hate his mother; she is too scattered to hate, too distracted by her pursuit of happiness” (168–9).

Once more, as in *Homeland*, this narrative presents a Muslim or an Arab – although an American too – as a disturbed human being who sees sex as an act of subjugation. To the narrator of the novel, the Muslim perception of sexuality is that it is shameful, and the conflict between the proud nature of Muslims and this shame that sexuality implies makes them fear and hate bodily pleasures. Ahmed fears his sexuality because he fears that it would make him unclean: “[Ahmed] sometimes would awake with an erection or, *more shamefully still*, a large wet spot on the inside of his pajama fly. He had consulted the Qur’an for sexual advice in vain. It talked of uncleanness but only in regard to women, their menstruation, their suckling of infants” (156, emphasis added). Ahmed is ashamed of his wet spot because it leads him to think of women’s menstruation; he is not only afraid of and ashamed of his sexuality: he is terrified of being ‘unclean’ like women, since the Qur’ān offers him no instructions referring to his sexuality (which, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, is not true). Once more, the orientalist, racist gaze represents the Muslim or Arab character as a psychologically disturbed individual obsessed with sexuality and intimidated by it. Moreover, Ahmed is a second-generation Muslim-American, Updike’s narrative is dangerously racist in its assumption that terrorism is inherited through or because of ethnicity. Once again, this is an impression which contemporary Iraqi fiction will rewrite, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Other readings of *Terrorist*, like Anna Hartnell’s cited above, and Peter C. Herman’s below, rightfully “examine the extraordinary intervention Updike makes – at considerable professional risk, [...] in post-9/11 discourse (692). Herman argues that *Terrorist* is more of a critique of American culture rather it is a simplistic indulgence in orientalist discourses; and, in fact, “Updike invites his readers to think hard about America’s culture and place in the world. Far from a failure, Updike’s *Terrorist* should be seen as part of the “political and aesthetic project” of understanding terrorism in our post-9/11 era” (712). It can be argued,

however, that in many cases – such as those presented in this analysis – this political and aesthetic project relies heavily on the depiction of many Muslim and Arab characters in the way that it seeks to justify for war and invasion. Herman writes that “Updike has his Muslim characters describe what the world looks like from their perspective, and their views partly overlap with Updike’s long-standing criticisms of American culture as materialistic and self-destructive” (700). At this stage of the discourse of the war on terror, the fact that these characters have this view of the world is like a card used too often in the game of ‘Writing/Framing the Other’. Moreover, Updike’s defence in the *New York Times* complicates things even more: “I think I felt could understand the animosity and hatred which an Islamic believer would have for our system. Nobody’s trying to see it from that point of view” (qtd. in Herman 700). Updike wants to show American readers the materialistic self-destructiveness of American culture by affirming a Muslim’s ‘hatred’ and ‘animosity’. Not only does Updike think he is trying to see ‘that point of view’ but he also speaks of it as if it were a given that an ‘Islamic believer’ hates and expresses animosity against American culture. What is more, he does not explicitly refer to his characters in the interview: he refers to an abstract ‘Islamic believer’. Nevertheless, if Updike was in fact trying to write a religious novel, then Herman’s point seems adequate, that “the book ends with a lapsed Muslim joining the lapsed Catholic (Terry Molloy) and the lapsed Jew (Jack Levy). In what may be the novel’s sourest insight, it seems that selfish, materialistic America affords no place for any religion other than the “born-again” (32) Christianity practiced by the Secretary of Homeland Security” (707).

The problem with the characterisation of Ahmed is that Updike seems to rely too much on Ahmed’s learning of the Qur’ān, the exposure to women’s bodies, and the racism of school bullies as the sources for his hatred. He moves around the city reflecting on what he sees, and all he sees is disgraceful uncleanness (*Terrorist* 281). He distinguishes himself

by thinking he is clean, and they are not. His cleanness – in his understanding – consists in refining, in purifying himself of lust and the degradation of the body in order to be prepared to meet God after he performs His inexorable will (287). However, other Muslim or Arab characters are also negatively represented in the novel as ignorant, violent, uneducated, unethical, mischievous and religious, yet they do not express this feeling of ‘cleanliness’ that Ahmed endorses. Unlike in *Homeland* or *Saturday*, they are not presented as merely opposing Western values, a point which Hartnell makes: “while *Terrorist* consistently posits Ahmad’s faith as incompatible with his American context [...] this incompatibility, the novel arguably suggests, derives as much from a chauvinistic American civil religion as it does from an Islam seemingly intolerant of ‘unbelievers’” (146). The novel acknowledges racism and Islamophobia, which are represented in the character of Tylenol, an older student who confronts Ahmed, thinking the latter is interested in his girlfriend, Joryleen (96–8). Ahmed had in fact experienced sexual urges towards Joryleen, but repressed them (280), and his anger towards Joryleen’s boyfriend prompts rage at society, on people who have sex and on bodily pleasures themselves. He sedates this rage with fundamentalist religious commitment.

Terrorist, then, sets forth another example of an orientalist representation of Arabs and Muslims which implies psychological disturbance provoked by sexual repression and fear of humiliation or feminisation. By excluding any positive representation of American and non-American Muslims and Arabs, *Terrorist* participates in the cognitive marginalisation of Muslims and Arabs as victims of war and of terror. The premise of *Terrorist* is that vulnerable masculinity leads men to hatred and violence; Ahmed’s repressed sexuality puts him in a vulnerable position as the novel depicts it in conflict with his mother’s, his mother’s lovers’, with Tylenole’s, with Charlie’s, and with any other characters who do not repress their sexuality. They may not be role models, but they do not drive a truck bomb into the city.

Ahmed, on the other hand, may be a good person, but the sexual frustration that his religion inflicts becomes too great.

Veterans' fiction – fiction by US military veterans who served in Iraq and which is written about the invasion of Iraq, or 'war' as they refer to it – shares some specific leitmotifs. Works such as *Generation Kill* (2004), *The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell* (2005), *Love My Rifle More than You* (2005),¹²⁹ *Redeployment* (2014), *The Yellow Birds* (2012) and many others “dramatize the frustrations American soldiers feel as they struggle to properly decode their environment” (Peebles 170). They share common motifs such as: 1) PTSD; 2) Rage and 'losing it'; 3) the soldier's abandonment by his girlfriend; 4) the presence of Iraqi children; 5) the misuse of Arabic; 6) what I call the 'I-miss-my-dog' rhetoric; 7) the description of military operations; 8) the heat; 9) homesickness; 10) rooftops; 11) the nice Iraqi girl; 12) trashing Saddam, his family and followers; 13) American soldiers being victims of torture by Iraqis; and 14) the Iraq 'war' as analogous to the Vietnam war.

In this section, I focus on *Redeployment* and *The Yellow Birds* as they, firstly, were significantly presented as being what 'really' happened in Iraq, or as telling 'the story', 'the inside story' or 'the truth' about the Iraq 'war', which was the tone describing most veteran's fiction. Secondly, they are arguably read for the most part as being critical of the leaders of the 'war', who lied to the American people about the reality of 'war'. “He writes with striking perception and *unusual honesty*” (Docx, emphasis added). Another reviewer writes: “It's the best thing written so far on what *the war did to people's souls*” (Filkins, emphasis added). Both of these review excerpts describe *Redeployment*. A review of *The Yellow Birds* describes it as “a first novel by Iraq War veteran Kevin Powers, [which] *reads much like the experience of that particular war itself*, at least as it's been described to me by other

¹²⁹ A female-soldier's diaries, not fiction.

veterans” (Watkins, emphasis added). Another review of *The Yellow Birds* states: “The author’s status as a veteran of the war, and therefore a curio in the American literary world, provides an *unimpeachable veracity* to the novel” (Evers, emphasis added). And this is corroborated by yet another: “Kevin Powers has something to say, something deeply moving about the frailty of man and the brutality of war and we should all lean closer and listen” (Percy). In general, veteran’s fiction is presented with the message that

[w]ar alters the shape of our families, communities, and nation—it is, as ever, a breaking point for history, politics, art, and the very ways we talk to one another. It matters, and soldiers’ stories tell us why and how. Then and now, we have to listen.
(Peebles 174)

Certainly, the term ‘soldier’s stories’, here, refers to all soldiers at any time and space. However, American veteran’s fiction is not concerned with Iraqi soldiers. For the American veteran’s authors, there are only locals and insurgents, no Iraqi state whatsoever: “Fucking mayhem was what it was” (Williams and Staub 142). “There are almost no Iraqis in *The Yellow Birds* or in *Redeployment* at all, and where they do appear, they are caricatures” (Scranton). The things that soldier’s texts have to say are not about the experiences of the Iraqi people; and the brutality of war which they mention is not the one suffered by both Americans and Iraqis. What veterans’ fiction – as well as Iraq ‘war’ films – offer is a reversed narrative of victimisation in which the victims are young American soldiers and the only war criminals are the insurgents who kill American soldiers and Iraqi people. This reversed narrative dehumanises Iraqis and consolidates their negative representation. In veterans’ fiction and biographies – with which I am familiar – torture, violence, rape, and cruelty are committed by Iraqis and American soldiers alike. However, whenever atrocities are committed by the American army, soldiers are presented as acting against their will, at times. The narrative tone both in veteran’s writing and in anti-war media highlights the fact that

soldiers are forced into these acts owing to the confusion caused by combat or miscommunication, or because they were following the orders of their superiors.¹³⁰ The tradition of depicting the good soldier, the hero, has historically been limited to that soldier who believes in duty no matter how weary or incomprehensible it is. The new war hero here is depicted as the honest soldier, the one who believes in his humanity and questions the orders of his generals and of the war leaders; he is the one who suffers the contradictions and the lies spread about the war. In veterans' writings this suffering is materialised through PTSD symptoms, which urge us to "[u]nderstand that these are *not* bad people [American soldiers]. They were simply people who were *beyond* frustrated. Beyond angry. Beyond bitter" (Williams and Staub 254). It seems, however, that when the Other is beyond frustrated, beyond angry, and beyond bitter, they are not only incomprehensible, but rather intolerable. This fact shows that, on the ground, "the U.S. military seemed more concerned about its own well-being than about Iraqis" (Ricks 200); then, on the level of the writing the invasion, the suffering of the Iraqis becomes invisible, hence the cognitive marginalisation.

Redeployment by Phil Klay, a national award winner, was repeatedly compared to Tim O'Brien's works as the Iraq invasion classic. Klay himself served in Iraq for thirteen months in al-Anbār province, west Iraq, during the first American troop surge (Lucas Thompson 192). In his collection of short stories, the narrators are either soldiers in service or veterans readapting to life. The narrators' voices all share a Bukowskian style, in the sense of being decadently tragic, sadly sarcastic, profoundly masculinist, and insistently linking veterans' depression to alcohol consumption and sex. The strength of Klay's stories lies in their capacity to reveal the emotional manipulation soldiers experience during the whole process. Lucas Thompson explains, "*Redeployment* documents countless forms of manipulation, at

¹³⁰ See Ricks: Chapter 11, 'Getting Tough', Ricks details how soldiers were victims of officials' orders, and in Chapter 12, 'The Descent into Abuse', he seems to imply that the U.S. army is a victim of Abu Ghraib (297).

every level of US culture, but it also self-consciously participates in many of these same manipulative strategies” (192). Most significantly, the horrors that soldiers see at war make us not only empathise with and understand the soldier’s moral and emotional conundrum, but they also make us believe that it is true, that soldiers feel so helpless and under such psychological pressure that “Killing hajjis is the *only* thing that feels like doing something. Not just a wasting time” (*Redeployment* 148, emphasis added), and that even a small Iraqi child around five or six years old can plant an improvised explosive device which will kill a soldier and destroy an American family – an element which is also present in films depicting the Iraq ‘war’, such as *American Sniper* (Eastwood). While Klay makes us feel a taste of “what it is like to be there” for a young American, we understand that this ‘war’ is justified because such awfulness must be stopped. In Thompson’s views “Klay’s collection embodies a kind of post-religious imagination, in which “sin” and moral “sickness” are equated with cynical forms of coercion, and grace occurs in precisely those instances wherein people communicate authentically with one another” (202). Yet, this authentic communication does not include Iraqis as equal human beings; rather, they are presented as unrefined agents of radical evil – or ‘the savages’ as Chris Kyle, the American sniper, calls them.

The first story – after which the book is named – for instance, tells the story of a veteran who has been in – and who has lost three mates in – the second Fallujah battle and the difficulties he undergoes trying to readapt to his life when he gets back home with post-traumatic stress.¹³¹ The story opens with these words: “We shot dogs. Not by accident. We did it on purpose, and called it Operation Scooby. I’m a dog person, so I thought about that a lot. [...] there’s a skinny brown dog lapping up blood the same way he’d lap up water from a bowel. *It wasn’t American blood, but still*, there’s that dog, lapping it up” (1, emphasis

¹³¹ Fallujah is also a central location in *American Sniper*, as it is in the history of the American presence in Iraq after the invasion in 2003.

added). The use of ‘but still’, at that fact of it not being American blood, implies that it would have been much worse if it had been American blood. He shouldn’t be so sorry, and yet he is. The story and the book begin with the image of a skinny dog lapping up Iraqi blood, and the American soldier who is telling the story is tormented by having killed that dog. As in the speech of the interviewed MP in *Standard Operation Procedure*, this image deliberately shifts empathy from the image of a dead Iraqi to the traumatised dog person, the soldier who probably caused the death of that Iraqi, who kills a dog. This kind of image dehumanises Iraqis and cognitively marginalises their existence as equal living beings.

The story later shifts to things a soldier sees beside dead Iraqis: “you see the little girl, the photographs Curtis found in a desk. First it had a beautiful Iraqi kid, maybe seven or eight years old, in bare feet and a pretty white dress like it’s First communion. Next, she is in a red dress, high heels, heavy makeup. Next photo, same dress, but her face is smudged and she is holding a gun to her head” (2). The pictures refer to the outrageous stories of forcing underage female children into marriage, which led them to experience violence and rape, with many reported dead during the intercourse. The employment of these images in the story, however, is superfluous, since they do not relate to the events of the story in any way. The detail is anyway inaccurate: the stories of forcing female underage girls to marriage did not happen around the time of the second battle of Fallujah in 2004. Rather, it began under the rule of ISIL in western Iraqi cities in the years 2014– 16. The image, then, is a manipulation by which to frame particularly Iraqis as repulsive beasts who would dress up little girls in red dresses, high heels, and heavy makeup – a stereotyped image linked to the idea of the *femme fatal* and also to cheap prostitution – and rape them. Moreover, since this image is not related to the story of the suffering veteran in any way – beyond being just a random memory which he happens to mention – it becomes a minor detail in the Veteran’s story and loses its relevance in highlighting a humanitarian disaster. The narrative focus of

the story is on the obsession which this veteran has with dogs, and how he ends up shooting his own dog. The focus shifts again onto the post-traumatic stress felt by a war hero, a dog person who shoots his dog because of the traumatic experience of war. In the background of the story of this tragic hero, the images of the Iraqi monster whose blood is lapped up by street dogs and the little Iraqi girl dressed as a whore become a sign, a reminder of why this 'war' was fought.

So far, Iraqis use small children to plant IEDs, they sexualise and rape female children, and simply do not like Americans and blame them for everything that is wrong (158). The soldier who wrote this book never questions himself nor he conceives himself as an invader who voluntarily enlisted himself for service, but rather he sees himself as a victim who was misled into a 'war' with the barbarians.

In another story of this collection, 'In Vietnam They Had Whores', the masculine 'warrior tone' escalates. The story tells the adventures of a young soldier whose father, after getting heavily drunk, gives him the cross he wore and which he states got him through the Vietnam war, telling him of how in Vietnam the soldiers had whores whom they treated like girlfriends (119). A few weeks later, the soldier is overseas in Haditha, west Iraq. Soon the soldier tells the Vietnam whores story to Old Man, the one soldier in his team whom one could talk to about whores (121). Old Man is called so because he joined the Marine Corps at an older age. His answer is: "Yep. In Vietnam they had whores. I guess that's the one thing they had over us" (121). Both the title and Old Man's answer imply that in Iraq they do not have whores. After this moment, war, to this team, becomes a quest for 'whores'. The men get so anxious about this that they almost get into a fight with another team who have all contracted herpes, assuming that they have been to a brothel. It turns out that the other team have been sharing a "pocket pussy" (122). The obsession with 'whores' is recurrent:

I thought about it the first time I jerked off in a sandstorm. Being nineteen and seven months without getting laid makes you all kinds of crazy. I thought about it again when West died, and Old Man said he wished to God he knew where the Iraqi whorehouses were, 'cause he'd get himself a big fat whore who'd let him cry into her tits. (121)

He could wish for a ceasefire or for the war to be over, but wishing for whores seems to him the right thing. The story then goes on and on about masturbation, dirty talk contests, rooftop drinking and the frustration over not having whores until their deployment ends. They go back home, where Old Man takes the narrator, after the memorial service for their three fallen comrades, to a strip club which is known to veterans. The whole point of the story is that there is nothing worse than the Iraq 'war': even Vietnam was better, because at least they had whores. Significantly, the Iraq 'war' is seen in this story as the utmost lack of kindness. All that these boys need is to 'get laid', fight their war and go home, and yet Iraq is depriving them of whores. In addition, the story depicts the lack of whorehouses as a symptom of inhumanity: "But we didn't know where the whores were, and that convinced me we didn't know anything about Haditha" (121). By knowing where the whores were, soldiers could supposedly know about the enemy's movement in the town. Not having a whorehouse means that whores are not needed. Thus there is a juxtaposition between the image a town where whores are not needed and the image of the vigorous masculinity of those soldiers who speak comfortably to each other about their sexuality and sexual fantasies, who laugh at dirty talk contests and who are stunned by the female who passes by, and whom they can smell – a masculinity that is so vigorous that neither Iraq and nor a memorial service can silence it, as opposed to an unknown masculinity which is utterly silenced, queered and stigmatised by the absence of whores.

The last example is *The Yellow Birds*, a National book award finalist and a well-received novel, also written by an Iraq veteran. Unlike Phil Klay's *Redeployment*, *The Yellow Birds* is a more poetic narrative, far from obscenity and vigorous masculinity, which was adapted for the big screen in 2017. *The Yellow birds* is more about the memory of brotherhood, friendship, and boyhood experienced amidst the horrors of war. The novel is a clear denunciation of war, its ultimate inquiry is into wrestling "with the dilemma of how to bear the burdens bound to this war" (G. Wright 119). Nevertheless, it performs this inquiry only into what concerns the victimhood and trauma of the American soldiers. Like most veteran's fiction, the horror of the war is employed to legitimise it: the worse the enemy is, the more reason there is to fight him. The novel is a material depiction of what Jim Holstun calls the "shoot-and-cry appropriation of Iraq's suffering" (28), as it presents American soldiers as good, innocent boys who are just trying to do their job whilst the war keeps making them its ultimate victims: "*The Yellow Birds* conveys the problematic representation of a seemingly endless war and its most neglected victim: a fractured soldier who is forgotten" (Mann 348).

The novel opens as follows: "The war tried to kill us in the spring. [...] Then, in summer, the war tried to kill us as the heat blanched all color from the plains. [...] The war had killed thousands by September" (3–4). By appropriating victimhood, the author "collapses invader and invaded into the generalized victims of a war's assault on "us." But even here, the menacing war begins to look more like Muslim Iraqi civilians only" (Holstun 8). The novel presents Iraq as a land of brutal savagery and wailing in the tangled memory of a US marine. It narrates scenarios in which American soldiers are constantly attacked, and in which they do not seem to attack or to prevent any attacks. The two boys, Bartle and Murph, find themselves repeatedly in near-death situations. They are ground down by the hardship of a war with a ruthless, monstrous, castrating and dismembering enemy. The Iraqis

they meet are informants or victims of other Iraqis, such as their first translator, who is also brutally murdered. The novel, as well as the film, hardly mention Iraqis; instead, the story revolves around the suffering of American soldiers in the Iraq ‘war’, in which the Iraqis are the ‘bad guys’. Even the discourse of rescue and liberation is absent, but it is implied in its context and in the representation of Iraqis as ruthless, psychopath castrators. Although the war was a great source of distress and suffering for ‘our boys’, the Iraqi freaks still deserved it, thus making this work, as well as those discussed above, a form of war propaganda, since they justify the invasion. Bartle, who has lost his partner Murphy – or ‘Murph’, as he calls him – is now back home coping with the memory and trauma of how Murph was murdered. Serving in Al Tifar, Nineveh, in north Iraq in 2004, Murph goes missing and is found later brutally murdered and thrown off a minaret:

He was broken and bruised and cut and still pale except for his face and hands, and now his eyes had been gouged out, the two hollow sockets looking like red angry passages to his mind. His throat had been cut nearly through, his head hung limply and lolled from side to side, attached only by the barely intact vertebrae. We dragged him like a shot deer out of a wood line, trying but failing to keep his naked body from banging against the hard ground and bouncing in a way that would be forever burned into our memories. His ears were cut off. His nose cut off, too. *He had been imprecisely castrated* (205–6, emphasis added).

It is not completely clear whether this castration is actually physical or metaphorical; the description of dismemberment above suggests that it might be an actual, imprecise cutting off of Murph’s testicles, especially because before he was found, he had been seen walking around the town completely naked, entranced and bleeding. A witness had seen him walk around like this for quite a distance and a group of five or six men took him into the minaret. The film, on the other hand, shows that Murph is definitely castrated and insinuates that he

might have been raped before as the picture shows Murph's naked body bleeding from his bottom.

The allegory of the American soldier being castrated in Iraq is a recurrent motif in many different depictions of the Iraq war and invasion. I have discussed earlier in this chapter how in *Homeland*, Brody 'can't even fuck his wife', and how the depiction of the Iraq 'war' as an attack on the American soldier's genitals is also present in other productions. In *American Sniper*, an injured soldier dies right after a girl accepts his proposal of marriage. In Phil Klay's 'Bodies', a girlfriend abandons her soldier as he redeploys and gets married to another man during the soldier's third redeployment, having her first child in his fourth, while the soldier continues to struggle with his emotional and intimacy issues. In *The Yellow Birds* film, Bartle's going to war also comes between him and his high school girlfriend. In the first two seasons of *Sons of Anarchy* (2008), for instance, 'the prospect' – a prospective member of the motorcycle club – is an Iraq veteran, called 'Half Sack' because he has lost one of his testicles while serving in Iraq. Half Sack is often an object of pity and mockery for the other members of the motorcycle club because of his caricatured nature and because of his attempts to restore his lost 'ball' by plastic surgeries that his body rejects. This sense of failed or targeted masculinity is present even in the narrative of female veterans.

Written by a female soldier, Kayla Williams, *Love My Rifle More than You* pretends to give a different perspective on 'war': "you won't find another voice like Ms Williams on your bookshelf, so unblinkingly candid, so aggressively raw and real" says the back cover of Kayla Williams's book. Unfortunately, Williams' memoir reveals very little and almost irrelevant difference. It shows how the US military system is racist and chauvinistic; yes, it does raise an interesting debate on women crossing gender boundaries and exploring masculine identity; and yes, it does show a different kind of a soldier: a soldier who has studied the language and who became part of a Muslim community, a soldier who tried to

understand the culture. Nevertheless, revealing the dark side of the US military does not mean embellishing the image of the ‘locals’ (Iraqi people, in US military jargon). “At a certain point we all started to hate the fucking locals” (253) says the woman who felt the US military was ‘treating her like a girl’. The memoir “demonstrates her desire to reach across gender boundaries and to be considered a true brother in arms [, but t]he writer’s performance of masculinity fails to be sustainable or sustaining in the context of war” (Peebles 50). Williams’ narrative tries to use this failure to justify the additional frustration and rage a female soldier can feel

I consider myself a reasonably compassionate person. I speak the language, and I have Arab friends, so I believe I am better equipped than most soldiers to see these civilians as people. Not simply as the enemy. But even for me there are times I am feeling overwhelmed by the situation. God, why can’t we just kill everyone – or leave them to fucking kill each other? Because I cannot care anymore. I cannot walk this line all the time. It’s too hard. I get too angry.

Increasingly many of us are just feeling angry all the time. When we think about the local population now, we’re thinking: what are you people doing? We’re here to help you! And you’re trying to kill us! Are you insane? Do you even want peace? Or freedom? Or democracy? Do you want anything? Or do you just want to kill all the time? What is wrong with you? What is wrong with these people? (238)

Dangerously, Williams’ narrative – as tolerant as it pretends to be – blames the people for killing the American soldiers, not the terrorists. Veteran’s fiction and memoirs show that this frustration and rage, ultimately converted into hatred against the people, is simply part of the experience of the Iraq war, regardless of the soldier’s gender. Peebles argues that “[s]everal of the memoirists writing about Iraq emphasize the ruptures in their own sense of masculine identity and the corollary failure of the masculine collective” (49).

Although it may seem ironic – since the war propaganda, as I have shown earlier, used a hyper sexualised language precisely to do the opposite, feminising the Iraqi other – this wounded masculinity narrative participates in the stigmatisation of the other’s sexuality. Iraq is depicted as a no-man’s land both figuratively and politically: it is the land where masculinity is in question. Those who win will be men: “I was going somewhere that would definitely make me a man” (*Redeployment* 59). Those who lose, in the writings of these American veterans, lose that quality; instead, they come to acquire a monstrous sexuality: they either rape little children, or, mystified by a woman’s body, “[t]hey just blatantly and openly stared at out tits. *All the time*” (Williams and Staub 2), or they castrate beautiful innocent boys (*The Yellow Birds* 206).

How is this any different from staging the bodies of Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib? Both in the Abu Ghraib pictures and in the narratives discussed in this chapter, masculine Iraqi bodies are depicted as ‘ungreivable’ bodies, bodies to be doomed. There is also a purely pornographic element to the representation of Iraqi bodies in this veterans’ fiction, which makes them the object of laughter and annihilation. This is precisely the Abu Ghraib situation: what we see is not the actual act of beating, torture, and sexual abuse of prisoners; what we see is the ridiculing of naked bodies and genitals, and soldiers laughing at staged simulations of sexual acts, eliminating every chance of envisioning those bodies in a serious act of consensual, human sex. This is also what happens in the veterans’ writings which I examine, an impenitent, dehumanising exhibition of monstrosity and sexual terror. We do not see Iraqi bodies seriously interacting sexually with other bodies; we just know about their sexual atrocities from either a dark, sarcastic perspective like Williams’, or from a deeply wounded, traumatised, and twisted memory like Bartle’s, or laughed at from the anger of a glass-ceiling feminist discourse appropriated by a white female soldier like Williams. The image of the body resulting from these narratives is of a distorted,

dehumanised, and monstrous sexuality which fits into what Mirzoeff described earlier as “a centuries old pattern of latent Orientalism” (180).

The problem with this specific narrative in veteran’s writings is the moral question posited by the stand on ‘perpetrators’ fiction’: “[f]iction that centralizes the perpetrator perspective [...] which centralizes the perpetrator perspective often without any real attempt at depicting (or, indeed, re-humanizing) the victims” (Pettitt 361). Even though Pettitt discusses the Holocaust, her definition of ‘perpetrators’ fiction’ can be extended to other contexts where atrocities are committed and their actors writing engages with what Rachel MacNair calls “Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress” (PITS), a subcategory of PTSD (7). Pettitt writes that “[o]ne of the central challenges of perpetrator fiction, then, is the potential it has to blur the line between imaginative engagement and a more problematic kind of empathy or identification, which runs the risk of displacing the victims of the atrocity and mitigating the guilt of those responsible” (362). This is the case in the veterans’ fiction discussed above: they are not so much displacing the victims and mitigating guilt, as being selective of whose trauma is worthy of telling. As Alosman observes, in *The Yellow Birds* and *Redeployment*,

Local people are by and large faceless and flat characters whose miseries are invested to show Americans’ humane standing. The lives of locals are drawn to complete the image of the American victimized soldiers whose sufferings are intended to induce empathy and to eliminate their full responsibility for the large scale of death and destruction inflicted on local peoples and lands (43).

This is the issue that the American author and Iraq veteran Roy Scranton describes in his reading of *The Yellow Birds*, *Redeployment*, and *American Sniper*.¹³² To him, these texts,

¹³² Roy Scranton enlisted in the US Army and served for four years, including a fourteen-month deployment to Iraq. He wrote a short story for the first Iraqi noir fiction anthology, *Baghdad Noir* (2018). His note as a contributor to the anthology reads “Roy lived in Baghdad in 2003 and 2004 as an occupier, and visited the city

among similar others, share a characteristic that distinguishes certain veteran writings from others: those veteran writers who fit the conventions of the ‘trauma hero’ myth, and those who do not. Scranton describes the trauma hero myth as

perceptions of reality through a set of recognizable and comforting conventions. It works to convince us that war is a special kind of experience that offers a special kind of truth, a truth that gives those who have been there a special kind of authority. The trauma hero myth also serves a scapegoat function, discharging national bloodguilt by substituting the victim of trauma, the soldier, for the victim of violence, the enemy.

Scranton argues that the trauma hero myth is not a contemporary invention but that it goes back to the eighteenth century, with Stendhal and Tolstoy, all the way through twentieth-century war fiction to present day narrative, which are more

conventional and increasingly self-referential. Tracking this myth through the poetry of Wilfred Owen, the prose of Ernest Hemingway and Tim O’Brien, and Kevin Powers’s Iraq war novel *The Yellow Birds* can help us see how the myth works, how it has been used by writers eager to capitalize on the moral authority it offers, and how it has turned from being a frame for understanding reality into a mirroring surface that reflects back only our own expectations. [... N]ovels such as *The Yellow Birds* and stories such as “Redeployment” are gross moral and literary failures. But the failure does not belong to the writers. It belongs to all the readers and citizens who expect veterans to play out for them the ritual *fort-da* of trauma and recovery, and to carry for them the collective guilt of war. Understanding the problem of American political violence demands recognizing soldiers as agents of national

again in 2014 as a Journalist”. Scranton’s attitude, joining other Iraqi and Arab authors in writing about Baghdad, and admitting his responsibility in being/having been an occupier, is perhaps the ethical stand that is missing in the perpetrators’ fiction discussed in this chapter.

power, and understanding what kind of work the trauma hero is doing when he comes bearing witness in his bloody fatigues. (Scranton)

This is what I mean by the reversed narrative of victimisation, and here perpetrators' fiction and PITS require more careful examination. The discussed examples focus on perpetrators' fiction and on PTSD, thus obviating

questions of why any American soldiers were in Iraq, why they stayed there for eight years, why they had to kill thousands upon thousands of Iraqi civilians, and how we are to understand the long and ongoing bloodbath once called the "war on terror." It does that precisely by turning a killer into a victim, a war hero into a trauma hero. (Scranton)

Such is the ethical conundrum. By turning the war hero into a trauma hero, focusing on soldiers' PTSD and obviating civilians' sufferings and share of victimhood, the narrative clears the perpetrators of their responsibility. Turning veterans' trauma into a subsection of the 'memory of "war" industry' that silences, reifies and dehumanises the other 'war' victims is a construction of a fantasy that alleviates the consciousness of those who write and those who consume that memory; it justifies the war and invasion and seeks to remove the burden of responsibility from those responsible. Innocent or not, the figure of the soldier in systems where the military service is not compulsory requires further attention; as enlisting in the army as a source of income and life improvement plan is yet a bigger question that perpetrators' fiction needs to answer.

3.3 Video Games

Video games possess visual and narrative potential in the representation of bodies. Though not a gamer myself, I acknowledge the visual and narrative importance of video games as literary and media discourses. I shall focus on games related to the Iraq wars and the war on

terror discourse. The Iraq wars and invasion have been a subject and a setting for military video games for over three decades. During that time, war video games releases often ‘coincided’ with actual wars, and games were designed and commercialised either for entertainment or for military recruitment purposes (Stahl, “Have You Played the War on Terror?” 120). Iraq as a setting is not a mere contextualisation of warfare video games; in fact, some of the games are designed based on marines’ input and on footage taken during real military operations in Iraq (Stahl, “Have you ...” 121; Snider). The US government even financed and nourished the research and production of war video games:

In 2000 the Defense Department devised an institution to facilitate collaboration between the military and the entertainment industries. The result was the University of Southern California’s Institute for Creative Technologies (ICT). Founded with a \$45 million Defense Department grant, ICT has amassed a motley collection of Hollywood talent, academics, toymakers, and game industry insiders to assist the military. [...] The partnership does not just benefit the military. Entertainment giants such as Sony and others have donated to the center in the hopes that participation in the center will aid software development (Waxman, 2003). Such partnerships allow commercial game developers access to up-to-the minute details of new weapons systems the public is hungry to test drive. ICT is a microcosm of much broader trends in military and game industry collaboration, reflecting the mobilization of information-age warfare across an entire spectrum of media (Stahl, “Have You ...” 117).

The narrative discourse in video games, then, is related to the political discourse of the war on terror. What is concerning about these games is their reproduction of real-life war conditions in a supposedly recreational activity. The games reproduce, for example, shooting, check points, curfews, ambushes, bombings, capturing, detention, imprisonment

and torture; footage of real battles and interviews with actual soldiers and military officials are also included in some games to consolidate a sense of ‘realism’.¹³³ Only in some games can players choose to be terrorists or US army soldiers.

Although creators of these games try to mimic real battles by, say, considering Middle Eastern skylines and the Marines’ input in depicting precise military uniforms, weapons and the streets where fighting took place, the total success of the mimesis is questionable. For one thing, civilians do not exist in the game, even though game battles take place in the city in broad daylight. This means that anyone who is not a US soldier in the city where the fight is taking place is a terrorist. This process of representation enhances the *cognitive marginalisation* of Iraqi civilians where narrative representations discard the possibility in which Muslim or Arab characters can be part of a text without being terrorists. This process gradually eliminates the idea that Muslim or Arab people are mere civilians who could practice regular jobs and wear regular clothes – that is, non-traditional clothes. Moreover, these games tend to

avoid legal, ethical, moral, or ideological considerations, including any other criteria used to measure the wisdom of war. Indeed, if there is a dominant “ideology” expressed in these game narratives, it is a marked disdain for diplomacy and preference for force consistent with the rhetoric of the war on terror (Stahl, *Militainment, Inc.* 98).

This means that, if Stahl’s hypothesis is true – which I believe it is – then this process empties the spectators of the game from any human consideration for the Other as well as it consolidating the idea that Muslim or Arab people are basically armed, violent male fanatics

¹³³ See Stahl 2010: 104 for further details on which games use real-life footage.

who must be defeated. Contemporary Iraqi fiction will find a counter-process to the cognitive marginalisation of the discourse of war on terror, as discussed in the following chapter.

In 2013, *The New Yorker* published a story of “one of the world’s top players in online game Battlefield 3” (Parkin). *Battlefield* is a first-person shooter online multiplayer video game series which started in 2002. The game consists of squad battles whose goal is to achieve a military objective in a specific context. *Battlefield 3* is set in Iraq near the borders with Iran, where pacification operations led by US marines are taking place. The mentioned world’s top player is eighteen-year-old Yousif Mohammed, who obtained this top position after having forty-two thousand kills attached to his name in the game. For Yousif and his family, engaging with video games seemed the safest way to escape trauma and make new friends (Parkin). The story suggests that playing video games related to fighting terrorism is very popular in Iraq: “Everyone wants to play it. We have been through so much because of terror. Shooting terrorists in a game is cathartic. We can have our revenge in some small way,” says the owner of Iraqi Game Centre (qtd. in Parkin). Watching some gameplay footage, one realises that there is no way to determine the terrorists’ identity: the player, as first-person shooter, is able to shoot any man who seems to be speaking Arabic. The characters, who are supposed to be terrorists, mouth unintelligible things with a few words in Arabic thrown into their speech, which – as in *Homeland* – dehumanises the real subjects these characters represent. Dehumanising these subjects takes other forms as well.

The cognitive marginalisation of the Muslim or Arab characters, mentioned above, and the worthlessness of bodies in the games – discussed later – participate in the dehumanisation of the Other. Rami Ismael, independent game developer and spokesperson, said at the Game Developers Conference in San Francisco in 2016 that “Muslim blood is cheapest on Earth right now” (qtd. in S. Lee). Romana Khan Ramzan, lecturer of game design at Glasgow Caledonian University, said at the same conference:

We are often just reduced to four or five stereotypes [...] It's usually summed up by the clothes we wear. So if you're a woman, you wear a hijab [...] If you're a man, you have a beard or wear your national dress. [...] In games, we will be represented as the 'other' people who are the ones you have to kill. Usually it's a slightly dark-skinned character shouting Allahu Akbar, carrying an AK-47. Or he has a camel or a goat (qtd. in N. Lee).

Furthermore, in some games, like America's Army, the enemy is dehumanised and cognitively marginalised by erasing his pain from the narrative: "When humans are hit with gunfire, they crumple noiselessly to the ground. Sometimes a mist of blood escapes an invisible wound, but the victims neither flail nor cry. Bodies tend to disappear as if raptured up to heaven" (Stahl, *Militainment, Inc.* 108).

These video games that indulge in Muslim stereotypes are not strictly battle or shooting games: there are games where the player experiences being a member of US army in detentions camps or prisons, where they interrogate and torture prisoners, such as *The Camp Bucca*, *Sprinter Cell*, and *24: The Game*. *The Camp Bucca*, which was supposed to be released in late 2016, refers to the US detention facility in Um Qasr, in southern Iraq. The designers of this game had been thinking of creating a video game which depicted the Abu Ghraib scandal; instead, they decided to choose the setting of Camp Bucca for its assumed relation with the formation of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, known as ISIS, and because in 2003 it was named after fire marshal Ronald Bucca who died in the 9/11 attacks. The game has no definite purpose other than that of experiencing interrogation and torture prisoners. There is no winning or losing:

Throughout the game players interact with Iraqi Prisoners, who are clothed in the camp's trademark yellow jumpsuits and occasionally have black hoods pulled over their heads. The player must interrogate the prisoners, choosing between methods

like waterboarding or electrocution to extract information. If an interrogation goes too far, the questioner can kill the prisoner. [...] Throughout the game, the player accrues points by completing assigned tasks, or loses them by failing. But the points never amount to anything. The game can't be won (Waddell).

The creators' intention is to recreate an experience that draws the attention towards human rights violations in prison and "the firsthand revulsion of being in the position of the torturer" (qtd. in Waddell).

Another similar case is the game *Six Days in Fallujah*, a video game that depicts the second battle of Fallujah, in western Iraq, which took place between 7 November and 23 December 2004, where 800 civilians were estimated to be killed during the first ten days of the battle (Democracy Now). In this battle, the US army used white phosphorus in shooting insurgents (Gibbons-Neff). The game was "developed in collaboration with a handful of Iraq veteran US Marines- who [lent] their videos, photos and diaries to the designers" (Telegraph Media Group) and it has been withdrawn from the market for its insensitive content to veterans and relatives of those Marines who had fallen in the battle of Fallujah (Ephron and Maron) – a fact which is hard to ignore since it reflects the cognitive marginalisation of Iraqi non-terrorist victims of that battle. It seems that for game designers and producers, Iraqi civilians do not exist, and the agents involved in combat and detention during and after the Iraq invasion were either US Marines or terrorists. Video games that depict Iraqis present them "as faceless, reckless and evil-looking figures in order to prevent any empathy by the player and to enhance their wickedness [... T]hey are dehumanised and faceless, and they are seen almost always as stupid and dumb characters so that players would not identify with them" (Al-Rawi 233–5). A question is to be asked here: is it a coincidence that Iraqi civilians are not recognised in either the reconstruction of real battles and detention camps, or the feedback on the games? Is cognitive marginalisation a deliberate

political strategy to justify war and prison torture or is it a discursive by-product of the colonial discourse surrounding the war on terror? This also raises the more general question of what we make of the mimesis of violence and torture in the visual arts and in the act of witnessing violence.

To answer this question, it needs to be clear first what is imitated in these supposedly too realistic games. According to the designers of both *Camp Bucca* and *Six Days in Fallujah*, these games were created to shed light on the Marines' experience in those contexts – or as Sergeant Eddie Garcia, infantry squad leader in the US Marines Corps and a Fallujah 'survivor' whose input was taken for the game, describes it: "In the video game, you are not just watching, but you are actually experiencing the battle as if you were there. You are the one that's firing the weapon, you're the one that's calling in for artillery, *you are the one that's deciding if that man across the street has a weapon or not. This is the opportunity to tell our story*"¹³⁴ (Cheever, emphasis added). Thus the imitated part of the game is the reality as lived and as wanted-to-be-told by the Marines, that is, as one part of a more complex reality. Second, what are the implications of deliberately wanting to recreate this experience and rule out other factors related to the same experience, such as the role of the Iraqi army who joined the American-British coalition in the real battle of Fallujah? I am not interested in whether the game is an honest mimesis of reality, nor am I interested in the good, evil, or neutral motives behind creating video games which allow civilians, probably underaged, to experience the excitement and dangers of invading a town and shooting insurgents. I am more interested in what it means to recreate a battle or a torture situation and have it experienced and lived by hundreds of thousands of people and the concomitant question of

¹³⁴ This extract of sergeant Eddie Garcia's speech is from a promotional video of the game where two other Marines are interviewed. The video was posted on September 7, 2013 by Nathan Cheever, one of the game's designers, on his own YouTube channel. There is no reference to the creators nor the producers of the video; therefore, I attribute it to Nathan Cheever.

why one might reproduce the experience of the shooter or the torturer exclusively – particularly in first-person shooter games such as *Six Days in Fallujah*. I am interested in the role of the decider, emphasised in the sergeant’s speech above. Roger Stahl calls this position in which the player visually identifies with the weapon, ‘weaponising of the civic gaze’: for what the player’s eye sees is the weapon’s target, and to him this was an institutionalised feature of the Iraq war and invasion in 2003 (*Militainment, Inc.* 44). Deciding whether the man across the street has a weapon or not, in this context, means deciding whether that same man across the street gets to live or die.

Furthermore, the game is designed so that the players can only be a marine shooter, the only Iraqi role to be assumed in the game is of an unarmed civilian trying to get his family out of the city (Highwire Games) Therefore, the mimesis of the Iraq ‘war’ and of in-prison torture in video games is an extension and a reaffirmation of colonial necropolitics in which the hierarchies of bodies – armed or unarmed, civilian or military, a beholder or exposed – reassign sovereignty to the player, who is the subject, the active agent, and the dominant male assimilated within the virtual body. It also converts the real body of the defeated Other into a stress-release toy, a disposable object which exists only to reaffirm the player’s sovereignty at any time and place. Moreover, considering the analysis of masculinity and heteronormativity given in the previous chapter, for the real Other – that is, Iraqi viewers – being represented as the defeated Other, i.e., as an object, without agency, and the subjugated Other means to lose the masculine quality of their shot body – a double defeat indeed.

This chapter has offered an analysis of the Anglo-American discourse surrounding the war on terror from the perspective of the Other. Through examinations of texts and media content, I have demonstrated that the discourse of the war on terror made use of a gendered

political strategy which feminises the Other through three different mechanisms: these are, firstly, sexual terrorism, in which the Other's sexuality is stigmatised, queered and feared; secondly, the orientalist gaze in which the Other is seen either as a backward, savage, violent, and monstrous male or a weak, silenced, and veiled female (both being envious and desirous of western progress and sexual freedom); and, thirdly, the cognitive marginalisation of any representation which contradicts or denies the absolutism of the Arabs'/Muslims' backwardness, savagery and desire to be Western.

Evil has, throughout history, been represented in different forms and ways. Choosing to represent the evil of Arab, Muslim terrorists as castrating maniacs or as being envious of western sexual freedom clearly indicates that the discourse of the war on terror establishes a sexual difference in which the West – American-led imperialism – is the masculine subject who generates knowledge about the Other, and in which the Other is the feminised object. This fantasy perhaps explains the over-compensatory representation of vigorous masculinity in *Redeployment* and in the closing scene of lovemaking in *Saturday*: both show that, even in times war and threat, men will act. This is not to be confused with the act of committing atrocities; acting here is understood as a privilege of the victors. Similarly, the idea may explain the portrayal of the castrating maniacs who wish to 'break' western manhood in *Homeland*, *Terrorist* and *The Yellow Birds*, since, on this view, each of these characters is envious of the Western penis. The Abu Ghraib pictures, too, stage a castration complex: the public shock of releasing these photographs exposes the intention to deprive a masculine subject of its culturally phallic symbolism and, at the same time, expresses an over-compensatory need to exhibit the invigorated, masculine West. The body in the Western discourse surrounding the war on terror is a sign which indicates the position of an identity within the hierarchy of necropolitics. Racial and sexual stigma indicate the quality of a body

to be doomed or to be an object of the victor's fantasy. What is in between does not exist because it is unknown.

The economic and political power that generate this discourse transform this representation into the symbolic order, to use the Lacanian term, in which the Muslim, Arab and particularly Iraqi identity operates. It does so, on the one hand, by means of the massive reproduction and repetition – as Shaheen observes (25) – of this representation and by having the means to make it difficult or impossible for any other representation which denies the absolutism of the first to be seen. On the other hand, the nature of reproducing discourse, as Lacan suggests, makes it difficult to be refuted, since once a new symbol comes to be recognised and established as knowledge, “we find it absolutely impossible to speculate on what preceded it other than by symbols which were always applicable. What appears to be new thus always seems to extend itself indefinitely into perpetuity, prior to itself. We cannot through thought abolish a new order” (Lacan, *The Ego in Freud's Theory* 5). This is the symbolic order that Iraqi postmodern traits attempt to question and contest in contemporary art and literature.

IV. Grotesque and Re-gendered Bodies: Representation Politics in Contemporary Iraqi Fiction

In the previous chapters I showed how the conceptualisation of the body was constructed via different political and sociolinguistic inputs: the first is the religious and socio-political investment of the body as national surveillance apparatus, which is a patriarchal hierarchy derived from the religious text and enacted in social performance – as interpreted by men who are attached to political power. The second is the historical, (neo)colonial and (neo)orientalist discourse of the war on terror, which uses the body and its sexuality as an instrument to impose identificational categories on its victims, reducing them to the status either of ‘war relics’ or ‘terrorists’. These discourses assume that there is a coherent and unified Iraqi self, and they operate as two confrontational symbolic orders in which the assumed coherent Iraqi self is dehumanised and reified. In this chapter, I outline and interpret two phenomena that distinguish contemporary Iraqi fiction from the other periods mentioned in chapter II. These are the grotesque representation of the body and the rewriting or rethinking of gender and sexuality. I interpret this employment of the body as presenting, first, scepticism towards the representation of the Iraqi subject in the confronted symbolic orders; second, as a need for a new conceptualisation of the body as a signifier of the self. This need can be understood as “rescription”, that is, as a redefinition of the self in order to own its subjectivity, and a healing mechanism to overcome the negative self-image resulting from trauma. I use the term ‘rescription’ based on Imagery Rescripting in psychology: “an

imagery-focused treatment designed to alleviate PTSD symptomatology and alter abuse-related beliefs and schemas” (Smucker et al. 9). In this therapeutic technique, the victim re-enters the traumatic memory as an adult and corrects the narrative of that memory in favour of the victim. I am aware of the differences in concepts and context; however, I am using the same logic: to redefine the self in a narrative that allows the victim to own their identity. The employment of the grotesque representation and the rethinking of gender, I argue, is a symptom of the confrontation or dialogue between symbolic orders.

1. Grotesque Bodies

I believe the following scene condenses the main elements of the grotesque representation of the body in contemporary Iraqi fiction:

In a land without bananas, the village awoke to nine banana crates, each containing the severed head of one of its sons. Along with each head was an I.D. card to identify the victim since some of the faces were completely disfigured, either by torture before the beheading or by something similar after the slaughter. The characteristic features by which they had been known through all the years of their bygone lives were no longer present to distinguish them. (Al-Ramli 7)

The scene above is the opening passage of Muhsin Al-Ramli’s *The President’s Gardens* (2012), a novel that narrates the history of three Iraqi families since the early forties until the sectarian killings after the 2003 invasion of Iraq. This scene sets an excellent example for understanding the grotesque body in contemporary Iraqi fiction because it contains sample elements of the constituents that shape the grotesque body as posited by Mikhail Bakhtin in his theorisation of grotesque realism in *Rabelais and His World* (1965), discussed in this section. The disturbing presence of the bananas carries multiple significations; the

expression ‘land without banana’ relates to the fact that, on the one hand, bananas do not grow in Iraq, their consumption depends on importation. During the genocidal economic embargo, imposed by the UN Security Council, Iraq’s financial and trade transactions were completely banned; bananas became a symbol of wellbeing because they are shiny, sweet, exotic, nourishing, yet impossible to obtain. For most Iraqis, access to bananas was exclusively visual – via Egyptian cinema and television soap operas, where bananas would be placed at the top of a fruit pile on a table in the villa of a wealthy man or a corrupt politician. Children saw bananas in cartoons, chased by an adorable monkey or used to make a villain dramatically slip and fall, as in the episodes of *Tom & Jerry*, which children of my generation watched insatiably. On the other hand, a strange phenomenon took place during the first months after the 2003 invasion, where suddenly street peddlers amidst Baghdad traffic started selling fresh bananas.¹³⁵ For many Iraqis, bananas could be tasted and seen for the very first time together with many other new things, such as coke, mobile phones, satellite dishes, and tanks with foreign soldiers. The documentary, *Homeland: Iraq Year Zero II* (2016), mentioned in the previous chapter, shows these details very meticulously (min.: 15:33). There is one scene where it explicitly shows the street peddlers selling fresh yellow bananas in a traffic jam caused by US military patrol closing the streets with concrete walls. Therefore, the presence of the bananas as a seat for the severed heads is a metaphor that embeds a socio-political awareness of the political mistakes and fraudulent nature of the rescue discourse celebrated by pro-invasion media. The opening phrase expresses the irony and absurdity of violence: the bananas, right after the US invasion, suddenly became street-peddling material instead of being exclusive to the rich, as previously perceived from television during the years of deprivation caused by the genocidal sanctions. It also hints at

¹³⁵ See Oliver Wright.

the future possibility of turning Iraq into a banana republic.¹³⁶ The scene shows how the military invasion has brought on this uncanny horror: the bananas – being shiny, sweet and exotic – symbolise colonial rescue discourse, promising freedom, democracy and human rights at the expense of Iraqi blood, the destruction of the Iraqi state and sectarian division. This is not to mention the way the phallic association with the bananas potentialises the comic element, ridiculing the slaughter.

Artistically, the scene promotes what critics call the *new aesthetics* in contemporary Iraqi fiction.¹³⁷ As discussed in chapter II, Iraqi fiction has historically presented the body within literary social realism as an expression of political anxiety and social reformation. Contemporary fiction engages an aesthetics of strangeness (Hanoosh, “Beyond the Trauma of War”) and post-colonial gothic, “a literary genre expressly concerned with questions of history and the return of the repressed through dark narratives that stage spectacles of horror through the use of the supernatural, the uncanny, and the monstrous” (Bahoora “Writing the Dismembered Nation” 188). Therefore, the instrumentalisation of body imageries, as a stage on which to display socio-political situations in contemporary fiction, belongs to a tradition that descends from practically the very beginnings of the narrative genre in Iraq. What is new, however, is the style and the aesthetics in which notions of the body are negotiated.

The representation of the human body in this post-colonial gothic, I argue, engages elements of grotesque realism, as defined by Mikhail Bakhtin, in which there is a hyperbolic and a deeply positive element to the body: “The material bodily principle is contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed. Therefore, all that is bodily becomes grandiose,

¹³⁶ About Iraq becoming a banana republic, see Russell Pompea.

¹³⁷ See Bahoora, “Writing the Dismembered Nation”, and Hanoosh, “Beyond the Trauma of War”.

exaggerated, immeasurable” (Bakhtin 19). Even though Bakhtin based his theory on Renaissance literature, his views on the grotesque representation of the body are applicable to contemporary Iraqi fiction. Bakhtin writes:

The grotesque image reflects a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis of death and birth, growth and becoming. [...] The grotesque images with their relation to changing time and their ambivalence become the means for the artistic and ideological expression of a mighty awareness of history and of historic change. (24–5)

This phenomenon of transformation reflects historical, social, and humanitarian and humanist change. The European Renaissance witnessed a substantial social, philosophical, and cultural transformation, and the celebration of the grotesque representation of the body, the revival of the grotesque, as Bakhtin highlights, is a reflection of that transformation. Similarly, literature and art which follow a transformative moment in the collective history of people can often engage with grotesque aesthetics. For instance, Francisco de Goya’s *Saturn Devouring His Son* (1820–1823), a painting with clear grotesque elements, was painted during the darkest period of Goya’s life during which he had survived two mortal illnesses and Spain had just survived Napoleon and was going through a period of civil strife.¹³⁸ Giacometti’s *The Nose* (1947) and his small thin sculptures are another testament of the grotesque representation of the body, which reflect the horror of World War II.¹³⁹ Additionally, Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* (1915) and his animal stories employ grotesque representation of the body as an expression of existential anxiety towards modernity and war.¹⁴⁰ This relation between socio-political transformation and the grotesque representation

¹³⁸ See Bozal, and Fingesten.

¹³⁹ See Bobrow, and Crawford.

¹⁴⁰ See Dagamseh and Rawashdeh, and Powell.

of the body makes Bakhtin's definition valid for the context of post-invasion Iraq. As far as context is concerned, post-invasion Iraq witnessed a period of violent political, social, economic, and cultural change that transformed the Iraqi culture aesthetically and even demographically.

Moreover, Bakhtin insists on the element of ambivalence that is contained in the grotesque body, a body that is neither one coherent thing, nor another; a body that unites antipodes: "the essence of the grotesque is precisely to present a contradictory and double-faced fullness of life" (62). This ambivalence is what creates the positive element of the grotesque body: it brings beginnings with ends, life with death, and beauty with ugliness. Through this quality, the grotesque body produces a new unfinished body from the old dead or dying body. The ambivalence of the grotesque body corresponds to the ambivalence of the boundary that delimits and unites the semiospheres. If the boundary "is ambivalent and [...] is the domain of bilingualism, which as a rule finds literal expression in the language practice of the inhabitants of borderlands between two cultural areas" (Lotman, *Universe of the Mind* 142), the grotesque body is a sign of the merger and translatability between the old conceptualization of the body, and of the production of a new one.

The grotesque body, as we have often stressed, is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body. Moreover, the body swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world. (Bakhtin 317)

The grotesque body is a point that connects different historical, social, political and aesthetic transformations that are happening in reality, on the ground level and on the level of the semiotic boundary. Therefore, whenever the grotesque body is present, the contexts which produced it are also present. This is what Bakhtin calls the "historic-allegorical method".

The grotesque representation of the body is deeply related to the historical and cultural understanding of the body. It is an allegory for the violent transformation of the relations of power along with the social and ideological circumstances at these moments of physical and epistemological violence.

What, then, does this body look like? Aesthetically, the material bodily principle is presented in images of the human body that highlight its materiality: food, drink, defecation, urination, sexual intercourse, images of flesh, bodily fluids, all taken to the point of exaggeration, transformation and, most importantly, degradation. Bakhtin writes that “the essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity” (19–20). That is, the exhibition of the body’s materiality in a demeaning context or manner suggests a predominant focus on the material and physical as opposed to the abstract and spiritual, which implies an epistemological transfer of signification between symbolic orders, from the order of the ideal, the supreme and the public image to the order of imperfection, materiality, corporeality and the private. This idea is central to many Iraqi texts such as Hassan Blasim’s *The Truck to Berlin*¹⁴¹; Sinan Antoon’s *The Corpse Washer*; Ahmed Saadawi’s *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, and ‘Āliyah Mamdūh’s *al-Tashahhī* – which I shall examine further on. These texts show

[e]ating, drinking, defecation and other elimination (sweating, blowing of the nose, sneezing), as well as copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment, swallowing up by another body – all these acts are performed on the confines of the body and the outer world, or on the confines of the old and new body. In all these events the beginning and end of life are closely linked and interwoven. (Bakhtin 317)

¹⁴¹ From *The Madman from Freedom Square*.

Accordingly, the bananas in the opening scene of *The President's Gardens* are an extension of the body as they add meaning to the dismembered and disfigured image of it: being sweet and exotic, representing freedom and democracy, is juxtaposed with the shockingly present materiality of the deformed and mutilated severed heads. The grotesque image of the mutilated heads degrades the rescue discourse in the propaganda of the war on terror. Moreover, in the novel, the banana crates are found at dawn of Ramaḍān 6th 2006 – thereby evoking sanctity and religious rituality¹⁴² – in the main street of the village by the village fool, who approaches the crates riding a female donkey. The fool rubs his eyes to make sure he is awake and looks around to make sure he is actually in his village, and when reality is confirmed, he starts shouting out loud until the villagers gather around him. The description of these circumstances introduces an element of spectacle to the violence in the scene, depicted in the bleeding and mutilated severed heads. The narrator also embeds a memory in which, years ago, the village fool cuts off a goat's tongue because he is annoyed by its bleating; now his screams are similar to that same noise (Al-Ramli 7–8). Likewise, the story of the fool, the donkey and the goat enhance the comic – if not circus-like – element to the absurdity of the spectacle of the bleeding severed heads in banana crates surrounded by a screaming fool and his female donkey. This is what Haytham Bahooora calls “narratives that stage spectacles of horror” (“Writing the Dismembered Nation” 188); and it also relates to the Bakhtinian carnivalesque element of grotesque representation (Bakhtin 149); the sanctity of death and the horrors of deformation, beheading and mutilations are being brought down to earth by laughter, parody and caricature.

¹⁴² A Ramaḍān day's rituality depends on two central events: sunrise, when fasters have their last meal before fasting and have the first prayer of the day; and sunset, when they break their fasting and the Ramadan night prayers 'Tarawīḥ' begin. Ramaḍān 2006 is significant in the history of contemporary Iraq, being the bloodiest month in the sectarian killings after the 2003 invasion.

The carnivalesque grotesque is manifested in the ambivalence in representation, a small area between the sacred and the profane, between horror and laughter: “The ‘swing’ of grotesque realism, the play of the upper with the lower sphere, is strikingly in motion; the top and the bottom, heaven and earth, merge in that image” (Bakhtin 163). It is this body with its primitive materiality opened to the world in a context that knots the horror with laughter, the sacred with the profane, and ultimately life with death. This is the representation of the body that predominates in contemporary Iraqi fiction. The body’s primitive materiality – blood, flesh, fluids, skin, defecation, and dismemberment, with particular focus on severed heads, bleeding, the belly, the rear, and the genitals – represents the transformation in the meaning of the concept of ‘the body’ in Iraqi fiction from a surveillance instrument to becoming an instrument of voicing subaltern subjectivities, and so of ultimately combating the grand narratives that have shaped Iraqi identity: Islam, Arabism and colonialism. The grotesque body, in its grandiose and exaggerated meaning (Bakhtin 19), extends to mean the people and the collective it represents and, in its linking and transformative function (24), indicates the metamorphosis of Iraqi identity. Giving voice, however, should not be read here as distancing the author from the position of victim and in possession of the privilege of giving voice; rather, the author here is one of the victims, survivors, or spectators, of this violence. The author in this case is not a messenger, but a translator.

Scenes with grotesque representations of the body in contemporary Iraqi fiction also focus on atrocities and pain to the extent that, on occasion, the implementation of the grotesque effect also relates to what Bernstein calls the pornography of horror – a notion that is hardly new to Iraqi culture, yet is rarely theoretically formulated. Bernstein explains that there is something pornographic in the projection of atrocities:

the negative aspect of the pornography of horror [...] involves the framing of devastation for the sake of the moral satisfaction of the liberal gaze: the affirmation that for we liberals, cruelty is the worst thing we can do, and that hence human solidarity is achieved ‘by imagination, the imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers. Solidarity is not discovered by reflection but created. It is created by increasing our sensitivity to the particular details of the pain and humiliation of other, unfamiliar sorts of people’. (Bernstein 11)¹⁴³

Although Bernstein is discussing the work of James Nachtwey,¹⁴⁴ I find his views on the pornography of horror of service in understanding the grotesque representation of the human body in contemporary Iraqi fiction. The notion of ‘[t]he framing of devastation for the sake of the moral satisfaction’ is deeply rooted in the Iraqi poetics of mourning. Firstly, it is part of the internalised qur’ānic depiction of torture for the purpose of moral lessons and discipline, along with the belief that the more one suffers, the more one proves their faith in Allah. Secondly, aestheticising pain is fundamental to the formation of the Iraqi way of articulating feelings, both religiously and socially; for instance, the Iraqi Shia’ self-flagellation spectacles and the dramatisation of ‘*Āshūrā*’ – the beheading of Ḥuseīn and the travelling with his head – are a testimony of how important the visualisation of pain is. These theatrical dramatisations of the popular ceremonies of ‘*Āshūrā*’ are attended by people of different generations and social status. Finally, socially, there is a sense of truth, depth and even an expression of love and solidarity in showing hardship and pain, as exemplified by the many popular sayings, colloquial expressions and proverbs that show how noteworthy hardship and pain are measurements of sincere feelings.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Bernstein is citing Richard Rorty’s *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1989).

¹⁴⁴ That is, Nachtwey’s photographs published in his book, *Inferno* (1999).

¹⁴⁵ Some of these sayings would include expressions such as ‘*sūdah ‘alāyah*’ "سودة عليا", which literally means ‘darkness upon me’; or ‘*imshī wara ilī yibakīk, lā timshī wara ilī yidaḥkak*’ "أمش ورا إلي بيكيك، لا تمش ورا إلي يداحك"

The visibility of bodies in the pornography of horror is similar to the instrumentalisation of bodies as discursive weapons as highlighted by Butler in *Frames of War* and discussed in the previous chapter. The same notion was implemented in the Qur'ānic narrative of torture, and one is tempted to speculate that such expression of horror could also be related to supposed Islamic fatalism, an interpretation of Islam based on the etymology of the word in Arabic, consisting of complete surrender to God's will and the knowledge that God's word and will supersede human free choice (Esposito).¹⁴⁶

Another aspect of the grotesque style is the use of abusive language. On the language of grotesque aesthetics, Bakhtin writes:

the grotesque concept of the body forms the basis of abuses, oaths, and curses. The importance of abusive language is essential to the understanding of the literature of the grotesque. Abuse exercises a direct influence on the language and the images of this literature and is closely related to all other forms of 'degradation' and "down to earth" in grotesque and Renaissance literature. (27)

The use of violent language and the subversion of linguistic taboos is another symptom of experimentation and innovation in contemporary Iraqi fiction. Profane language, for instance, particularly blasphemy, bears a profound relation to the grotesque image of the body. The fact that the heads in the banana crates were found on Ramaḍān 6th is a hint at the profane element in the grotesque representation of the body.¹⁴⁷ Blasim's fiction could be

"يضحكك", meaning 'follow him who makes you cry, don't follow who makes you laugh'; or '*min ḥabbak, lāshāk*', "من حبك، لاشاك", meaning literally 'he who loves you, teases you'. These utterances are quotidian and highly popular; they are used in everyday speech and in very familiar contexts. The speaker utters these expressions wishing grief and horror upon themselves in order to sympathise with the person in pain. Even though they do not show physical or graphic pain, they indicate the transcendence of pain in Iraqi popular culture.

¹⁴⁶ See also Agamben, 1999: 45, where he refers to the same idea in his description of the 'Muselmann' of Auschwitz.

¹⁴⁷ Ramaḍān is one of the months in the Islamic calendar where it is forbidden to shed blood.

considered the most representative example of the use of abusive, violent, and profane language. In his story "A Wolf",¹⁴⁸ the experimental narrative structure is purposely unclear. The narrator – who, whether drunk or hallucinating, remembers having met a strange man, who at the end appears to be the author himself – tells a story of coming back home to find a wolf inside his apartment; he jumps and locks himself in the bathroom. In part of his delirium, he thinks as follows: "Imagine. The two Jehovah's Witness women, naked in my bed. One of them sucking my cock and the other giving her clitoris to my tongue while reading a passage from the Bible" (660). The narrator, here, is talking about his loneliness and how no one visits him or knocks on his door except for Jehovah's Witnesses, about whom he is fantasising. At the same time, by being blasphemous he is expressing his disappointment with God: "I believe in dreams more than I believe in God. Dreams get into you and leave, then come back with new fruit. But God is just a vast desert" (620).

These scenes combining pornography with blasphemy are forms of the grotesque body as they entangle the holy with the obscene. The pornographic element stems from, on the one hand, the premise that "pornography operates as an objectification of, dominantly, the female body as a space in which fantasies of sexual gratification through subjugation are played out as stimulants for the male gaze" and, on the other hand, "the pure desire to bear witness, to just witness the way a photograph just witnesses, then witnessing begins to sound like an aestheticized looking, and what is looked upon is the body without dignity" (Bernstein 8). The body without dignity is the powerless body, the body that cannot intervene with its visibility or the way it is represented. The notion of a 'body without dignity' is related to the lower stratum of the body:

¹⁴⁸ "عادة التعري السبئية" من كتاب معرض الجثث.

To degrade also means to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs; it therefore relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth. Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one. To degrade an object does not imply merely hurling it into the void of nonexistence, into absolute destruction, but to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and a new birth take place. Grotesque realism knows no other lower level; it is the fruitful earth and the womb. [...] This genre and all the other modern forms of degradation could not, of course, preserve their former immensely important meaning. (Bakhtin 21)

Fellatio and cunnilingus, based on Bakhtin's definition here, are the maximum expression of the grotesque since they engage the genitals, the bodily fluids, with what goes into the mouth. They associate ingestion with discharge, procreation with contraception, and, in this scene, holiness with degradation. However, what is more interesting is the idea of reproductivity from degradation; how a new body is born out of the degraded one. In this scene, for the narrator, the undignified bodies, objects of the gaze – the male gaze, the reader's, and the narrator's gaze – are supposed to be of the two female Jehovah's Witnesses, representing the figure of God who is being feminised in a pornographic scene to serve the sexual fantasies of the patriarchal male gaze. Yet, for the reader's gaze, in this blasphemous representation of God, there is also the body of the Iraqi refugee whose presence as object and subject in this fantasy brings down to earth his body as it is outside the fantasy.¹⁴⁹ The surreal circumstances in which the fantasy is narrated and the fact that it is a fantasy narrated

¹⁴⁹ The story does not specify if the narrator is a refugee, but his use of Iraqi expressions of blackguardism throughout the story and the characterisation of the narrator apply to the stereotype of the emotionally destroyed Iraqi refugee in the West.

by a blathering, terrified, drugged or drunk person crawling naked on his bathroom floor, show that in fact it is the refugee's body that is being presented without dignity. In this miserable situation, as the story shows, the grotesque, blasphemous scene highlights his bare life; fantasising about the sexual subjugation of God shows the intensity of his feeling of being cast away, neglected, wronged, repressed and subjugated by God. The grotesque representation of the body, then, is an expression of resentment towards an 'almighty'.

Violent language is not strictly the description of violent scenes or the insertion of violent imageries. Violence, here, is also linguistic, materialised in the use of slang amidst standard Arabic or the use of swear words and offensive language or even graphic description of taboo issues such as genitalia and sodomy, as we have seen in the previous scene, and in many others to come. All of these are manifestations of this violence. In the Arabic version of 'A Wolf', the narrator repeats the expression '*kushā wa kus ummhā*' which literally means 'her pussy and her mother's pussy', which is one of the most aggressive insults in Iraqi slang.¹⁵⁰ The use of the expression, whether referring to someone's mother, sister, wife or daughter can lead, in person, to a fierce fight, in which the participants, usually men, could be seriously injured, if not murdered. The translator chooses the English expression 'fuck that', which certainly conveys the narrator's intentions in expressing his despair while maundering nonstop, but it obscures the considerable impact of violence and the aggressiveness of this expression in Arabic. Reviewers – whether critics or ordinary readers – have described Blasim's language as obscene and blasphemous and, occasionally, offensive, because of this and other similar expressions. However, many agree that this

¹⁵⁰ "كُشَهَا وَكُسْ أُمَهَا"

linguistic violence reflects the horrors and violence that Iraqi people underwent during years of wars, dictatorship, sanctions, and humiliation.¹⁵¹

Blasphemy and sexual language in Blassim's writings are intended to deliver a humanising message: de-sanctify religious symbols and show how much they make human beings suffer because of them. In his magnificent story, "The Iraqi Christ", blasphemy takes a less sexual though equally violent and grotesque mode. It tells the story of a young Christian man who is something of a genius – and a passionate one – in the use of Radar. He wishes to join the air force in order to get the highest possible training in radar, but the government repeatedly rejects him because of his father's affiliation with the communist party. He then volunteers to serve in the medical corps in the second Gulf War, where he saves his partners' lives many times by predicting military attacks. His fellow soldiers name him Christ and, because he is chewing gum, they name him Chewgum Christ. After the 2003 invasion and the dissolution of the Iraqi army two months later,¹⁵² Chewgum Christ goes home and spends his days reading and taking care of his elderly mother, who is blind, deaf and who had lost her memory and the control of bowel movements. Christ looks after her because "his mother's death would sever the thread that tied him to the place" (449). One day, after Sunday Mass, Chewgum Christ takes his mother to a Kebab restaurant.¹⁵³ While he feeds his blind and sick mother, a terrified suicide bomber approaches their table. He sits down and shows Chewgum Christ his suicide vest. He tells Christ to meet him in the restaurant's restroom. He makes him wear the vest, threatening otherwise to detonate the vest and kill him and his mother. The bomber promises to take the old woman out and make

¹⁵¹ See Abdellah; Bahoora "Writing the Dismembered Nation"; Genadi; and Goodreads reviewers.

¹⁵² The Iraqi army was disbanded by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) Order #2 on 23 May 2003.

¹⁵³ What is known in Iraq as Kebab differs greatly from the European concept of Kebab in shape, taste, and ingredients. Kebab restaurants in Iraq can be equally popular yet, economically, suggesting higher social standards and material quality if compared to Kebab restaurants in Europe, which makes them crowded with families.

sure she is safe and taken care of. He carefully puts the suicide vest on Christ and leaves. The story ends as follows:

Christ fell to his knees. He could hardly breathe and pissed in his trousers. He opened the bathroom door and crawled into the restaurant. Someone met him at the door and ran back shouting, ‘A suicide bomber, a suicide bomber!’”

Amidst the panic, as men, women and children trampled on each other to escape, Christ saw that his mother’s chair was empty and he pressed the button (486).

The parallelism between Jesus Christ and Chewgum Christ crystallises both the grotesque body and the profane language. The holiness of Jesus Christ’s body and passion is being brought down to earth – in Bakhtin’s terminology – by the passion of Chewgum Christ with his precarious life, wet with his own urine, whose only purpose in life is to save the life of a blind, deaf, ageing mother who has lost her memory and who is in need of nappy changes every few hours (449). The biblical mystification of the passion of Jesus is juxtaposed with the horrific hopelessness and solitude of Chewgum Christ. The precariousness of his life alludes to the fact that every life is sacred and worth saving and serving, but those who are more vulnerable have no one to look after them. Like Jesus Christ, Chewgum Christ saves other people’s lives and is not able to save himself (Mark 15:32). Unlike Jesus, though, his crucifix is not consecrated and prayed to; his crucifix is a suicide vest, the most horrific symbol of religious violence. Most importantly, the Iraqi Christ has nothing to be punished for: he had upset no one, he was not a revolutionary, no politician, no businessman; he was nobody and, like Jesus Christ, whose flesh stands for the saved believers, his flesh, urine-wet, represents the many Iraqis who wanted nothing but to ensure the safety of their loved ones – victims of absurd violence. Taken together, the name ‘Chewgum Christ’, his self-urination, his characterisation as a radar-freak or a nerd living with his mother are aesthetic

characterisations of the carnivalesque grotesque as they bring down the sacred to the level of the profane, the tragic to that of the absurdly comic, and horror to that of laughter.

However, the only controversial drawback for defining the representation of the body in contemporary Iraqi fiction within Bakhtin's theorisation of the grotesque body would be the question of laughter. Bakhtin insisted that no grotesque is conceivable without laughter (38), which can be difficult to justify in the analysis of some texts – as in Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer* – owing to the seriousness and the darkness with which the grotesque body is employed. Unless laughter is interpreted symbolically, which I will explain when I analyse each example, the Bakhtinian definition will require theoretical adjustments and additions. Nonetheless, Bakhtin is certainly flexible on the function of this laughter which is characteristic of grotesque aesthetics. In his historical overview of the development of the meaning of the grotesque (37 – 52), Bakhtin shows that laughter's quality and function changed from one period to another. In the latest development of the grotesque, in Romanticism and modernism particularly, “laughter was cut down to cold humour, irony, sarcasm. It ceased to be a joyful and triumphant hilarity. Its positive regenerating power was reduced to a minimum” (38). This is the kind of laughter that the opening scene of *The President's Gardens* and Blasim's scenes, discussed above, offer us, a sinister irony and sarcasm, which have nothing to do with the festive and joyful laughter which Bakhtin considers essential of the grotesque as it appears in the Renaissance. However, the grotesque in contemporary Iraqi fiction maintains the hyperbolic and grandiose positive notion of the body.

In 2008, *The World Today* published a review of Sinan Antoon's novel *I'jām* (2004, with the English translation titled *I'jaam: An Iraqi Rhapsody*, published in 2007) in which it described the violence in the novel's language as descending at times to ‘Repulsive

Realism' (Albazei 58), which I consider different from grotesque realism. The term 'Repulsive Realism' was used in a review of *War and Peace* in *The Spectator* in 1887 to describe the French realism from which the author distinguished Tolstoy's realism: "Were it necessary to label Count Tolstoi as an author, we should have to call him a realist. But he is not realistic with the repulsive realism of the modern French school, which seems to consist largely in dragging forward and exposing to the light that shameful side of human nature which it should rather be our interest and duty to conceal" (*The Spectator*, 38).¹⁵⁴ It was used again in 1897 by H. E. Belin as a term to criticise the 'bare' and 'bald' characteristics of the art of the modern short story of his time (*The Writer*).¹⁵⁵

In contemporary criticism the term is used to describe a popular genre characterised by an excess in gross corporeality: a "refreshing counteroffensive of odiferous refuseniks, a burgeoning genre you could call Repulsive Realism [, in which] the characters manufacture their own mire and swim around in it. They rebel against the packaging of femininity and the oppression of the lacquered image" (Kelly).¹⁵⁶ While the definitions appear to refer to a transgressive depiction of corporeality which entails a repellant imagery and the employment of the body for the purpose of social criticism, this is not the case in *I jaam*. There is a clear celebration of joy in the repulsiveness of the body and a union of the upper and lower stratum, which Bakhtin considers essential in the structuring of the grotesque body. *I jaam* provides scenes of imprisonment, torture, rape, and heterosexual consensual sex, none of which expresses an enjoyment at repulsiveness; yet there is a clear celebration of the disabled and vulnerable body that unites opposites, which finds strength in vulnerability, liberation in repression, and life in death, a connection between the upper and the lower stratum.

¹⁵⁴ Reference found in Dorothy Brewster's *East-West Passage: A Study in Literary Relationships* (1954).

¹⁵⁵ Cited in Williams, Jay 96.

¹⁵⁶ In this article Hillary Kelly discusses the work of major female authors who write in this genre exclusively.

Although further research and theorisation are required to delineate what ‘repulsive realism’ entails, as far as this research is concerned, repulsive realism can be distinguished from grotesque realism in the orientation of the hyperbolic function of the body image. In repulsive realism the exaggerated corporeality is meant as a satire of that which is not exaggerated, while exaggeration in the grotesque image, as Bakhtin explains, cannot be reduced to satire (308) because of the ambivalent nature of the grotesque image which does not target the materialisation of negativity exclusively, since there is also a positive element to it. Therefore, the grotesque bodies under analysis here, in their staging of corporeal horror, do not only symbolise trauma, fear, pain and death. In their ‘grotesqueness’ they also express resilience, revolution, survival and the creation of a narrative of authoritative selfhood. Corporeality, as we shall see, is not instrumentalised here as a recourse of denunciation by which to expose vulnerability, fragmentation and victimhood caused by war, invasion, and patriarchal nationalism: it is also exaggeratedly employed as a celebration of a challenging and rebellious attitude towards the patriarchal religious-nationalist and orientalist discourses which caused the war and invasion of Iraq. In the Renaissance period the grotesque body, after being reduced by the classical and medieval canon to the low comic level, continued to fertilise areas of life and culture by becoming part of the carnival forms and folk festivities, which were part of the family’s private life (34). In a similar manner, Iraqi authors use grotesque images of the body which have been related to festivities and abundance with deep, cynical sarcasm in order to expose a spectacle of pain and trauma of the same magnitude as the carnival – that is, in order to ‘write’ a carnival of pain and suffering in which the freedom of the body and its sexuality which are celebrated by the blood-shedding, aggressive discourse of the war on terror becomes intertwined with the nationalist and religious discourse of prohibition and repression, and the hyperbolic implementation of corporeality attains this function of both denunciation and self-generation.

Having established an approximation to the definition of the grotesque, I shall provide an analysis of the different manifestations of the grotesque in a selection of fictional works. The texts I include in this analysis are the ones that encapsulate firstly, the different and innovative characteristics of the new aesthetics which Hanoosh and Bahooora mention: all of them engage with narrative of strangeness and – except for *al-Tashahhī* – the postcolonial gothic. Secondly, the grotesque representation and the questioning of gender which I discuss here. Additionally, as far as the grotesque body is concerned, I find the selected texts representative in their commitment to the notions of transformation, ambivalence and the historic-allegorical method, even though they differ in the way the grotesque body is manifested. Finally, each of the selected texts provides a different aspect of the rethinking of gender and sexuality in addition to the grotesque element. I have discarded other examples that do not present such a complete example as do the selected ones to avoid length and repetition. For instance, the stories of Ḍīyā' Jubāīlī, *Mādhā Naf' al Bidūn Calvino* (What We Do Without Calvino), can give us a case of the grotesque body similar to that in Hassan Blasim's, and their stand on gender might be similar to the one in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. The same could be said about Betool Khedairi's *Absent* (2007), which, although it might be similar to *al-Tashahhī* in the sense that it gives visibility to silenced bodies,¹⁵⁷ yet contains a treatment of the question of gender which still perpetuates the phallogocentric perception of subjectivity. Therefore, the selected texts are considered representative in their adherence to the two categories I am describing; other similar texts might lack one or the other of the qualities which I seek to illustrate.

¹⁵⁷ On this topic in *Absent*, see Hamdar 106–124.

1.1 “The Truck to Berlin”

Blassim’s story ‘The Truck to Berlin’, from *Majnūn Sāhat al-Ḥurriyah (The Madman of Freedom Square)*, presents another, and a more comprehensive, manifestation of the grotesque. The story narrates what happens during the journey of a truck smuggling a group of thirty-five Iraqi young refugees, all men, from Turkey to Berlin, through Bulgaria. The trip is supposed to take a few days but something unknown happens to the driver who abandons the truck on the road next to a forest. The locked-up young men remain locked inside the truck for at least two days before chaos and distress fall on their souls. The story narrates the horrors of the travellers’ psychological processes, shifting from fear and anger to paranoia and rage. Blasim uses three mechanisms to depict the horror in the story: the darkness, the noises and the grotesque element. The grotesque element takes three manifestations: defecation, atrocity and monstrosity. In the description of what leads the narrator to abandon Iraq, he says:

At the time I was on the run from the hell of the years of economic sanctions, not out of fear of hunger or of Saddam Hussein. In fact, I was on the run of myself and from other monsters. In those cruel years fear of the unknown helped obliterate the sense of belonging to a familiar reality and brought to the surface a savagery which had been buried beneath a man’s simple daily needs. In those years a vile and bestial cruelty prevailed, driven by fear of dying from starvation. I felt I was in danger of turning into a rat. (881)

The words ‘bestial’, ‘savagery’, ‘cruelty’ and ‘monsters’ already set a background of dehumanisation. The animal metaphor persists in this story, and in many other of Blasim’s works, to remind the reader of the suffering that human beings undergo in circumstances of

absolute fear: “I saved some money from my work and paid it to those who smuggle the human cattle of the East to the farms of the West” (882).

From the same book, *The Madman of Freedom Square*, in the story ‘The Song of the Goats’, for instance, the narrator expresses enormous fear of his mother using animalistic imagery: “Her tongue was as poisonous as a viper”; “she had turned into a fat cow” (136):

There was a cart that brought kerosene, drawn by a donkey. It came through the lanes in the neighbourhood in winter. The children would follow behind, waiting for the donkey’s awesome penis to grow erect. I used to shut my eye and imagine the donkey’s penis, gross and black, going into my mother’s right ear and coming out from the left. She would scream for help because of the pain. (120)¹⁵⁸

As Bakhtin puts it, “the transformation of the human element into an animal one [,] the combination of human and animal traits is, as we know, one of the most ancient grotesque forms” (316), and both in ‘The Truck to Berlin’ and ‘The Song of the Goats’, Blasim uses the grotesque element both to express and to protest against the horrors of human suffering.

Moreover, the passage above completes the representation of grotesque realism in the employment of the carnivalesque element which is materialised by the comical depiction of the children following a donkey from behind to see its erection. The gathering of the children in the neighbourhood lanes has the comic folk element of the marketplace, which Bakhtin describes as the arena for the grotesque manifestations of the body. The surreal image of the mother being penetrated in the head, through the ears, combines obscenity with laughter. It is obscene because of the animal genitalia, and it is funny because it breaks the

¹⁵⁸ Personally, I used to fear the young men who rode the cart, some of them would perform obscene gestures at little girls, waving or showing their penises to them.

sanctity of horror: motherhood being violated by ‘the worst’ creature’s genitalia,¹⁵⁹ but not through her genitals or through oral sex, rather, through the impossibility of having the beast’s ‘gross’ and ‘black’ penis enter into her ear. One can almost hear the voices of the crowd of children laughing at the image. Nevertheless, the grotesque effect in the scene is intensified in the last sentence, which describes the mother’s cry for help owing to the pain, which breaks the comic element and brings the “‘swing’ of grotesque realism” (163) between the lower and upper stratum, laughter and horror, and pain with amusement.

Blasim follows a similar strategy in ‘The Truck to Berlin’. Throughout the story, he intensifies the material bodily element as the tension inside the abandoned, locked up truck escalates:

For fear that the air would run out, the young men were breathing rapidly, like someone preparing to dive into a river. After five hours of travel, the smell of bodies, sweaty socks and the spicy food they were eating in the darkness made it even stuffier. (912)

As they realise that they have been abandoned, the rhythm of the story and the employment of the material bodily element go deeper into the lower stratum:

some shat in food bags, and the repulsive smell built up inside the truck like strata of rock. The young men’s breathing, taken together, was like that of a monster roaring in the dark. The fear and the smell so shattered everyone’s nerves that quarrelling and fistfights broke out in the gloom. The fighting spread, then after an hour died down because thirst had restored the calm. Everyone sat around whispering and speculating in low voices, like a hive of bees. (936)

¹⁵⁹ The donkey in Iraqi folk culture, as in other cultures – including the Arab – is a symbol of dull stupidity. The Arabic word, ‘Himār’, is used as a common insult in everyday language.

The combination of food and defecation, the fistfighting and the calm of a beehive together contribute to the building up of the grotesque element and the gradual transformation of human into beast. The surrealism of the fistfighting in such situation provides the ridicule and cynical sarcasm. The employment of the beehive image accentuates the characters' agitation, evoking the unsettling sound of bees and anticipates an attack. Finally,

On the third day there was a complete chaos. Some young men who still had the energy to hang on to life tried to break down the truck door, while others kept shouting and banging on the walls. One of them was begging and pleading for a gulp of water. The sound of farts and insults. Quranic verses and prayers recited in loud voices. (946)

For David Lawton and Bakhtin blasphemy constitutes a mechanism of the grotesque as it manifests the essential principle of degradation, the degradation of what he describes as the high, spiritual or ideal down to the material level and the lower forms of being. The parallelism of farts and insults with qur'ānic verses constitutes this blasphemous representation of the grotesque: it brings the sanctity of the holy verses to the level of defecation. In David Lawton's words, "[b]blasphemy extends not only to the name and nature of God, but to the representation of the divine" (45), and therefore "the criterion of blasphemy in these circumstances is rebellion pure and simple" (109). Blasim's fiction is characterised by the use of blasphemy and a profane attitude towards all that is sacred, and his profanation is tied to the body as in the representation of religious symbols in 'The Wolf' and 'The Iraqi Christ', and 'The Truck to Berlin', discussed above, and of motherhood in the 'The Goat's Son', also discussed above. In *Profanations*, Giorgio Agamben writes that profanation

neutralizes what it profanes. Once profaned, that which was unavailable and separate loses its aura and is returned to use. Both are political operations: the first guarantees the exercise of power by carrying it back to a sacred model; the second deactivates the apparatus of power and returns to common use the spaces that power had seized. (77)

Blasim's grotesquery, then, desacralises the social totems and hysterically celebrates the sufferings of the body, as the final scenes of the story show. A sound is heard followed by a violent noise of movement coming out of the truck. Blasim creates an almost cosmic moment with sound and visual effects to lay the ground for the birth of the monster:

When the policemen opened the back door of the truck, a young man soaked in blood jumped down from inside and ran like a madman towards the forest. [...] As soon as the man reached the forest he started to run on all fours, then turned into a grey wolf, before he vanished ... (965)

Behind him, in the truck

there were thirty-four bodies. They had not been torn apart with knives or any other weapon. Rather it was the claws and beaks of eagles, the teeth of crocodiles and other unknown instruments that had been at work on them. The truck was full of shit and piss and blood, livers ripped apart, eyes gouged out, intestines just as though hungry wolves had been there. Thirty-four young men had become a large soggy mass of flesh, blood, and shit. (958)

There are two elements of the grotesque body employed here, the first one is the persistent use of atrocities, defecation and detailed materiality of the body, typical of Blasim's work. The second, is the transformation into a non-human being. The metamorphosis from human

into animal cited above, as Bakhtin shows, is one of the most ancient forms of the grotesque (316). It brings the human and non-human into one being, and it also eliminates the frontier between good and evil; sane and insane; perpetrator and victim, and oneself and its other – at the same time disrupting the idea of a body as a coherent, single unity: the body is what it suffers.

Aesthetically, the young man's transformation into a wolf manifests other elements of the grotesque: those of cannibalism and the uncanny. Cannibalism, as Edwards and Graulund suggest, stages the body's materiality in its most crude and visible form, and "plays out, materially and figuratively, the integration of the self into the other, the other into the self, the abnormal into the normal" (7). Bakhtin finds images of material bodily fusion between devouring and devoured bodies, and of human and animal flesh "interwoven with those of the grotesque body" (279). The scene also provokes the effect of that which is "ambivalently abnormal", which Philip Thomson describes as a definition of the grotesque (27). As for the uncanny, although major theorists of the grotesque agree that it might not be a "necessary element of the grotesque" (Thomson 5),¹⁶⁰ the scene resides under this category in its Freudian sense. Freud defines the uncanny as the fear provoked by "nothing new or alien, but something established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (Freud et al. 634). The scene responds to the teaching from the Sermon on the Mount, 'beware of the wolf in sheep's clothing', only here we see the emotional process: the fear of becoming a rat has turned the young man into a wolf. The uncanniness of the young man's body lies in the unexpected yet somehow intuited violence he is capable of. It materialises the readers' shock as they follow this helpless yet hopeful victim who is in this tragic conundrum, which he got himself into in search for a better, more

¹⁶⁰ Thomson, Bakhtin and Kayser share the same view that the uncanniness of the grotesque is not always related to the Freudian definition of the word, see Thomson 5; Bakhtin 49; and Kayser 135–136.

humane life, only to be turned into the predator that the repressed orientalist fantasy expects him to be. His body's metamorphosis then is an image that evokes both the narrative of the war on terror which created the dichotomy of bodies – bodies to be saved and bodies to be doomed, which I discussed in the previous chapter – and, at the same time, the nationalist and religious narrative that imposed the horrors of poverty and dictatorship from which the young men are escaping. However, there is a more complex psychoanalytical dimension to this story, as it evokes two of Sigmund Freud's major cases, *The Ratman* and *The Wolfman*. Both are obsessive-compulsive neuroses developed at an early stage, which I shall not go into as they do not concern the representation of the body, but it is interesting to note that there is a further possibility to read into this story.

1.2 *The Corpse Washer*

Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer* (*Waḥdahā Shajaratū al-Rummān*) consists of a series of flashbacks which take place between the late 1970s and the sectarian killings in the late 2000s in Baghdad. It tells of the struggle of a young man, Jawad, who wants to become a sculptor but ends up unwillingly inheriting his father's profession, a washer of male corpses.¹⁶¹ The narrative structure swings between Jawad's memories and nightmares, which revolve around his failed romantic relationship, the corpse he washes and the violence seen on the streets and on television. Corpse washing before burial is a compulsory Islamic tradition; it follows a certain system with rituals, specific verses to be said out loud throughout the ceremony, specific architecture – though modest, consisting of a marble bench on which corpses are washed – and material to use for washing the corpse and for

¹⁶¹ In Islamic tradition and teachings, male corpse washers wash male bodies exclusively; female corpses are washed by female washers.

preparing it for its burial. The tradition might vary in some details between ‘*Sunnī*’ and ‘*Shī’ī*’ doctrines, but here the author chooses for his protagonist to be a ‘*Shī’ī*’ washer. The representation of the body in this novel plays a major role, since the interaction between Jawad and the corpses is the main conflict of this story. To begin with, on the washing bench Jawad is faced with all sorts of atrocities:

a bullet in the forehead, strangulation marks around the neck, knife stabs in the back, mutilation by electric drill, headless body, fragmentation caused by suicide bomb [...] I was on my way home one day when I realized that aside from Mahdi and my mother, I was living my days exclusively with the dead. (131)

Jawad does not only live ‘with the dead’ in the sense of their absence, their memories and the sorrow they leave behind, but also the dead human flesh exposed in its crudest materiality. The narration of this life among the dead is interrupted by Jawad’s nightmares in which these corpses, scenes of death and blood and the ‘*mghaysil*’,¹⁶² a washhouse or house-like building where corpse are washed, are central. The novel opens with the first nightmare where Jawad sees Reem, his sweetheart, lying on the ‘*mghaysil*’s’ marble bench asking him to wash her, which he is not authorised to do. Thus the novel opens with the grotesque ambivalence of a talking dead body. Jawad caresses Reem and suddenly hears a Humvee approaching rapidly from which masked armed men dressed in khaki descend and attack them:

None of them says a word. I am screaming and cursing them, but I can’t hear myself. Two men force me to get down on my knees and tie my wrists with a wire behind my back. One of them puts a knife to my neck; the other blindfolds me. I try to run

¹⁶² I use the spelling of this word as it appears in the English translation.

away, but they hold me tightly. I scream again but cannot hear my screams. I hear only Reem's shrieks, the laughter and grunts of the men, the sound of the rain.

I feel a sharp pain, then the cold blade of the knife penetrating my neck. Hot blood spills over my chest and back. My head falls to the ground and rolls like a ball on the sand. I hear footsteps. One of the men takes off my blindfold and shoves it into his pocket. He spits in my face and goes away. I see my body to the left of the bench, kneeling in a puddle of blood. [...] The same nightmare had been recurring for weeks with minor changes. Sometimes I saw Reem's severed head on the bench and heard her voice saying, "wash me, darling," but this was the first time there was rain. (2–3)

The grotesque body element is present in different forms: the talking dead body, the act of necrophilia suggested by the shrieks, laughter and grunts, and the severed head. All involve bodies that occupy the border between life and death, love and hate, violence and tenderness. Similarly, Jawad's nightmares expose images of slaughter (54, 135), pouring blood (54, 123) and corpses stacked on a conveyor belt with no water to wash them (75). Aside from his nightmares, Jawad's working days are also full of a rituality of horror. One day, sitting in the *'mghaysil'*, waiting for work, a man and his son bring in his other son's severed head in a black plastic bag. They want it to be washed and prepared for burial. The detailed description of the washing ritual (156–157) shows not only the emotional difficulty of washing a severed head, but also how it is physically challenging. For instance, Jawad's first dilemma is how to place the head on the washing bench; usually he and his assistant would carry the corpse and lay it on its back on the bench and both would flip the corpse to the sides to wash the back. With only a head, he says, "I tried to place it as if it were still attached

to its body, but it tilted to the side, and its cheek rested on the bench” (156). Jawad’s second dilemma was how to shroud the head:

I dried it and put cotton in the nostrils and a lot of cotton around the neck, but it kept falling off [...] I held the head with my left hand and put one end of the cloth at the top and pressed down on it with my other hand. I asked Mehdi to put wads of cotton on the neck and hold it in place. I tied the cloth around the neck and the head twice and then put it under the chin. He was all covered in white except for the closed eyes, nose, mouth and part of the cheeks. There was obviously no need for all three pieces of the shroud we usually use, so I just used a second one to wrap around the head and we tied it with a strap (157).

Other than the representativeness of the severed head in ‘*Shī‘ah*’ mythology, these details show how the sanctity of death and the dignity of the human body come together for Jawad with mundane mechanic activities such as solving incidental problems at work. He describes his third dilemma: “I was about to ask the old man whether they wanted a coffin, then I realized how silly that might sound. Mahdi was looking at me, waiting for my signal, so I pointed to the corner where the coffins are stacked” (157). The grotesque image of the severed head condenses the horror not merely of death, but rather the fear of losing oneself, since images of atrocities are often linked to the absurdity of violence, which at the same time shows the absurdity and the fragility of life. In *The Severed Head: Capital Visions* (2012), Julia Kristeva examines a historical review of literary and artistic representations of heads, suggesting that the image of the bodiless head or headless body evokes the fear of death that originates in the unconscious of the newly born in the absence of his or her mother, particularly her face (Kristeva *The Severed Head* 4–6), which is also linked to the threat of castration (17). Kristeva’s point makes sense in Jawad’s story: his dream of becoming a

sculptor is frustrated by his socioeconomic obligation to work in the ‘*mghaysil*’; in one way, Jawad feels castrated by the corpses he washes.

However, the artistic representation that calls for the contemplation of that horror sublimates this fear into a productive instrument. Kristeva writes that “slaughter turned to image assuages the violence” (*The Severed Head* 74) and Antoon’s novel – as Frances L. Restuccia suggests – indulges in all sorts of beheadings and physical and emotional atrocities in order to give meaning to the absurd violence Iraqis live through, and to give a way by which to channel the suffering (Restuccia 65–6). To this I add that the exhibition of atrocities, the expression of vulnerability – on the victim’s behalf – and the grotesque representation of the body are also aesthetic means of political positioning. The suffering body gives visibility to the victim’s narrative as opposed to perpetrator’s narrative or, as Judith Butler writes, “political resistance relies fundamentally on the mobilization of vulnerability” (“Rethinking Vulnerability” 15). This systematic staging of corporeal vulnerability, as we shall see at the end of this section, goes beyond artistic narrative of trauma.

For every anxiety and fear Jawad suffers, there is a bloody nightmare with a disintegrating body or a slaughterer or an aged man standing for it, all engaging a grotesque representation of the body – which leads the discussion to the question of symbolism. The title in the Arabic edition reads *The Pomegranate Alone*, which is the last line of the novel: “But no one knows. No one. The pomegranate alone knows” (184). It is a crucial metaphor for the whole story. The pomegranate is the only tree in the small garden of ‘*mghaysil*’, where the water that has washed the corpses flows slowly through a specific channel to the garden and waters it. During the waiting hours, Jawad spends the time contemplating or sketching the tree. He feels that the tree is a witness to the agony resulting from the tension

between his frustration and his moral obligation to wash the continuous flow of corpses. Hence the expression, ‘the pomegranate alone knows’: only the pomegranate knows both about death or hardship as it feeds on dead human bodies in Jawad’s *‘mghaysil’*, and about Jawad’s pain. The epigraph opening the novel is a line from the Qur’ān describing heaven: “In both gardens are fruit, palm trees, and pomegranates” (55:68). In the Arabic edition there is a second epigraph, a Ḥadīth that reads: “there is not one pomegranate without a grain of heaven’s pomegranates”. That is, every pomegranate has at least one grain of the pomegranates in heaven.

Moreover, in the corpse-washing cult, pomegranate or palm branches are placed next to the corpse before it is wrapped and buried, to ease the pain of torture in the grave on the dead (65). Accordingly, the water from the dead bodies watering the pomegranate suggests that these dead are going to heaven, and that death becomes life. This water washing the dead bodies and feeding the pomegranate, in a way, suggests that these bodies are transforming into the tree and every grain of this pomegranate is in fact one of the dead bodies in the Baghdad hell. In Bakhtin’s words:

In the grotesque body [...] death brings nothing to an end, for it does not concern the ancestral body, which is renewed in the next generation. The events of the grotesque sphere are always developed on the boundary dividing one body from the other and, as it were, at their points of intersection. One body offers its death, the other its birth, but they are merged in a two-bodied image. (322)

This is precisely the representational mechanism throughout the novel. The act of washing the corpse is the dividing boundary that brings the codified and inhibited bodies represented in their crude materiality into a new form of life, not merely by the act of transformation into the pomegranate but also by the presence of death itself. As the quote above indicates, the

presence of the corpse contains what Bakhtin calls an element of characterisation which is essential to the grotesque body. The description and ultimately the visibility of the corpse in the text plays a systematic and an affective role in representing the normalisation of horror and the transformation of the self as the dead become alive in the extent to which their presence interacts with and effects Jawad's life. In *The Corpse Washer*, death comes alive, almost as a setting or a character with personality and lines: "Death is not content with what it takes from me in my waking hours, it insists on haunting me even in my sleep. [...] I can almost hear death saying: 'I am what I am and haven't changed at all. I am but a postman'" (3). In fact, death, horror and anxieties seem to be the only aspects in the development of the novel; except for Jawad, all the characters seem to decay and be numbed by pain and sorrow as they suffer and suffer; they do not fight back or resist while death rules. Jawad's utmost fear is of being a corpse washer for the rest of his life and being unable to work on his dream of becoming a sculptor.

A dialectic is created between the fact that Jawad wants to sculpt, bringing stone to life, to living bodies, through art, and the fact that he is stuck in a job where once-living bodies are lifeless. This dialectic gives Jawad a sort of a purgatorial position in which he is working on dead flesh but hoping someday, he can bring stones into the state of living bodies. Ranjana Khanna reads this dialectic as a "necrophiliac desire" in the novel, arguing that Jawad's erotic touch "is shaped in fact through the mechanism of washing" (414) – citing the scene where Jawad washes Reem's hand after lunch and before intercourse. Khanna continues that "[t]ouching the corpse, or touching the sculpture-like inanimate object, would seem to confer animation on he who touches. [...] Derrida will draw out Aristotle's argument that we touch form not matter, and for Jawad, this means a necrophiliac erotic life and sculptural life-world" (416). Khan presents a strongly argued point, though strikingly fails at articulating a definition of necrophilia itself. She seems to locate the necrophiliac desire

at some level of collective *jouissance*, in which the global solidarity with the dead is somehow entangled in a metonymical structure of associations, which leads her to make a speculation that Antoon's novel is one of a "necrophiliac desire that is, perhaps, a symptom of contemporary global politics" (401). Critics and psychoanalysts do not agree on a single definition of necrophilia: Erich Fromm, for instance, saw necrophilia as fascination by destruction and "by all that is dead; to corpses, to decay, to faeces" (9), rather than the sexual arousal by the dead or death-related matters, which is the clinical condition for the classification of necrophilia.¹⁶³ The fact that Jawad is constantly associating his relationship to the corpses he has washed with the women he is involved with and with his desire to be a sculptor does not necessarily indicate a necrophiliac desire. If anything, I suggest rather that it is a form of biophilia – to use Fromm's term. Nevertheless, I believe Khanna's views on necrophiliac desire might be of use on the level of spectatorship, voyeurism and the reception of the novel – which I discuss in the following chapter, rather than in the metonymical structure of the novel itself.

Although necrophilia makes a precise example of the grotesque body – the accelerated, invigorating feeling of life generated by penetrating a dead body – I believe that the grotesque element in this novel is not clearly linked to the operation of sexual intercourse. Jawad finds inspiration in the work of the sculptor Alberto Giacometti; however, instead of being Giacometti (the creator), he seems to feel that he is becoming one of Giacometti's little grotesque sculptures as in the following nightmare:

One of Giacometti's statues lies on the washing bench. I assume I am meant to wash it. As I pour water over its tiny head, the sculpture dissolves into tiny fragments. I

¹⁶³ See Aggrawal's study, in which he shows ten classifications of necrophilia. All of them imply sexual engagement whether physical or fantasied.

put the bowl aside and try to pick up the pieces and repair the damage, but everything disintegrates in my hands (141).

The little sculpture dissolving in his hand is his dream of becoming an artist, his life wasted among the dead who are haunting both his dreams and his reality. Giacometti's little statues like *Homme Qui Marche* (1960), *Le Chien* (1957), *Groupe de Trois Hommes* (1943–1949), *Femmes de Venise* (1956), and similar works, are a manifestation of the grotesque themselves.¹⁶⁴ The hyperbolism and the striking materiality of bodies as represented in these statues characterise them as grotesque, particularly when taking into consideration the context in which they originally appeared.¹⁶⁵ Like Jawad's life, Giacometti's "new style projected an air of despair and loneliness. The frail scarred bodies he created reflected those of the survivors living in post war Paris" (Hohl). The loneliness and despair projected in Giacometti's works are also experienced by Jawad, who is also a survivor living in a post war, post invasion, post sanctions, and post dictatorship context. As Motyl and Arghavan observe, for Jawad, "Giacometti's sculptures embody what *bare life* might look like" (137), and his precarious life surrounded by corpses is represented in the skeletal fragility of Giacometti's creatures

This dialectic is presented in other unions of antipodes, not only life and death, but also beauty and horror, art and reality, dreams and awakenings, real and surreal. For instance, in one of Jawad's nightmares:

I see Reem standing in an orchard full of blossoming pomegranate trees. The wind moves the branches and the red blossoms appear to be waving from afar. Reem waves as well and her hands say: Come close! I walk toward her and call out her

¹⁶⁴ These sculptures are examined in Giacometti, 2000.

¹⁶⁵ Giacometti started creating these figures in the 1940s, after escaping the Nazi invasion of France. On Giacometti and grotesque aesthetics, see also Horsley, and HTDeco.

name, but I can hear neither my own voice nor the sound of my footsteps. All I hear is the wind rustling. Reem smiles without saying anything. I am much closer, and I see two pomegranates on her chest instead of her breasts. She notices that I am looking at them and smiles as she cups them with her hands from below. Her fingernails and lips are painted pomegranate red. I rush toward her, when I reach her and hug her, the left pomegranate falls to the ground. When I bend down to pick it up, I see red stains bathing my arm. I turn back and see Reem crying as she tries to stop the fountain of blood gushing from the wound. (123)

The image of the female standing in the orchard full of red blossoms evokes a combination of the biblical Song of Songs and the image of Eve in the Garden of Eden before eating the forbidden fruit.¹⁶⁶ Her smile while cupping the pomegranate-breasts from below suggests original sin, although, in the case of this particular narrative, it is not sin which expels the two lovers from heaven: after being diagnosed with cancer, Reem leaves Iraq for a mastectomy in better conditions than those available in post-invasion Iraqi hospitals. She never tells Jawad about it in person. She disappears and after months Jawad receives a letter explaining her absence and ending their engagement. Therefore, the pomegranates in the orchard scene stand for death and the tumour that defeats the presence of Eros. The same thing happens to Jawad with his second lover: “I would look at my hand after touching her breast and could not believe that a few hours later it would touch the body of another man. Her naked body started to flash in my mind as I washed, and often I felt guilty” (152). Jawad’s torment is this purgatorial state, in which he cannot live like the dead since images

¹⁶⁶ “Like a scarlet thread, your lips,/and your mouth is lovely./Like a slice of pomegranate, your cheek” (Song of Songs 4:3), see Exum, J. Chery 151.

of fertile, lively, loving women float in his mind while he is washing corpses, and in which he cannot enjoy the pleasures of love as his “heart is full of death” (153).

The Corpse Washer employment of grotesque corporeality is strikingly different from that in Hassan Blasim’s texts discussed above and from the different examples that follow. Antoon’s staging of horror, in all his novels, is inherently linked to the beauty of life and love. The grotesque element in this novel relies completely on the image of life infecting death and death generating life.

1.3 *Frankenstein in Baghdad*

Ahmed Saadawi’s novel is probably the most read, most translated and best received Iraqi novel of the past fifteen years. It has been translated into thirteen languages and has already been central in academic articles and dissertations, particularly concerning questions of the body and its representations. Reviewers and commentators focus on the powerful symbolism and metaphors in the novel, arguing that it masterfully describes the socio-political quandary and the administrative and security straits prevalent in the post-invasion period in Iraq. However, academic analysis finds a more philosophical and literary significance than is revealed by this focus on war trauma.

In a few words, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* narrates the creation and the life of the *Shismah*,¹⁶⁷ a creature made of a restless spirit looking for its body, and a body assembled

¹⁶⁷ *Shismah* is the central character’s name in Arabic, and it is the Iraqi dialectal word to say ‘what’s-its-mane’, an ordinary expression used among Iraqis to ask for someone’s or something’s name when not known or remembered. The translator of the English edition decided to translate the name Whatsitsname in this format to express its meaning. However, I shall use the italicised transliteration of the Iraqi expression in my analysis to maintain the enigmatic nature of the character and its peculiar identity, denoting both the unknown and how uncanny what is known can be. Furthermore, this enigmatic nature is intended to reflect the Iraqi identity, and, personally, I believe that using it is vital to give visibility to the importance of the Iraqi dialect in contemporary literature.

of the neglected body parts of dead Iraqi victims, sewn together by a junk dealer. The restless spirit has lost its body after a car bomb explosion that killed it while on duty, guarding a hotel gate in the city centre of Baghdad. The body parts are collected by the junk dealer after different car bomb explosions across the city. Hadi, the junk dealer starts to collect them and assemble the body after the traumatic experience of losing his friend, roommate and work partner, Nahem Abdaki, in another car bomb explosion. Nahem owned a horse cart. He and Handi used to take it around the city centre to collect unwanted domestic objects (22). The day Nahem dies, Hadi cannot not distinguish his friend's flesh from that of the horse (24). From the different body parts, left shattered after different explosions in Baghdad, Hadi builds the body "so it would be respected like other dead people and given a proper burial" (26). The lost spirit somehow finds its way to the decomposing sewn together corpse (39) and decides to use it in its mission to avenge its condition by killing those responsible for killing its parts (130). The genius twist in this plot is that, whether the revenge is fulfilled or not, after a certain time, the part to be avenged dissolves and the *Shismah* requires a replacement in order to be physically capable to fulfil his mission. Therefore, he needs more dead bodies. The situation complicates to the extent that injustice takes place in order to fulfil justice, and the *Shismah* moves from being a justice-seeker into a criminal.

Like Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) – evoked in Saadawi's title and creature – where elements of the grotesque are employed to materialise the horrors human nature is capable of (R. Evans 66), the grotesque element in the Iraqi novel ascends to a political, aesthetic and existential reading. The first encounter with the body of the *Shismah* is when the body is almost finished:

The rest of the shed was dominated by a massive corpse – the body of a naked man, with viscous liquids, light in colour, oozing from parts of it. There was only little

blood – some small dried patches on the arms and legs, and some grazes and bruises around the shoulders and neck. It was hard to say what the skin was – it didn't have a uniform colour. Hadi moved farther into the narrow space around the body and sat down close to the head. The area where the nose should have been was badly disfigured, as if a wild animal had bitten a chunk out of it. Hadi opened the canvas sack and took out the thing. In recent days he had spent days looking for one like it, yet he was still uneasy handling it. It was a fresh nose, still coated in congealed, dark red blood. His hand trembling, he positioned it in the black hole in the corpse's face. It was a perfect fit, as if the corpse had its own nose back. Hadi withdrew his hand, wiped his fingers on his clothes, and looked at the face with some dissatisfaction, but his task was now finished. Actually, it wasn't quite finished: he had to sew the nose in place. (25–26)

The idea of a corpse assembled of dismembered corpses fulfils the grotesque definition by relying on the hyperbolic image of the parts within the continuum of corporeality merging into each other: the body is in fact various bodies, its history is the history of different lives, families and circumstances. The present materiality of the body clearly indicates that it is a body in the making and in constant renewal. Its presence transcends its natural status, being pieces of flesh assembled into a decomposing corpse, to an active significance in which the corpse performs as an actual living character even when it is an immobile cadaver, which means that it is a body that generates other bodies. It is the extreme representation of the grotesque body because, as Bakhtin suggests, it does not present an individual body (318).

It is a grotesque body because it also brings the solemnity and sanctity of death down to the precarious life of a junk dealer; it converts the sacred creation of God into dark ugliness: "It's hard to believe God would create such a face" (85). Such a comment evokes

the Qur'ānic discourse on the creation of the human body. According to the Qur'ān, the human body is a miracle and a testimony of the creator's godhood (Jasim 44). The ugliness of the *Shismah*, on the other hand, proves nothing but the accumulated flesh of ungrievable lives, to use the Butler's term (*Frames of War* 31). The fact that the missing part is the nose and the use of the words "fresh nose", "perfect fit" and "some dissatisfaction" together indicate the ironic tone of the narration, which creates this space between laughter and horror or joy and disgust, proper of the carnivalesque grotesque. The setting of the novel is close to what Bakhtin describes as the culture of the marketplace, which "does not, generally speaking, belong to the sphere of art. It belongs to the borderline between art and life. In reality, it is life itself, but shaped according to a certain pattern of play" (7). Unlike *The Corpse Washer*, where fine arts and literature are beauties aspired by the ungrievable lives of Jawad and his lovers, Frankenstein in Baghdad is closer to the work of Hassan Blasim in focusing on chaos and those who thrive on it. The neighbourhood where the novel is set is the material representation of this chaos, both in reality and in fiction: right at the centre of Baghdad where the statue of Saddam Hussein was pulled down on April 9th 2003, the al-Bataween neighbourhood is the centre of insecurity, corruption, hotels, with the Harj flea market, prostitution, drugs, fools, junk dealers and helpless old people. One can almost hear the noise coming from this setting, where the *Shismah* was created. The grotesque body of the *Shismah*, then, engages in its corporality the historic-allegorical interpretation of the lives and the state of affairs of this period of Iraqi history, which means, again, that the grotesque body swallows its world and is being swallowed by it (Bakhtin 317).

The body of the *Shismah* and the way in which it is assembled establishes the central ideas around which the novel develops: first, the appalling atrocities of the invasion and sectarian killing that transgress the limits of reality; second, the body – being sewn of different dismembered cadavers – represents the plurality of the Iraqi national identity and

its economic, social, ethnic and religious diversity; third, it expresses the obvious belief that violence can only produce violence. Fourth, somehow it gives the message that it is the responsibility of Iraqis to establish social justice. However, the American-led occupation made any such project impossible by destroying the Iraqi state and establishing a sectarian, racist, and misogynist parliament that dissolved the Iraqi army and police and handed the country's security to sectarian militias, which led to absolute administrative and security chaos. Finally, it reveals the emotional and psychological catastrophes that Iraqis live through.

Like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the corporality and ugliness of the *Shismah* is central to the story. However, there is an unclear stand on monstrosity; that is, in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the word "monster" is used thirty-two times to refer to the creature that Victor Frankenstein has created. In the English translation of *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, the word "monster" is used only nine times to refer to the *Shismah* and coincides only five times with the Arabic text where the word 'wāḥsh' is used.¹⁶⁸ Throughout the translation the *Shismah* is referred to by different words. Occasionally it is referred to as a "criminal" (78, 82, 85, 112, 122, 125, 132, 211, 216) or as "Criminal X" – with a capital C (209, 250, 258, 262, 270, 278). On other occasions, he is referred to as "Frankenstein's monster" (170) or simply "Frankenstein" (264, 265, 271). However, most of the time in the Arabic text or the English, it is referred to as "Whatsitsname" or "Who Has No Name" – with capital initials. Then, towards the very end of the novel, the *Shismah* is strikingly referred to as "man" (278).

While Shelley's *Frankenstein* shows a deep concern for the notion of monstrosity as a critique of materialist thought (Burkett 600), *Frankenstein in Baghdad* seems to be more concerned with the human nature that can be located in monstrosity. In fact, in the Arabic

¹⁶⁸ The Arabic word literally means "Monster" in English.

text the expressions “strange human being” and “Frankenstein(ian) being” appear on the book’s back cover and the word “person” is used on different occasions to describe the *Shismah*. I believe that while Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* treats the creature’s monstrosity and ugliness as by-products of human greed, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* does not present the *Shismah* as the ugly monster but, rather, it is the political and administrative power that leads to its creation. The narrator clearly states that as he dwells on the identity of the *Shismah*

the spokesman for the US State Department said he was an ingenious man whose aim was to undermine the American project in Iraq. But what project might that be? As far as Brigadier Majid was concerned, the monster itself was their project. It was the Americans who were behind this monster. (267–8)

Accordingly, *Frankenstein* presents Dr. Victor Frankenstein as a person who has unintentionally created a monster, while *Frankenstein in Baghdad* suggests that it is the discourse of the war on terror, which led to the invasion of Iraq, that purposely created the monster; therefore, the occupation is the monster. In this regard, there is a difference among critics concerning how *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is related to Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Scholar Bushra Juhi Jani affirms that “*Frankenstein in Baghdad*, as Saadawi said, was not an adaptation of Shelley’s work” (324, emphasis added). On the other hand, Sinéad Murphy refers to it as an adaptation of Shelley’s creature (4, 12), and Ola Abdelkafor calls it a “Frankenstein-like monster” (1). I agree with Haytham Bahoora, who writes that

Sa‘dawi’s use of a literary monster in his novel *Frankenstein in Baghdad* rewrites the canonical literary monster of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* as an Iraqi monster, stitched together from the dismembered bodies of Iraqis and reanimated as a symbol

of the murderous past rising to intervene in the present. (“Writing Dismembered Nation” 188) ¹⁶⁹

However, Bahooora does not elaborate on the meaning of rewriting, which I believe is vital to understanding this tendency not only in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, but also in contemporary Iraqi fiction in general: to return to the classics, the universal and Arabic literary canon.¹⁷⁰ To define rewriting, I build on Cristian Moraru’s description of the concept as “both a symptom and an active instrument” (9) of the postmodern critique of literary and historical narratives and their constructions of selfhood. Moraru explains:

Rewriting continues to have “indicial” value and, as such, speaks to the increasingly multicultural positionings of our time’s rewrites. From these very locations they “wage” rewriting to polemically “update” a “familiar story”. To do so, they usually take on the representation of race, gender, or class in the “model” story and alter it, or [...] other it from “marginal” standpoints. It is in this sense that rewriting carries out a complex critical rereading of the rewritten narrative, fulfilling interpretive, aesthetic, as well as ideological and political functions. (9)

Rewriting, then, is to approach canonical texts from the margins of *Weltliteratur* to decentralise the canon and its attributes by bringing the margins to the centre. What Saadawi’s text does is to establish dialectical dwelling upon the position from which monstrosity is being written and from which margins are being established. Accordingly, *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, I argue, although it is widely read as a novel of war and sectarian

¹⁶⁹ Transliteration as appears in Bahooora’s article.

¹⁷⁰ As discussed in the introduction, many Iraqi authors establish a dialectical correspondence between their texts and canonical literature. For instance, ‘Abd al-Hādī Sa‘doun’s *Memoirs of an Iraqi Dog* establishes an intertextual relationship with Cervantes’s *El Coloquio de los perros*; Hassan Blasim’s *The Nightmare of Carlos Fuentes* – from *The Madman of Freedom Square* – evokes Fuentes’s *La muerte la Artemio Cruz*; Blasim’s “The Truck to Berlin” reminds the reader of Kanafani’s *Men in the Sun*; Dīyā’ Jubāīlī’s *Mādhā Naf’ al Bidūn Calvino* (What We Do Without Calvino) borrows elements of fantastic literature and narrative turns from the works of Italo Calvino; Ali Bader’s *Papa Sartre* develops a critique of existentialism; and so on.

violence trauma, is also a novel replete with postmodern and anticolonial critique of Western discourses, as well as supporting a reading geared towards the construction of the Iraqi self, and a representation of the failed national project (Bahooora, "Writing Dismembered Nation" 196). The novel, in fact, never mentions Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, except in the epigraph. It rather refers to the Kenneth Branagh *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994) film adaptation (139), and it is referred to as a "Robert De Niro film" (19). According to the plot, it is plausible that a drunk Iraqi junk dealer would get the horrid story of stitching a corpse together from watching the movie rather than from reading a nineteenth-century classic. Nevertheless, this shows the distance between the literary canon and the values it represents, and the reality of those who are to be saved by these values. It shows the distance between Dr. Victor Frankenstein's insatiable desire to play God, and Hadi Al-Attag's ambition to dignify his best friend's death by giving him a decent burial, so that his corpse "wouldn't be treated as rubbish, so it would be respected like other dead people and given a proper burial" (25). It shows how the materialist, rational, scientific discourse that situates the life of 'man' on the top of all forms of existence causes other 'men' to be treated like rubbish.

The body of the *Shismah*, then, synthesises a human being's desire to be treated as a human being. The grotesque representation of the body, once more, expresses a rejection and a protest of human being against his or her condition. By not alluding to Mary Shelley's novel but rather to a "recycled" version of it, Saadawi's novel establishes a position from which to "write back" to notions of monstrosity and to dwell upon deep philosophical questions such as the meaning of life and death, margins and centres.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ This is to echo the title, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature* (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, editors.), as well as Salman Rushdie's article, 'The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance' (1982).

Other readings of *Frankenstein in Baghdad* ignore the element of the grotesque and focus more on notions of biopolitics in the novel. Annie Webster, for instance, suggests that this novel challenges tales of biomedical salvation which were constructed around the invasion of Iraq (439). She builds on Jennifer Terry's views regarding biomedical logic in the discourse of the wars on Iraq and Afghanistan, suggesting that *Frankenstein in Baghdad* uses the same logic of biomedical salvation only to give visibility to those bodies neglected by those myths of salvation (445). The metaphor of a body sewn together from different Iraqi bodies and fighting for justice can certainly be understood as the unity that might bring healing to the Iraqi wounds (Dewachi). Indeed, there is a critique of "Western" medical and scientific discourse in the novel; however, this reading limits the interpretation of the *Shismah* to the postcolonial gothic, discussed earlier.

Sinéad Murphy suggests that the *Shismah* and the circumstances in which he was created allegorise a complex entanglement between the precariousness of an ontological condition and the systematic political precarisation in which Iraqis are silenced victims (Murphy 284), a reading that comes very close to the analysis provided above; yet it does not contemplate the grotesque body as an aesthetic instrument by which to fulfil this political reading. On the other hand, Ola Abdalkafor shows that in both novels, the creature is a manifestation of the *Homo sacer* as defined by Giorgio Agamben, arguing that

Homo sacer, the outlaw or monster is unprotected by human laws and, simultaneously, cannot be subjected to these laws. The creators either lose control over their monsters or just abandon them on purpose. This is clear not only in Shelley's text but also in Sadaawi's. (Abdalkafor 13)

What Abdalkafor forgets in her analysis is that the creator in the case of *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is by no means a sovereign subject. Unless we agree with Saadawi's narrator and

with Abdalkafor that the ultimate responsibility for the creation of the monster lies with the American-led occupation itself, then we cannot think of the *Shismah* as an outlaw; and if it were true that the *Shismah* is the *Homo sacer*, the question is then raised of how to define Hadi in legal terms. Let us not forget that both Frankenstein's creature and the *Shismah* commit the crimes of murdering innocent people whose lives do not serve as a direct revenge, which means that both experience an act of sovereignty over their victims. According to Agamben:

What defines the status of *homo sacer* is therefore not the originary ambivalence of the sacredness that is assumed to belong to him, but rather both the particular character of the double exclusion into which he is taken and the violence to which he finds himself exposed. This violence – the unsanctionable killing that, in his case, anyone may commit – is classifiable neither as sacrifice nor as homicide, neither as the execution of a condemnation to death nor as sacrilege. (52)

Although both Frankenstein's creature and the *Shismah* apply to this status, both, also, understand justice in a proper sense and they issue to themselves the right to act upon it, which makes them sovereign subjects, because it is within the faculties of the sovereign to decide what is in and outside its law (17). Therefore, it can be said that the body of the *Shismah* is like a community of *homo-sacer*-fragmented individuals, those whose killing is unclassifiable and unpunishable, like the lives of Hadi and his friend, as well as thousands of Iraqi lives. Bushra Juhi Jani gives another interesting reading of the novel, focusing on the question of violence, thinking via Julia Kristeva's concept of The Abject. This is a concept which is central to the formulation of the body in contemporary Iraqi fiction. Jani argues that the brutality of violence has turned Iraqi bodies into waste and garbage, and that forms of brutalities, atrocities, waste and loss of human sanctity are all forms of Abject (Juhi

Jani 324). However, the idea of waste or uncleanness is only a partial understanding of the Subject as detailed in Kristeva's work *Powers of Horror* (1982); besides it ignores Kristeva's understanding of the grotesque as a grey area, as the "interface between abjection and fascination" (204), which echoes the Bakhtinian concept of the grotesque.

The idea of the body as a policeman, a justice maker or a vigilante finds its roots in the Qur'ān. The human body is employed as an instrument of surveillance; body parts are to speak at the day of the final Judgement to tell of the body's sins, as discussed in chapter II.¹⁷² A similar idea can be read in the body of the *Shismah*: body parts take up consciousness and accuse the responsible for their dismemberment and death. The weight of the transcendental ideological preoccupation that Iraqis give to the masculine body as an instrument and stage of political anxieties in an anticolonial context is still present in this novel. Nevertheless, it seems that they have overcome the sexual crises and the instrumentalization of the female body to project these political anxieties – as will be discussed in the section 'Regendered Bodies'.

1.4 Al-Tashahhī

'Āliyah Mamdūh's novel presents another employment of the body in which the grotesque element makes for an even clearer case. Like other contemporary Iraqi fictional texts and most of 'Āliyah Mamdūh's works, the presence of the body as an epistemological tool is central. The novel is a constant backwash of memories that narrate the life of Sarmad Burhān al-Dīn, an exiled Iraqi translator who lives in London. However, different sections of the novel are narrated by other characters: Yūsuf, Sarmad's friend and doctor in Paris; Kita, Sarmad's German communist lover; and al-Bayḍāwīyah, his Moroccan lover; and Alif, the

¹⁷² More analysis on the qur'anic description of talking body parts, see Jasim, 2012.

Iraqi love-of-his-life. There is one single event that triggers all these voices which narrate the memories which make up the novel: Sarmad's gradual penis atrophy and disappearance. Reviews in Arabic popular journalism, collected by the author's website, agree that the penis atrophy or its complete disappearance is a metaphor for the fallen Iraqi state after the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.¹⁷³ However, these readings expose the phallogentric and heteronormative understanding of the self, as discussed in chapter II. Not only do they see authority in the act of penetration, but they also imply that there is a lack of selfhood in the inability to penetrate. Such a metaphor expresses the supremacy of the inherited nationalist discourse, which configured a national identity in the image of the virile Arab male. Moreover, such interpretation ignores if not misreads the novel's articulation of the problem of the disappearing phallus. The readings by Arab authors and critics are juxtaposed with those of feminist readers such as Hélène Cixous, who wrote personal note to the author regarding the French translation of the novel in which she writes: "It is beyond all what contemporary literature suggests. It is a revolutionary moment in itself, a moment to strike in the true sense of the word. Yes, it is without restraints, liberated, daring, and very funny. We laugh as we read it an astonished laughter".¹⁷⁴

The novel opens with Sarmad sitting at the Pakistani doctor's clinic,¹⁷⁵ hoping to understand his condition while the doctor laughs hysterically at it during the examination. This scene recalls Ian McEwan's *Saturday*, when Henry Perowne examines the Iraqi professor – discussed in the previous chapter. In both scenes, an Iraqi is laughed at under

¹⁷³ See Moḥamad Baradah's and Ra'ūf Mus'ad's reviews which support the phallogentric reading of the novel. Both reviews are cited by Abou El Naga and can be accessed through the author's website.

¹⁷⁴ From the Author's website:

http://www.alghulama.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1888:2022-02-01-11-03-58&catid=59:mutabatthakfa&Itemid=79v

" أبعد من كل ما يمكن أن يقترحه الأدب الراهن. إنه، في حد ذاته، لحظةٌ ثوريّة، وقتٌ للعصف، بالمعنى الحقيقي للكلمة. نعم، إنه بلا قيود، مُتحرّر، جريء، وطريف للغاية. نضحك أثناء قراءته ضحكةً مندهشة."

¹⁷⁵ I find it difficult to find a suitable interpretation of the fact that the doctor is Pakistani other than to show the cultural diversity in Sarmad's life, which is crucial to the novel's central issues.

medical examination; one is narrated from the ‘foreign’ doctor’s perspective, and the other is narrated from the ‘Exiled-Iraqi-intellectual’ patient’s perspective. In *Saturday*, the Iraqi is described as “a man of a slight, almost girlish build” (61), and in *al-Tashahhī*, the doctor is rudely amused by Sarmad’s disappearing penis: “his laughter went louder like sea waves come higher and then quickly lower, it made his nostrils open to their extremes and his eyes got smaller and smaller, then he produced strange sniffles”, says Sarmad describing the doctor’s attitude (5).¹⁷⁶ Iraqi men under examination, ridiculed by ‘foreign’ medical discourse requires a further discussion, as other contemporary texts also engage with such encounters; but this is not within the scope of this research. For the time being, focusing on Sarmad, the doctor decides that the reason behind his condition is physiological, owing to his acquired obesity (17). Sarmad had started gaining weight during his years of exile; he developed a fixation with food, both in the linguistic and the Freudian senses of the word; he gets sexual pleasure from eating and dwelling upon food. The novel suggests that both obesity and penis atrophy are psychological reactions to the traumatic exposure to sexual abuse, repression, wars, exile, and the poor capacity of administrating one’s emotions.

From the very first page in the novel, Bakhtin’s recipe for the grotesque element is methodically fulfilled: The face, particularly the nose, Bakhtin suggests are classic grotesque elements (316), and it is no coincidence that the image of the dilating nostrils – mentioned above – takes place precisely when the doctor is looking at Sarmad’s disappearing penis. The nose and the laughter in the scene recall Giacometti’s *The Nose* (1949), and Gogol’s story also titled *The Nose* (1836), where the employment of the nose generates a sinister laughter which is linked to cultural discourse and grotesque realism (Bakhtin and Sollner 36). As Bakhtin confirms, the relation between the nose and the penis is historically universal

¹⁷⁶ "تعالنت ضحكته على شكل تموجات البحر تملو ثم سرعان ما تتخفص مما جعل منخريه ينتفخان الى آخرهما، فضاقت عيناه وتبع ذلك بعض الشبهات الغريبة."

in almost all languages, and it basically suggests that the nose symbolises the phallus (87; 316). Therefore, being examined by a physician implies there is another discourse questioning the discourse of selfhood that Sarmad has built for himself; therefore, the more Sarmad's penis disappears the bigger the doctor's phallus gets. Moreover, the novel sizzles with images and metaphors of the body and its senses in relation to food. Sarmad lives cognitive experiences through these senses, his perception of himself and of others is based on what he physically feels and eats (*al-Tashahhī* 110).

The grotesque representation of the body involves two important questions, genitalia and obesity – both of which are discussed by Bakhtin as components of the grotesque body throughout Chapter Five of his book, 'The Grotesque Image of the Body and its Sources'. In addition, both are crucially related to the perception of selfhood in terms of value to size and rendition, translating knowledge into behaviour and performance into knowledge. Sarmad's body shows how corporality – obesity and genital atrophy in this case – inflicts marginalisation. His body knots together two critiques: the conditions that lead to the emergence of that body, and the conditions in which such body exists once it is made – excluded and marginalised – and it is in the grotesque representation of the body where these issues are materialised.

The grotesque representation of the body becomes even clearer when the narration gets to the almost psychedelic passages of Sarmad's dwelling upon his despair. I use the term 'psychedelic' to describe Sarmad's long interior monologues in which he dwells upon food (savour, texture, smells and ingredients); sexual intercourse (fantasies, positions, sensations, fluids, touch, thought); and on his own body with its fat, sweat, irritated skin, discoloured hair, and flaccid muscles. He narrates in a style that is similar to what Jerry

Mosher describes as “male hysteria”, a sort of existential crisis that Mosher names a “masculinity crisis”. He relates this crisis to obesity:

The fat and flaccid male body proved to be a handy visual metaphor for the impotent exercise of patriarchal power . . . large and *vulnerable*, the fat male body became a recognizable symbol of insecure male performativity, its phallic potential buried under folds of flesh. (Mosher qtd. in Harker 991)

The contrast between Sarmad’s penis and the doctor’s nostrils clearly indicates an expression of asymmetrical confrontation between virility and the lack of it; but it also shows a political understanding of vulnerability versus power, not merely that he is losing his place in the patriarchal hierarchy, especially when Sarmad remarks:

His behaviour is proper of a man whose penis is still in its utmost perfection [...] he points his fingers in a way full of meanings inspired by my miserable condition. Then, I notice something there, as if standing, erecting still under his pants, something genius, it can make even a corpse move. The thing is, my doctor had a sense of humour that I didn’t appreciate, like when he grabs his penis to tease and threaten me with it, just to let me know that his was alive, throbbing with blood and power more than me. (6)¹⁷⁷

Sarmad feels insecure and restless about not fitting into any structure. He is not merely intimidated by another’s man’s penis; he is threatened by medical discourse itself:

Both bodies and the language used by patients to describe their health are offered up for diagnosis and understanding. It is therefore a social process: texts, like bodies

¹⁷⁷ "أنه يقوم بكل هذه التصرفات كما يليق برجل لا يزال عضوه في تمام الاكتمال. (...) دس يديه الاثنتين بجيبتي سرواله وبدأ يسير امامي بطريقة بطيئة جداً وهو يدل ويشير بهما، مرة على شكل قبضة يد وتارة يستخدم الإصبعين بحركات لا تخلو من معنى مأخوذ من وضعيتي المزرية، فالأحظ شيئاً هناك كأنه قائم يزداد انتصاباً من تحت سرواله، شيئاً عبثياً يحرك الجثة حتى. والحال، طبيبي كان يملك نوعاً من الدعابة التي لم استلطفها، كأن يمسك عضوه بيده ليغيظني ويتوعدني به، ليقول فقط، إنه حيّ ونابض بالدم والقوة أكثر مني."

and minds, can be interpreted in different ways; there are always conversations to be had, counter interpretations to be offered. A crucial question in medicine (similar to questions about authorial intent and reader response) relates to whose interpretation should be prioritized — doctor's or patient's? Both are “reading” the body and the mind of the sufferer, but with different vantage points, presumptions, and authority. (M. Turner 1)

Sarmad is aware of this authority, and he feels judged by and laughed at by it. However, it is not exactly clear, in the novel, whether the doctor is in fact openly blunt and rude or whether it is Sarmad's interpretation or hallucinations caused by the enormous fear of losing his penis and the emotional crisis that this loss suggests. Moreover, there is an unclear usage of quotation marks in the dialogues where the doctor's words and Sarmad's thoughts are confused:

I don't want to hear about it, I know these stories. But tell me what kind of a craving is it that you can't avoid? What inspiration? what gluttony that gets hold of you? [...] why didn't you die? There is nothing for you but death, you were meant to die [...] Your penis got rid of you, it is not a joke [...] Eat, my friend, because you can't do anything but eat. Food makes you happy so you could accept harm and cruelty. I swear you eat in your sleep; your mouth is open, and your finger moves around feeling your friend. You see it in your sleep and think of it lying there on Tashrib trays full of thighs and shanks and thick fatty broth which sticks to your glasses and

clouds your sight as you scream with ecstasy so that everyone hears you ... isn't that right, dear? (8–9)^{178 179}

Sarmad imagines that these are the verbalised words of the doctor's inner thoughts as these open quotation marks close after Sarmad resumes the narration in the first person. He feels genuinely threatened to the extent that, at the end of his appointment with the doctor, he says "Doctor Hakīm stood up as if preparing to hit me, he put his arm around my shoulder, he stirred me with that move, so I had to stand up" (16).¹⁸⁰ Sarmad feels physically threatened. He admits that the doctor is right, that he loves food as much as sex (9). The image of *Tashrīb* evokes the gathered hands taking soaked bread and meat to the eating wet mouths, and the combination of food and genitalia in this sarcastic tone intensify, or rather, embody the grotesque element as they combine the upper stratum with the lower stratum, as Bakhtin suggests, happiness with repulsiveness, pleasure with suffering, and the human with the monstrous. Such thoughts materialise Sarmad's gelotophobia.

Research shows that individuals who have lived prolonged threatening experiences are more likely to feel threatened by ambiguous situations (Boda-Ujlaky and Séra 94). Sarmad's memories show that he undergoes a serious ordeal in his youth in Baghdad: his brother, Muhanad, who represents the ba'athist regime in the story, threatens him and tells him to leave the country. Muhanad forcibly marries Ālif,¹⁸¹ the woman Sarmad is in love with, and sexually abuses Sarmad's friend, Yūsuf. Taking refuge in London, Sarmad works

¹⁷⁸ "لا أريد سماع أية قصة من القصص إياها فأنا أعرفها. لكن، أسمع أيّ تشبة لا تستطيع تجنبه، ها، قل لي أرجوك؟ أيّ الهام، وأيّ نهيم للأكل يمسك بك (...). لماذا لم تمت؟ ولا حلّ كان أمامك إلا الموت، أنت أصلاً كنت مخصّصاً للموت. (...). عضوك الكريم تخلّص منك وها أنا لا أمزح معك (...). كلّ يا صديقي لأنك لا تقوى إلا على هذا. الطعام يُدخل السرور عليك فتستطيع تقبّل الأذية والقساوة. أقسم أنك تأكل في منامك، فمك منفرج وأصابعك تدور بين الفروج وأنت تتحسّس صاحبك، تراه في المنام وتحسبه ممدداً في صواني التشريب المحشوة بالأفخاذ والزنود، المرق النخين الدسم الذي كان يلتصق بعويناتك الطيبة من الخارج فيزوغ بصرك فلم تعد ترى ويتعالى صوتك باللذة ليسمعه الجميع.. أليس كذلك يا عزيزي؟"

¹⁷⁹ 'Tashrīb' is a traditional Iraqi dish consisting of bread soaked in broth and big chunks of meat with bone and legumes spread on top of it. It is a main dish known for being heavy and fatty. It usually eaten by hand, off a large round tray which people gather around.

¹⁸⁰ "وقف الدكتور حكيم وكأنه يستعدّ لضربي، وضع يده حول كتفي، استقرّتني تلك الحركة فاضطررت للوقوف."

¹⁸¹ The name of the woman Sarmad loves, which is also the first letter of the Arabic alphabet.

as a translator in extremely precarious conditions, where he is not even allowed to have his name on the works he translates. In his early youth, in his first sexual encounter with a woman, he was sexually abused by his female British teacher who was working at the British Council in Baghdad. This is the first time this affair between Sarmad and his teacher, Viona, has been referred to as abuse. I qualify it as abuse because Sarmad was only sixteen and Viona forty at the time. She seduces him and takes him to her house; their encounter is deliberately repeated. Viona is aware that she was engaging in a sexual relationship with a minor under the age of consent.¹⁸² At the end of the section in which Sarmad narrates his story with Viona, he describes her as a “pest” that feeds on young boys’ and young men’s meat (44).¹⁸³ Even though Sarmad is unconsciously aware of Viona’s abuse, his narrative is not one of victimisation; on the contrary, it is more one of a nostalgia awakened by passionate memories. He seems to be attempting to explain that he acquired the fixation that links the pleasures of sex with food from his sexual encounters with Viona. For instance, when Viona first seduced him, the first thing she uttered was: “Do you like pistachios?” (31).¹⁸⁴ She took him home on the premise of giving him pistachios. On another occasion, Sarmad explains that he had never understood the meaning of the word “eros” in English, until after many eventful encounters with her. He narrates:

I thought it [eros] was a tasty Scottish dish that Viona would cook for me one day, and it would have the famous Scottish lamb, or beef, or liver meat soaked in cinnamon, herbs and green rosemary. I told her that once as if I was telling my

¹⁸² According to the Iraqi civil code issued in 1959, the age of consent is eighteen years old. Last consulted January 25th, 2020. From the Iraqi Supreme Court website: <http://iraql.d.hjc.iq:8080/LoadLawBook.aspx?SC=010320061162736>

¹⁸³ "أفة"

¹⁸⁴ "هل تحب الفستق؟"

mother, while she was budging between my thighs: "This is today's dish." She answered (41).¹⁸⁵

The sarcastic twist of thinking the word 'eros' a greasy Scottish dish is a grotesque representation of the body, and thus the grotesque element is not only embodied through obesity and impotence. The subtle sarcasm intended in the quotation materialises the comic element in the structure of the grotesque.

Obesity started only in exile, where "kilograms of meat started to refill what I was hiding of alienation and monstrosity, my skin started to peel off sometimes like dandruff, small atoms of dandruff which I remove as I look at them and smile ..." (13).¹⁸⁶ Sarmad describes his own body with expressions like "deformities" and "flabbiness"; he says that "my nose started to look like a thick beak" (14);¹⁸⁷ he refers to the "hugeness of [his] body" and its "antagonising shape" (17).¹⁸⁸ He also describes his penis with the word "ageing" and says that it was "copulating for nothing, for the emptiness and disappearance, for the others, not for me" (17).¹⁸⁹ Sarmad clearly confuses sexual pleasure with the pleasure of companionship and affection and now that he is unable to have intercourse, he panics. More importantly still, Sarmad shows symptoms of self-loathing; he is ashamed of his body, and he expresses guilt in relation to it; he is aware that he has fattened himself in order to fill a void that he is unable to identify. He calls it "alienation" and "monstrosity" (13).¹⁹⁰

185 "تصوّرتُ الكلمة أكلة أسكتلندية لذيذة سوف تطبخها فيونا وتتكوّن من لحم الخروف المشهورة به وديان بلدها. أو من العجل أو الكبد المنقوعة بالدارسين والأعشاب البرية والزنجبيل الأخضر. قلت لها في أحد الأيام ذلك كما لو كانت أمي وهي تتود بين فخذي: "هذا هو صحن اليوم". هكذا أجابت."

186 "بدأت كيلو غرامات اللحم تتردم جميع ما كنت أداريه من وحشة ووحشية، فكان جلدي في بعض الأحيان يتقشر، تتساقط منه كما قشرة الرأس، ذرّت أزيحها وأنا أنظر إليها وأبتسم ..."

187 "أنفي، صار يشبه منقاراً غليظاً"

188 "ضخامة بدني" "شكلاً معادياً"

189 "فظهر لي أنّ عضوي المسنّ كان يجمع من أجل اللاشيء، من أجل الفراغ والتلاشي، من أجل الآخرين، لا من أجلي أنا."

190 "وحشة ووحشية"

Research in psychology shows that male survivors of child abuse report “high levels of self-loathing and self-blame” (Crete and Singh 347), and other studies show the possibility that self-loathing is related to obesity, eating disorders, and migration.¹⁹¹ Moreover, psychoanalyst Karim G. Dajani shows that, in fact, being dislocated from one’s own culture has a profound impact on ego functions, as it alters the individual’s perception and causes serious pathologies such as “depression, alienation, confusion, excessive anger, frustration and other intense negative emotions” (18). He explains:

Dislocation is a serious loss that needs to be mourned. However, mourning the effects of dislocation is often complicated by difficulty in conceptualizing the loss. And when mourning is disrupted, the patient is likely to suffer from melancholia. A common resistance to the resolution of melancholia in dislocated individuals is the presence of a pernicious sense of self-loathing whose origins are deeply unconscious. (25–6)

Therefore, Sarmad’s grotesque body translates a range of human suffering into physical symptoms. Being sexually abused by his teacher is like being verbally abused by his older brother, who represents the repressive ba‘thist state. The brother’s sexual abuse of ‘alif and Yūsuf is equally inflicted on him. His cultural dislocation, his body, his precariousness and his loneliness are interwoven into his anxiety as he watches the 2003 invasion from a weight-loss clinic in Paris, where he suffers a nervous breakdown. Sarmad was neither aware of nor had the mechanisms to overcome these emotional quandaries or to mourn his losses.

Throughout the narration, the grotesque representation of the body accentuates notions of being an object of ridicule. Additionally, Sarmad is deeply terrified of not being

¹⁹¹ See Aoun, Joundi, and El Gerges, whose study examine eating disorders among refugees; and Aruguete, Alayne, Edman, whose study examine the links between self-loathing and eating disorders.

loved again. His trip to Paris is highly significant as it shows the impossibility of love for a person like him: even in the “city of love” he cannot be healed, because the memories of his traumatic experience are incrustated in his soul, like fat piled under his skin. However, his utmost fear, I suggest, is the fear of not knowing himself, or rather not being able to identify himself. Sarmad’s crisis lies in the fact that he has lost the ideal image of himself:

I want to know when I was really an Iraqi, and when it was necessary for me not to be that, and not even to consider it. The thing is, it wouldn’t work to be Iraqi anymore [...] what I need to do is to tear up that country and pull myself out of it and discover the reasons of its biological, physical, chemical, moral and existential dysfunction.
(253)¹⁹²

The grotesque body, then, is the grotesque story of an Iraqi refugee, who escapes the brutality of a chauvinistic dictatorship in order to face the brutality of being a perpetual outsider. The body here, like the bodies in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, *The Corpse Washer* and Hassan Blasim’s stories, is a hyperbolic storyteller of the bare lives and stories of the Iraqi people in their transition from one trauma to another until they gain awareness of their subjectivity. This leads to another aspect of the grotesque representation of the body in this text: the question of cultural translation. Sarmad is a translator: his job is to make sense of one language into another. His knowledge of the two languages he works with entails his capacity to mediate between the two systems of thought these languages convey. Sarmad, however, seems to be at a conundrum in both as he recognises his fear of risk and failure even after long years in this profession, because he realises that “what is implied in translation, what we do, is to uproot [meaning] (15).¹⁹³ Sarmad is unable to transfer

¹⁹² "أريد أن أعرف متى كنت عراقياً حقاً ومتى كان ضرورياً ألا أكون كذلك، ولا آخذ بنظر الاعتبار إلا أنني لم أعد أصلح أن أكون عراقياً (...)
فما عليّ إلا أن أشقّ البلد وأستخرج منه نفسي وأكتشف حالة انعدام وظائفه البيولوجية والفيزيائية، والكيميائية، والأخلاقية، والوجدية."
¹⁹³ "إنّ ما كان يطال الترجمة وما نقوم به يشبه عملية الاقتلاع"

knowledge or decipher meaning as he is equally unable to distinguish his anxiety from hunger, and sexual pleasure from the pleasure of sedating hunger. He describes translation as “the damned fruit”¹⁹⁴ and his boss comments: “Translation, Mr. Burhān, is a craft with temptation, it can lead to damnation, so beware!” (15).¹⁹⁵ Being a translator symbolises his attempts to reconcile past and present, home and exile, inside and outside, health and disease, virility and the lack of it, being and not being. He is in a permanent incomprehensible status and the shape of his body becomes more than this: it transcends its state as an obese, ugly, sterile body to being the document that translates the psychological and epistemological processes which dislocated subjects undergo, and the cultural mourning which they are unaware of.

Feeling misplaced has catastrophic implications on the construction of the self, especially after, in this case, decades of political, humanitarian, and psychological hardship. His precarious condition as a worker reflects his precarious life; this hinders one’s ability to translate their place in the world: his body is socially inadmissible, his sexuality is dysfunctional, his identity is undefined, and – worst of all – he does not understand what the source of his anxiety is, which leads him to stress-eating in the first place. If anything, this novel is about the importance of cultural translation, not only between cultures and languages, but also between emotions and corporeal behaviour. The dangers of misrepresentation or lack of representation, in view of Butler’s *Precarious Life*, dehumanise the other – as did the discourse of the war on terror, or ‘super-humanise’, that is ‘phallogocentricise’ the self – as did the nationalist and religious discourses.

¹⁹⁴ "الثمرة الملعونة"

¹⁹⁵ "الترجمة يا مستر برهان الدين حرفة بها غواية قد تفودك الى التهلكة فاحذر"

The examined texts show that there is an important presence of the grotesque representation of the body in contemporary Iraqi fiction. The body in *The Truck to Berlin* joins the notions of fear and violence, human and monster in one body. The presentation and representation of the body in *The Corpse Washer* joins life and death, flesh and stone, love and violence in Jawad's body, and is symbolised by the pomegranate. In *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, the idea of life within death, of death becoming life is repeated; however, the one coherent mass known as the human body is in fact numerous fragments of different living dead bodies, in which the concepts of monstrosity and human are joint. In *al-Tashahhī*, the grotesque representation of the body joins the notions of hegemony and subalternity, sexuality and the lack of it in the obese body deprived of its genitalia. The grotesque body symbolises the position of the subject in these indefinite and incoherent grey areas. In none of the analysed narratives does the body come to an end or to a definite state, which thus indicates the perpetual state of ambivalence which obtains in them. The bodies in these narratives remain in the making, in the process of definition. The grotesque body is a symptom of the semiotic boundary where different and opposed significations meet. With this I conclude that the grotesque representation of the body denies the definite external image imposed by the religious and traditional, and the orientalist colonial discourses. The question that remains not completely answered is the notion of laughter: laughter in the examined grotesque bodies is not entirely present and, as I mentioned earlier, requires interpretation, which will become clearer after the following discussion on sexuality.

2. Re-Gendered Bodies

At an early stage of this research I wrote an article claiming that contemporary Iraqi fiction is in a process of overcoming sexuality, as a new conceptualisation of sexuality is emerging,

particularly in the redefinition and re-presentation of masculinity.¹⁹⁶ In chapter II, building on Bahooora's article, I established a historical foundation on which sexuality – that is male sexuality – was the determining factor of subjectivity and which in literature was a reflection of political anxiety in anticolonial Iraq. In the above-mentioned article I claimed that contemporary Iraqi fiction is moving away from that position, employing sexuality to redefine gender roles. I compared two extracts from different Iraqi novels; one was, *al-Raj' al-Ba'id* (*The Long Way Back*) by Fu'ād al-Takarlī – also cited in the second chapter. The second was *The Corpse Washer* by Sinan Antoon – discussed above. In this section, I shall develop the ideas I presented in that article into a more comprehensive analysis and provide a readjustment to that claim as, over time, research has shown me that some texts are in fact going beyond sexual encounters in questioning the core of masculinity around which this subjectivity evolved. I shall open the analysis of the question of rewriting gender by referring to this comparison again, as it provides a very clear, didactic exercise by which to illustrate my conception of re-gendering bodies, and how new literary tendencies are approaching gender equality. Then, I shall examine the question of gender in the same texts as those analysed in the previous section, albeit, however, in a different order. This section transports the analysis of gender from the idea of equality to that of questioning the definitions of masculinities and femininities.

2.1 *The Long Way Back and The Corpse Washer*

Both novels present to us a sex scene between a man and a woman, in almost the exact same context. In both, the family of the protagonist is visited by another family, relatives of the protagonist's mother. The visiting family includes a young woman with whom the

¹⁹⁶ See Jasim Khammas.

protagonist develops a romantic relationship. However, the difference is that in the first novel, *The Long Way Back*, the couple engages in sexual intercourse after marriage. In *The Corpse Washer*, the couple engages in intercourse without marriage. I recall the sex scene, between Midḥat and Munīrah cited in the second chapter and compare it to the scene in Antoon's novel:

She was squeezed in his arms, loose under him, her breath trickled with unknown flavour. He pushed himself away from her, lifted his chest to her naked chest. He filled his eyes with seeing her like this; *his Munīrah, his wife, his lover*. [...] *She was squeezed, speechless under him*. [...] She gasped when he entered her the first time, she fastened her arms around his naked back, then she started panting like him. He was taken by her opening as if falling into the abyss. He was confused while preparing himself to penetrate her. The smell of her body, her sweat and her scent, her gentle touching and her wide-open legs shook him and crazed him in an unfamiliar way. A fountain for eternal heat was holding his breath, then iced water poured onto him. Once he enters her and she is under him: *his beloved female is becoming a mirage*. Once again: he pulls out and his lust does not give space for his mind and doubts, so, once more, he stabs again and loses balance, his soul drowns with the water of life that fulminated out of him like the blood from the heart (al-Takarlī 318-326, emphasis added).¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷ "كانت معتصرة بين ذراعيه، متلاينة تحته، تتلاحق أنفاسها ذات النكهة الغربية. ابتعد عنها قليلاً، رفع صدره عن صدرها العالي، أخذ يتملى من رؤيتها هكذا. منيرته، زوجته، حبيبته. كانت رقيقة الجلد، ممتلئة النهدين والبطن. جذبت نظره لحظة عظمًا حوضها ورأها تغلق ببطء فحذيها. كانت معتصرة، لا تتكلم، تحته. كانت تقول له بجسمها ذي السمرة الخمرية، شيئاً لم يكن يفهمه. وحين جذبته إليها كأنها لا تريد منه ان يطيل النظر في خفايا الجسد، أحس بها تعيد فتح فحذيها لتحتويه. (...) شهقت حين دخلها أول مرة وتقبضت ذراعاها حول ظهره العاري، ثم صارت تلهث مثله بعد ذلك. أخذه انفتاحها على حين غرة، كمن يسقط في هاوية لا قرار لها. كان ملتاث الحواس وهو يتهيأ لدخولها. بعثت فيه رائحة جسدها و عرقها و عطرها ولمساتها الناعمة و عيونها وشفاتها وساقاها المنفتحة عن حب للقياء، جنوناً واضطراباً لم يعهده قبلاً. كان ينبوع حرارة مستديمة يمسك بخناقها، فسكبت عليه مياه متلجة. وفي ثوانٍ، انقلبت به حياته. لحظة دخوله فيها وهي تحته: انثاء الحبيبة التي تتحول الى سراب. لحظة ثانية: ينسحب وشهوته لا تعطي مجالاً لعقله أو شكوكه، فيعاود الطعن ويفقد في اللحظة الثالثة توازنه وتفويض روحه مع ماء الحياة الذي انبثق منه كدم القلب، كدم القلب..."

As mentioned in chapter II, Munīrah is a victim of rape, committed by her nephew who, in the novel, represents an emerging political regime, “although many readers were apparently quick to identify him with the Ba‘ath Party” (Caiani and Cobham 219). She married Midḥat, who is the classic existential male character whose political anxieties are reflected in his sexual behaviour – as in other works of al-Takarlī’s fiction and of the fictional work of his generation in general. Being aware that she is no longer a virgin, she marries Midḥat, hoping he might be understanding of her situation and spare her the scandal.

In the other scene, Ghayda’s family is visiting because they were displaced from their home after the sectarian conflict started in 2006. After a few weeks of flirtation, a romance starts between the two, in which Ghayda’ visits Jawad in his room every night, after everyone is asleep:

We had our own secret world every night between two and four in the morning, fleeing from our nightmares to each other’s bodies. It was a world bordered by danger and the fear of scandal. One night she whispered coquettishly, “Do whatever you want with my body, but not from the front.” *It was reasonable for her to preserve her capital in a society like ours.* The first part of what she said – “Do whatever you want” – triggered a volcano in my body. We did everything but fully unite bodies. I played in the taboo zone with my finger and gave my offerings with my tongue. Her nocturnal presence reminded me that life can be generous, if only for a few hours a day. [...] I would look at my hand after touching her breast and could not believe that a few hours later it would touch the body of another man. Her naked body started to flash in my mind as I washed, and often I felt guilty. (Antoon 151-152, emphasis added)

Even though both scenes are narrated from the man's perspective, and both are narrated with similar passion and anxiety, the difference in the characters' attitudes towards their partners is very clear. Ghayda's voice is clearly present in Jawad's narrative, unlike Midḥat's narrative in which Munīrah is more like a property or a sex-toy that is squeezed under his body. And because we can hear Ghayda's voice we know how she feels about her partner, which is not the case with the way Munīrah is presented in this scene: a voiceless penetrated body drowned in the narrative of a male character who is supposed to represent left-wing thought coming to power and embracing the Iraqi people in a moment of pure passion. Iraq, however, has masculinist traditional, "rapist" history attached to it, and this puts his ideology to the test. Although both Jawad and Midḥat represent a particular moment of Iraq's history, Midḥat differs in being ideologically constructed as a character whilst Jawad corresponds to a universal humanistic framework. Midḥat's revolutionary thought – questioning the meaning of honour, being anti-marriage, and being the only healthy, young and energetic person in his family – is an echo of the progressive thoughts and changes that Qāsim's government was working on at that time.

I do not claim that Midḥat represents 'Abd al-Karīm Qāsim. Rather, I suggest that Midḥat is a representation of a generation that might at a certain time have felt themselves able to identify with certain of his policies. Like Midḥat, Qāsim's government had ambitions in transforming the Iraqi state and society, and this is reflected in Midḥat's criticism of his family and the whole social structure and behaviour (147). Qāsim and Midḥat die on the same day, 8 February 1963. Midḥat's crisis in a way is the Left's crisis leading a country where the values of Arabism, pride and masculinism are so deeply rooted in the very construction of personality that even the Left – Midḥat – can involuntarily embrace these values. Even when Midḥat resolves his crisis of honour, his thoughts are that "this is how strong men started ..." (404), and throughout all his introspective journey, Midḥat genuinely

believes he is the victim of “a savage will” (409) which torments him. He feels that taking Munīrah’s virginity by anyone but himself is an action of savagery not against Munīrah, the actual victim, but against him and the beliefs of healthy and organized egotism (141). This is what Haytham Bahooora is suggesting in his article ‘The Figure of the Prostitute’: ideology is depicted in the way it relates to the silenced female body. Al-Takarlī’s novel shows that the political turmoil of that specific period of Iraq’s history – depicted in *Midḥat* – is in fact an epistemological dilemma, a crossroads in which the definition of masculinity is to be determined: whether it is to be the traditional, nationalistic version of bigoted heroism, which is savage and violent – ‘Adnān – or whether it is to be that of the progressive Left, which requires time and contemplation to be assimilated – *Midḥat* – which was about to happen if weren’t for the former’s savagery that kills it and him. Nevertheless, I believe that al-Takarlī either fails to resolve *Midḥat*’s dilemma or is precisely showing us where Iraq’s left failed, as the novel does not resolve the social equation of feminine virginity with honour.

The Caiani and Cobham study on the novel agrees on the fact that “virginity has more powerful symbolic value in the novel than the characterisation of ‘Adnān and Munīra” (233), and that *Midḥat*’s “revulsion and humiliation at discovering that his new wife is not a virgin are the start of his realising how much his own morality is still bound up with these traditional responses” (231). However, the study concludes by suggesting that the end of the novel, *Midḥat*’s death, is ambiguous (237) since

Midḥat has gone a long way towards freeing himself from his inherited preoccupations, towards taking responsibility for himself and realising that the shame is his as much as Munīra’s,¹⁹⁸ but still fails to observe some obvious external

¹⁹⁸ The transliteration in Caiani and Cobham’s study spells ‘Munīra’ without a final h.

constraints and almost distractedly makes a dramatic, foolhardy gesture at the last minute. (236)

Nevertheless, I argue, that this is precisely why Midḥat had to die: because his rationalisation on the ‘lost’ virginity and shame is utterly chauvinistic. Midḥat decides to go back to Munīrah and to “accept” the fact that she is not a virgin only because he realises that “it happened to her, it happened to her. She did not do it” (428). Moreover, not only she did not do “it”, but also, she “entrusted him with her ‘shame’” (Caiani and Cobham 234). In a culture of honour killing, she chose him to decide her fate once the missing virginity was discovered, which gladdens Midḥat. Therefore, what matters to Midḥat, what makes him reconcile himself to the situation and to Munīrah, is her ‘unwillingness’ in losing the virginity and her unwillingness in choosing what might happen to her if she is discovered. As long as she did not want “it” to happen, and as long as she accepts whatever his decision is, then she does not infringe his honour, and she is not his enemy. This means that, if Munīrah was not raped, if she had sex willingly, Midḥat’s crisis persists. I believe this is why Midḥat – the Iraqi Left – dies; he and it could not handle women’s will over their own bodies and, particularly, their sexuality.

Jawad, on the other hand, does not have the luxury of being tormented by ideology and political conflicts. Throughout the novel, Jawad is just a young man who wants to be an artist and to live in a perpetual state of falling in love, and he is certain of his entitlement to that right of deciding over his life. Jawad is not conflicted by whether his own behaviour is coherent with his thoughts or not. It certainly is. Sexuality for Jawad is a postponed pleasure and right. Therefore, his encounters with Reem and Ghayda’ are opportunities to fulfil that silenced and postponed part of his dreams, a window through which he can look at himself and see the man he actually is, an adorer of beauty and a devoted lover of life and fertility,

not a corpse washer. Unlike Midḥat, who describes his semen as “the water of life”, Jawad is a plant – the Pomegranate tree – crying for the water of life and not the water of the dead bodies. Also, unlike Midḥat, Jawad sees his partners as equals in will and desire, Jawad never questions the way his partners interact with their bodies; Reem was married to a man who had raped her under the ‘lawful’ right of marriage, and for him, Ghayda’ is reasonable in stating ground rules for their interaction. He sees these interactions as acts of love and generosity, not because these women fear him or they want to subdue him, but rather because he truly believes that they are, like him, eager for these escapades in which they could feel mutually loved.

The women in these two scenes also give us more details about sexuality and masculinity. Interestingly enough, both Jawad’s sexual relations are initiated by his partners. Both women willingly want intercourse with Jawad before marriage, and although both women want to marry Jawad eventually, they do not regret the decision when marriage does not happen. Reem’s tragedy is that of cancer and approaching death, and Ghayda’ consists in her displacement after her family takes refuge in a European country. When Jawad misses the opportunity to marry Ghayda’, because he feels he is not ready, her only remark is “why did you let me go?” (154), a question he himself cannot answer. This shows that both Jawad and Ghayda’ are aware of the happiness they mutually gave each other with, and that marriage could have been the solution to their day-to-day problems, and not merely a social imperative to conceal a scandal.

The ground rules that Ghayda’ sets (“Do whatever you want with my body, but not from the front”), and Jawad’s affirmation (“It was reasonable for her to preserve her capital in a society like ours” (151)), show how both are aware of how to appropriate the mechanisms of the social economy of the body and use them for the purpose of personal

empowerment on a mutual and egalitarian level. Unlike Munīrah, Ghayda' does not see her body as in ideological merchandise; on the contrary, it is the capital on which she builds part of the economy of her kinship. It is the instrument through which she mediates her space within the hierarchy of power, be that social decorum or emotional repression. Even the use of the word 'reasonable' makes intercourse seem like a transaction: it was reasonable for her to impose such a condition, because we both understand the rules of this particular market. However, I do not intend to describe this rational relationship as cold or materialistic; on the contrary, I believe the novel tries to show how educated young Iraqis – men and women – see themselves as equals when it comes to the social administration of bodies, emotions and care for one another. Both understand that they are jeopardized by the social constraints of this society and this situation of constant violence.

Munīrah, on the other hand, sees herself as 'damaged goods'. She thinks she is no longer entitled to the luxury of loving and being loved; her marrying Midḥat is purely logistical, planned for her unquestionable fate: either immediate death by honour killing, or waiting for death as an unmarried woman. Her only hopes in marrying him reside in the facts that, firstly, he is a progressive thinker and leftist; and secondly, he does not believe in marriage in principle (264). Owing to these reasons, he ought to be the man who will take her even though she is not a virgin; he ought to understand and to be compassionate (478); he might let her live and spare her the scandal. For both Midḥat and Munīrah, the rape is a misfortune that stands in the way of their happiness. For both, Munīrah's raped body is an intruder into the harmony of the peaceful identity assigned to her: an extension of Midḥat's identity. Her only way to 'sell' such a damaged product is to find a 'buyer' who might sympathise or who could see or think of it differently. He, on the other hand, feels that Munīrah's virginity was a right of his own, and that it has been taken from him by the savage emerging power. Therefore, Midḥat feels doubly 'defrauded': once, by the person who took

her virginity, which Midḥat thinks it is his to take and, another time, by Munīrah, who thought she could use him to cover for ‘her’ scandal. Munīrah’s raped body, then, represents this one man’s tragic fate. What remains of the marriage is the dramatic effect of the scene where ‘Adanān, the rapist, dressed in khaki, brings Munīrah the news of Midḥat’s death.

What makes *The Long Way Back* a key text today is its accuracy in detecting the one aspect that had never been up for public debate among Iraqis: manhood and masculinity. A great deal of the political turmoil the Iraqi state has suffered in its modern and contemporary history gets stuck because of men’s honour, men’s manhood, men’s bodies and their limits. What novels like *The Corpse Washer* do is to rethink that scheme, placing honour somewhere else, going beyond genitalia and displacing the national allegories derived from the phallogentric tendencies to unvisited bodies, voicing this way what had been silenced. In Sinan Antoon’s first novel, *I’jaam: An Iraqi Rhapsody*, for instance, one of the key issue the novel poses is the need for new hermeneutics for Iraq. The very term ‘*I’jām*’ in Arabic comes from ‘*A’jem*’, that is, ‘not Arab’; the noun ‘*I’jām*’ refers to speech and means ‘to obscure speech’, that is to speak or write in a different or unintelligible way. The novel tells the story of a young Iraqi man, who is trying to write his testimony of the horrors he has seen in prison. He tries to write it in a way that his jailer will not understand, so he writes it in Arabic without any dots or short vowels, just like old Arab manuscripts were written. In *I’jaam*, masculinity, disability and sexuality are presented in a peculiar way. Furat,¹⁹⁹ like Jawad, is a young man who dissents from the stereotyped traditional Arab masculinity, and particularly the one advocated by Ba’ath regimes in the 1980s and 90s. The novel engages the body using two central aspects: Furat has a slight limp caused by a minor brain tumour, and he is imprisoned and explicitly raped for his political views.

¹⁹⁹ Iraqi name and Arabic Word for the river Euphrates.

Unlike the examples of functional diversity, discussed in Chapter II, Furat finds his limp empowering and self-assuring as it frees him from military service which represents the very same political discourse that he is crushed by. Disability, in the examples of modern texts, was occasionally employed as a source of anxiety and shame as it gets in the way of characters' happiness or ability to perform their gender role or take responsibility for their lives. What Antoon does is to empower his character with the same stigma that the system attributes to him, making of his body a stage for resistance. In the rape scene, however, the protagonist distances himself from his body by considering it a prison and a medium of pain and subjugation, not of shame or feminization. Technically, the narrative of the novel gives as much attention to the rape scene as to any other form of aggression or torture. This way, the novel is promoting a narrative that decentralises the agency of the phallus as it evens out the traumatic impact of the different forms of aggression. Moreover, Furat's relationship with his female partner Areej is similar to Jawad's affair with Reem, and similar to all love plots in Antoon's fiction, where it seems that he transforms the meaning of consensual intercourse, from a social stigma to a transaction of love and kindness, and as an ultimate expression of power over the body. Within this transaction, both parties have equal opportunities in taking the initiative to pursue and fulfil their desires. By doing so, Antoon is not only challenging but rather eliminating gender hierarchies in his male-female relationships, and his focus on young couples, especially in these two novels, is, in a way, an attempt to rewrite a history of bigotry and injustice into pictures of families drawn with compassion, love and mercy. By creating couples that distance sexuality from political anxieties, Antoon is writing a narrative of healing, where bodies are the instrument.

2.2 *Al-Tashahhī*

In a review of the novel in the *International Journal in Contemporary Iraqi Studies*, Shereen Abou El Naga writes that the title in Arabic is close in meaning to ‘desire’ (337). I, however, suggest that ‘desire’ might be too broad. The word ‘*tashahhī*’ is the gerund and noun of ‘*tashahhā*’ meaning ‘to desire’, which usually refers either to food or sex. In the context of food, the word ‘*tashahhī*’ can mean ‘craving’, and in the case of sex ‘lust’ or ‘passion’, or, as Abou el Naga explains, the meaning can come close to the Freudian libido (Abou El Naga 337). There is a stronger sense in the Arabic word of having a perverse desire than there is merely in the English word ‘desire’. Having examined the novel, this makes sense: on the one hand, the storyline and the protagonist’s feelings express a deeply psychoanalytical content that links food with sex. On the other hand, thinking of the word ‘desire’ in both English and Arabic, ‘*raghbah*’, is used in any context, but rarely with food, and it does not express the psychoanalytical depth that ‘*tashahhī*’ conveys. Therefore, I suggest the translation of the title could be *The Craving*, since the novel deals with a strong desire, wanting, and longing that equally refer to food or sex.

In her forward to ‘Āliyah Mamdūh’s *Naphthalene: A Novel of Baghdad* (2005), Hélène Cixous wrote “*Freedom?* It gushes from the body. It is secretions, odors. *A country of odors*. Acridities, repulsions, and seductions [...] *Freedom?* You can’t imprison *voices*” (101). This is what ‘Āliyah Mamdūh is accomplishing in *al-Tashahhī* as well: she is inviting her readers to hear the voice of man differently, where selfhood is no longer measured or reassured by moustaches or genitals and sexual activity. In fact, Mamdūh’s writings often challenges notions of femininity and masculinity, something which Cixous also observes: “If women are slaves and prisoners, the men are the paramount prisoners of the prisons they run” (101). Sarmad’s body transgresses the normative body in its sanitary, gender, aesthetic and political definitions. As the novel suggests, his body is a hysterical joke to medical

discourse, a repulsive pile of fat that is peeling off itself under colourless hair and a reproductively dysfunctional being.

As Abou El Naga shows, “*Al-Tashahi* is about ‘language’ and its incapability to express the core of desire in its multiple forms” (339). Sarmad’s sexual dysfunction and obese body embody the dysfunction of language in articulating his desire. Wars, exile, the precariousness of a working-class refugee, anxiety and stress-feeding have taken out of his body all identity-defining attributes, leaving him – at the end of the novel – as a huge living mass suffering nervous collapse in a health clinic in the Parisian suburbs. His desire, his craving, is to find love and compassion to ease his lonely exile days which are trapped in memories that now belong to a different man, a man who was taught to thrive on penetration and on using and being used by women’s bodies as a medium of existing. What we encounter in this novel is an extraordinary representation of the male hero in Arabic fiction. On the one hand, obesity – probably for the first time in Iraqi fiction – becomes a symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder and it is openly discussed and reflected upon. On the other hand, the notion of normative corporeality is questioned by means of interrogating masculinity, not femininity. This shows that ‘Āliyah Mamdūḥ has taken the discussion on sexuality out of recurrent dominating-dominated dynamics in order to question corporeality itself.

The disappearing phallus challenges gender hierarchy and it suggests that, by the elimination of gender hierarchy, one can perceive the complexity of the deep identity crisis Iraqi fiction is trying to resolve. The propaganda that accompanied the invasion used phallogocentric and orientalist imagery to break down a phallogocentric national identity, and the novel eliminates the phallus to protect the re-inscription of identity from the fragility of being gender-based. Such a process is certainly painful and terrifying as it destabilises the structures of conceptualizing the self; but it is necessary to wash off decades of phallogocentric

knowledge, a step radical enough to be considered rebellious. The act of writing that denies the identification with the epistemological image proposed by these discourses is in fact an awareness of becoming a sovereign subject.

2.3 Frankenstein in Baghdad

As far as *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is concerned, the question of gender is less evident, and my analysis depends primarily on its absence. There is an unclear stand on gender in the novel, and there is a simplistic ideological distribution of gender and sexuality in the building of the main characters which I describe as clichéd. For instance, the old blind Christian woman, Elishva, who lives alone and is eternally waiting for her son come back, is a representation of absolute goodness.²⁰⁰ Elishva is an Iraqi interpretation of the Virgin Mary; a pious, devoted mother, vulnerable and yet protected by a strange omnipresent power. She also represents the ethnic and religious diversity of Iraq, the silenced Iraq. Another example is the womanizer, a corrupt writer and public figure coming back to Iraq after years of exile, Al-Saidi. Additionally, unlike the tendency in contemporary fiction, the novel's lack, or poor description of sexual activity is a characterisation of a precarious social, economic and political status, as in the case of Hadi and Nahem. Prostitution is a symbol for moral decadence and social decay. However, the beautiful working intellectual woman Nawal al-Wazir is an enigma; she is viewed at the beginning as pure evil, but in her own narrative, the reader realises that she is in fact a strong independent woman, who has been used by a corrupt politician. Then there is the classic young and ambitious male character whose sexuality

²⁰⁰ The Hebrew name 'Elishva' given to a Christian woman might have two readings: on the one hand, it might refer to the phenomenon of the Christian families massively yet gradually leaving Iraq in the last decades, comparing it to the Jewish Exodus, as the name of the character also appears in The Old Testament, Exodus (6:23). On the other hand, I believe it is employed to give visibility to the Jewish memory of the Bettāwīn neighbourhood in Baghdad where the character lives.

reflects his political anxiety, Mahmoud al-Sawadi. Surprisingly, academic views and critical reception of the novel rarely juxtapose these stereotypical characters with the *Shismah*'s in-existent positionality regarding gender and sexuality. Unlike Shelley's monster, who imposes the condition of having an equal female companion to leave humans in peace (Shelley 140), the *Shismah* does not seem to be concerned with the genitals assigned to him, and he seems to accept his fate of loneliness – except when it comes to parenting figures, Elishva and Hadi, whom he refers to as his “reasons for existing” (244). However, the *Shismah* is clearly identified as a man's body. When Hasib dies in the explosion that shatters his body, his soul spots the soulless body of a “naked man” (39), which he takes after flying around the country to find a body where he can rest his soul.

Based on the fact that “[m]onsters, whether male or female, are often understood as figures who confirm and/or disturb our conceptions of what it means to be human” (Hawley 218), and since “monsters may be signs of possible worlds – and they are surely signs of worlds for which we are responsible” (Haraway 2), I suggest that Saadawi's monster, by not claiming a sexual partner of any sort, allows two interpretations. On the one hand, Shelley's monster is aware of his humanity: his monstrosity is in his looks not in his nature. He justifies himself by saying “I am malicious because I am miserable” (Shelley 140). The *Shismah*, by contrast, does not think of himself as a human being and, therefore, he does not apply to himself the human qualities that assume heterosexual coupling as natural behaviour. He claims: “I am made up of body parts of people from diverse backgrounds – ethnicities, tribes, races and social classes – I represent the impossible mix that never was achieved in the past. I am the first true Iraqi citizen” (146). He is aware that he is a collective being, and perhaps the creation of this first true Iraqi citizen suggests the future of a ‘true’ Iraqi society that overcomes gender hierarchy. Chances are the historic violence from which this creature is born will lead to an Iraqi identity in which being a man means the quest for justice to all

those ethnicities, tribes, races and social classes. Let us not forget, that Saadawi's monster was born from an act of love by the precarious lives of both Hadi, who wanted to dignify the death of his only friend Nahem, and Elishva, the longing mother awaiting the return of her missing son. Shelley's monster, conversely, was born from a man's ambition to bend the laws of nature.

Another hypothesis could be read in the monster's lack of interest in a female partner, something which is crucial to Shelley's monster. This might reflect the historical moment that the monster's body represents. As Zahra Ali points out, "the overall climate of insecurity and political crisis, along with the competing powers of militias on the streets and conservative parties in power, have a great impact on women's everyday lives and shape the limits and possibilities for women's rights advocacy" (155). Women were not the state's priority at that time – and never became so. Likewise, the *Shismah*, as a reflection of that moment of Iraq's history, did not have the chance to prioritise female companionship. He did not even contemplate the idea of creating similar monsters to help with his mission to restore justice for innocent victims. With that said, I confirm my earlier statement: even though *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is one of the most innovative texts in contemporary Iraqi fiction, it does not convey a clear stand on the question of gender and sexuality, which is interesting because it expresses ambivalence and ambiguity when it comes to the representation and interaction between genders. Gender has become a 'trouble', to use Butler's term, and that is a relatively positive change.

2.4 "The Truck to Berlin"

In the previous section I mentioned that this piece echoes two of Freud's cases of obsessive-compulsive neurosis: those of the Ratman and the Wolfman. Blasim's narrator, a refugee on

the road, at the beginning of the story, expresses his fear of turning into a rat (881) as he is telling the story of another refugee on the road who will turn into a wolf at the end of the story. It is as if the ratman, in Blasim's story, becomes the wolfman.²⁰¹ In both cases, Freud's patients and Blasim's characters, the rats and wolves acquire a symbolic meaning that allows various interpretations.

In the Ratman, the patient's rat associations are entangled in his unconscious with his father complex, indicating his fear of punishment and his feelings of guilt towards the authority of the father figure. Although the Freudian analysis is not the main subject of my reading of gender in the story, the associations that lead to the diagnosis, however, apply to the narrator of Blasim's story. The narrator, like the Ratman, fears punishment and experiences guilt towards the authority of the father figure. As the young man narrates the bestial cruelty of starvation and the dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein that have put him in danger of turning into a rat (878), he associates the consequences of over-exposure to deprivation with being a rat. Like the Ratman, the narrator fears rats, who survive on excrement and waste, and this is confirmed by the image of defecation in food bags (936). Similarly, just as the Ratman is aware of how rats are ruthlessly killed by human beings (Freud, *The Wolfman and Other Cases* 169), the narrator fears being so deprived that he will be degraded, excluded, hated and eventually killed in the most ruthless manner. This is confirmed by the squander of those men's lives who were considered so worthless as to be left to die in a locked and abandoned truck: like unwanted animals 'rats' are left to starve and die. By the same token, one cannot ignore associating laboratory rats with the millions of deprived young people who suffer under the merciless political and administrative experiments carried out by dictators, multinationals and mercenary militias. Additionally,

²⁰¹ I use capital letters (Wolfman & Ratman) to indicate Freud's patients, and small letters (wolfman and ratman) to indicate Blasim's characters.

this idea is also confirmed in the war on terror narrative, being represented in fiction and television. To give an example, in *Homeland's* first season, the character of young Issa, the son of a terrorist who was an object of Brody's affection, dies in the American air raid to save Brody. Another example can be found in season four, when Carrie sexually uses a young Afghani medical student, Ayan Ibrahim, the terrorist's nephew, and allows his murder. Both young men get killed by the terrorist and the 'saviour' in their fight to establish power. Both Issa and Ayan respond to the saviour's reification in exchange for the fulfilment of a latent desire; Issa finds in Brody the affection and care of the father figure who would play football and study with him, and Ayan finds in Carrie the female body that offers him sex and protection from the CIA, which he never gets. Therefore, the narrator is in a constant state of threat because he is subconsciously aware of his position as an insignificant collateral damage to both centres of power: the one he is escaping from and the one he is escaping to.

Freud claims that the patient's guilt is due to an unconscious desire for the father's death in order to fulfil sexual desire (*The Wolfman and other cases* 132). My interest in this story lies in the logic in which the patient's rationalization develops, as if he says: acting upon my desires is wrong; my father will punish me and I will feel embarrassed: "If I harbour the wish to see women naked, my father must die" (132). For Blasim's ratman and the men he represents, I am proposing a similar and, perhaps, a more evident logic in the character's thoughts: the sociocultural system and the political regime – the father figure – do not allow me act upon my sexual desires; if I want a job and a sex partner I should 'kill' this father figure, or the ideal male figure assigned for me – the nationalist religious male hero. This guilt is built up through years of social, political and religious lecturing on how to be a 'real' Iraqi man, and the anxiety those lessons entail. These men leave Iraq, running away from "the hell of economic sanctions" (878), looking for better life, better lives and better conditions that can preserve their humanity, that is, to prevent them from becoming rats. For

many, such a trip is not merely a running away from the horrors of dictatorship and deprivation, it is also an abandonment of one's own home and religion to chase after 'easy sex' and material pleasures, attributes condemned by Islam and the righteous Arab man, and hence this feeling of being small and fallen into the dark, like a rat living in the sewers. Let us remember a significant factor: the story takes place around the year 2000, when Hussein, his faith campaign, and the values he represents were still in power, and the genocidal sanctions imposed upon Iraq were also still implemented. In this period, "as if sanctions were not enough", ²⁰² "Iraqi men and women were confronted with sexual and broader gender-based violence" (Al-Ali, "Sexual Violence in Iraq" 10). Therefore, the fear of turning into a rat unravels anxieties in which masculinity is negotiated: I do not want to be the man my father is, but I feel guilty about it.

The transition from a rat into a wolf depicts a process of detachment: from refusing the system of values that defined the narrator's human experience to – in this case – pushing him into a tragic monstrosity. However, the first question that comes to mind is, why a wolf? Why not a bear or a lynx, or any other carnivore inhabiting the Eastern European forests? The answer is, as in Freud's Wolfman, the wolf conveys a fairy-tale element proper to the structure of myth. The patient associates the representation of the wolf in fairy tales, particularly *The Little Red Riding Hood*, with his unconscious fear. In Iraq, and probably in any Muslim country, the mythical legacy of the wolf also comes from *The Little Red Riding Hood – Layla and the Wolf* in the Arabic version – and from the qur'ānic story of Yūsuf, where Yūsuf's father is made to believe that his little beloved boy was devoured by a wolf. Therefore, the wolf which in the collective imagination represents an evil or gothic element

²⁰² I quote Naje Al-Ali's title of the conclusion to the section on war and sanctions in her book, *Iraqi Women* 2007. In that section Al-Ali shows how the sanctions added up to the complex constellation of cultural, political, economic and religious factors that accentuated gender hierarchies in Iraq. Therefore, I quote the title of that section as a hypertext to refer to that complexity.

in Iraqi culture as well. Curiously enough, in both stories, the wolf suggests an obstacle and an impairment to a functional, 'normal' relationship between the characters: Yūsuf and his father, Layla and her grandmother; or at least it suggests a threat to the security and the safety the children feel in their relations with the adults in the story – the authority figures. In addition, Blasim's wolfman rejects the identification with the castrated or the feminized figure – subjugated by the almighty imaginary father, hence the fear of turning into a rat – but he also rejects identification with this father figure, hence fleeing the country and the guilt. His anxiety is therefore set in between two identifications which he rejects. This explains his transformation into this particular wolf, a mix of a victim and a perpetrator at the same time. The body of the wolfman-ratman in Blasim's story, then, reveals an anxiety with regards to a masculinity that is willing to detach itself from the traditional framework of gender and sexuality.

The examined texts show a clear critique of hegemonic masculinity which is certainly not the only focus in contemporary fiction, as far as gender is concerned. There are certainly many attempts to critique, rewrite and to outspoke female desire and femininity alongside voicing subaltern bodies, such as the female body, ageing bodies, rejected bodies, modified and transformed bodies and diversely functional bodies. These narratives still focus on the victimisation of these subjects. Hassan Blasim for instance has a peculiar stand on maternity and motherhood, which is worth further investigation. The traumatised mother figure in his fiction differs from any other characterization of motherhood I have come across throughout this research. I have mentioned, in the previous section, a grotesque scene of a mother from his story "The Song of the Goats"; another curious story on the subject of motherhood is his untranslated story "Shams wa Jannah" (Sun and Heaven).²⁰³ In this story,

²⁰³ Published in the Arabic version of *Corpse Exhibition: and Other Stories of Iraq*, a collection of short stories that includes *The Iraqi Christ*, *The Madman from Freedom Square* and other stories. See Blasim 2015.

a mother forces her fifteen-year old daughter to sit in the burning sun to deface and darken her complexion, so that she will not be raped by the militias who, the mother had heard, enjoy white girls. The mother ends up killing her daughter in a moment of panic because she realizes she cannot protect her. Such depiction of cruel and ‘hysterical’ mothers is unprecedented in Iraqi literary and cultural heritage. In both of Blasim’s stories the mother’s love and protection is expressed with cruelty and violence.

Similarly, Maīyādah Khalīl’s work, in her two novels, *Nescafé ma ‘a al-Sharīf al-Raḍī* (Nescafé with al-Sharīf al-Raḍī) and *al-Ḥayāt min Thuqb al-Bāb* (Life from a Keyhole, 2018). The author presents two female characters who not only offer a distinguished representation of motherhood but also different depictions of female desire.²⁰⁴ In both novels, the narrators constantly re-valuate their bodies, their place in society and their kinship. In *Nescafé with al-Sharīf al-Raḍī*, Āminah is an exiled middle-aged woman who is left alone after her husband’s death and her son and daughter are settled in a different European city with their families. In her solitude and memories, she begins an affair with an exiled Iraqi man who lives in her building. She tries to take care of herself and look attractive for this new man in her life, but she realizes that the man has other women in his life. Disappointed by her naivety, Āminah goes back to her apartment and narrates as follows:

I sat on the sofa in front of the TV for a long time, and in my head only one picture. That woman’s picture. I took off my dress while still sitting on the sofa, and my headscarf still on. I looked at the dress, as if I was looking at myself, before I threw it on the floor like a piece of paper where I had written my silly thoughts and thrown it away after reading it again. I went to my room, took out my pyjamas from the wardrobe and put them on. As for the dress, I threw it in the garbage bin. I threw

²⁰⁴ In Iraqi fiction.

away Āminah who tried to be a woman all her life and never succeeded. (Khalīl, *Nescafé ma 'a al-Sharīf al-Raḍī* 93)²⁰⁵

This is an extraordinary unspoken moment in an ordinary middle-aged Iraqi woman's life where she gathers up the courage to express her desire of *wanting* to wear an open dress and goes to a man's apartment to see his art, have coffee and "maybe something of what I imagine everyday would happen" (91)²⁰⁶. Then, once disappointed by contrasting her image with the image of the other woman, reevaluates her desire and questions who she really is, the woman in the open dress, like the other woman, or a different woman. This moment of doubt and exercise of self-interrogation is, as Slavoj Žižek puts it, "subjectivity at its purest".²⁰⁷

On the established knowledge about sexuality in Iraq, Sana Al-Khayyat writes:

Women's nature is believed to be receptive and frigid [...] Girls [women] are socialized to regard sex as predominantly a male concern; [e]ven when partners become sexually experienced, as sometimes happens after long years of marriage, they may still feel insecure regarding their own sexuality. Many women are unaware that a female orgasm exists. They try not to admit that they need satisfaction or to mention such needs even to their husbands 'to keep their dignity'. (81–4)

To desire, therefore, is a subversive act. If females are expected not to have or not to show sexual desire, women of Āminah's age are not even thought of as sexual beings. The Arabic term for menopause is '*sin al-ya 's*', which literally translates as 'age of despair'. Menopausal women are rarely considered in the framework of romance and lovemaking; they are usually

²⁰⁵ "جلست وقتاً طويلاً على الأريكة امام التلفزيون، وفي رأسي صورة واحدة فقط. صورة تلك المرأة. نزعنت ثوبي وأنا لا أزال أجلس على الأريكة، ولا يزال الشال على رأسي. نظرت للثوب، كما لو أنني انظر إلى نفسي، قبل أن أرميه على الأرض مثل ورقة كتبت عليها سخافاتي ورميتها بعد أن قرأتها من جديد. ذهبت إلى غرفتي، أخرجت بيجامتي من الدولاب، وارتديتها. أما الثوب، رميته في سلة المهملات." ²⁰⁶ "وربما يحدث شيء مما أتخيله كل يوم."

²⁰⁷ From the interview with 4 News: min. 26:33. See: Žižek, *On Corbyn, the election, Brexit and fake news*.

considered ageing persons who, after marrying off their children, are supposed to have fulfilled their purpose in life. Āminah defies this picture by acting upon her impulse. However, contrasting herself with the other woman, and looking at herself as a dress taken off or as a paper with silly thoughts, Āminah looks at her self as someone who has tried to be someone else's fantasy. This moment is what Kristeva calls 'abjection of the self': "there is nothing like the abjection of self to show that all abjection is in fact recognition of the *want* on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded (5). Āminah's naked body sitting on the sofa, in a way, is a grotesque body, it is a body that separates and unites the rejected silly Āminah and the other Āminah.

In the second novel, *al-Ḥayāt min Thuqb al-Bāb* (Life from a Keyhole), Khalīl brings up many other issues from the perspective of a female narrator, such as household harassment, rape within marriage, unwanted pregnancy, hidden miscarriages, masturbation and adultery, all lived and seen through the eyes of a woman living on the margins of political turmoil from the mid-1940s to the late 1990s. Ghazwah, the protagonist, has a peculiar 'super-power': she can see signs that tell her the individual's future in a halo – visible only to her – around their head. She can know and understand things about people that others cannot see. However, this gift does not save her from her tragic fate of being an uneducated woman ruled by sadistic misogynists, like her first husband and the ba'ṯhist who incarcerates her to make her his private fortune teller. Men who could have loved her, like her father, her lover or her son, either abandon her or disappear in wars and political conflict. Her mother dies and her mother-in-law leaves the country with Ghazwah's son, looking for a better future. Ghazwah's life is the keyhole through which we can glimpse the complexity of an Iraqi woman's life throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Ghazwah is subversive because she challenges the reader's expectations. The Iraqi reader or readers familiar with Iraqi society or literature do not expect a woman like Ghazwah to be brave and

daring, willing to love passionately and not regret it, and to decide to live or die. In the final scene Ghazwah jumps from the window to escape the ba‘thist’s intentions towards her. When her body hits the ground, she is separated from her body as if the self leaves the body; she stands up with the help of her dead mother and lover who take her away from ‘there’. This scene shows how women’s bodies are their ultimate weapon of resistance against violence.

Many other contemporary works negotiate the representations of gender and sexuality with the purpose of voicing subaltern subjectivities. This section has outlined the different angles from which this negotiation is being led. Certainly, many works do not propose a clear political stand, and rather suggest or raise a question for its own sake. For instance, there is no clear stand on homosexuality, yet there is a clear employment of male homosexual rape as a symbol of extreme horror or monstrosity, as in Sinan Antoon’s *I’jaam* and Blasim’s story ‘The Killers and the Compass’.²⁰⁸ Contemporary authors, however, insist on introducing aspects concerning sexuality into the scene, not merely in an overcompensating spirit, but rather to combat the monsters of repression and censorship, to normalize sexuality in the depiction of quotidian Iraqi lives.

In the narratives analysed above the representation of the human body shows different approaches to the ambivalent position of the subject and its relation to the world. This ambivalence is reflected in the representation of the grotesque body and the renegotiation of sexuality. The examined texts show a strong connection with the ideas discussed in the previous chapters. The depiction of atrocities relates to the instrumentalization of the body as part of military operations, as Butler has suggested. The reconfiguration of gender and sexuality responds to the conflicted masculinity in the

²⁰⁸ From *The Iraqi Christ*.

juxtaposed discourses of corporeality. The emergence of grotesque aesthetics in the representation of corporeality shows the working of signs at the boundary that joins the semiospheres where corporeality is at an ambivalent state.

Earlier I mentioned that by the end of this chapter, it would become clear why Bakhtin's definition of the grotesque is suitable to describe this phenomenon in contemporary Iraqi fiction, or at least in the selected and in similar texts. Despite the negativity of trauma and the narrative of victimhood, there is a joyful celebration of corporeality as a fierce negation of the laws of censorship imposed by the nationalist religious discourse. It is also a strong and fierce rejection of the orientalist colonial fantasy. The grotesque representation of the body and the critique of hegemonic masculinity indicate a will to narrate the horrors of dictatorship, and the shock and awe of the war, invasion, and destruction of the Iraqi state. Yet it is a will to celebrate these narratives as an expression of freedom and an exercise of subjectivity. The exhibition of grotesqueness exhibits the wounded body openly to the world, to show it and sign it so that only its author can claim its authority. Therefore, laughter and the comic element in the grotesque, in this case, should be seen as either hysterical, as in the case of Sarmad's body and Blasim's characters, or as the sarcastic grin of monstrosity as intended in the body of the *Shismah*, or as the victorious smile in the celebration of life and love defeating annihilation.

The grotesque body is, then, a sign of self-abjection:

It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order [...] Abjection, on the other hand, is immoral, sinister scheming and shady: a terror that disassembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you. (Kristeva *Powers of Horror* 4).

Abjection of the self is precisely at this paradoxical conjunction where ‘to be’ requires an act of unbeing. That is, to be ‘I’, the undesired ‘I’ must be undone. It is the undesired ‘I’ that disturbs identity, not the new identity. The grotesque body indicates that the image of the body that has been distorted by the mirrors of the conflicting semiospheres is being reconfigured. This can be ascribed to what Yasmien Hanoosh describes as ‘unnatural narratology’, by which she means that “the act of creating texts with defamiliarizing effects that experiment, transgress, refuse to conform, seek extremes, and depart from the ordinary” (“Unnatural Narratives” 148). She observes that the body of contemporary writing from and about Iraq shares “multiple modes of departing from the mimetic norms that characterize the dominant narratological models in modern Iraqi and Arabic fiction, especially the social realism that was cultivated in the 1960s and 1970s in Iraq by seminal authors such as Ghā’ib Ṭu’mah Farmān, Maḥdī ‘Īsā al-Ṣaqr, and Fu’ād al-Takarī” (146).²⁰⁹ I argue that the grotesque representation of the body is one of those modes of departure, and it is a mode of mediating definitions of corporeality motivated by the horrors of destruction and atrocity. The subject in the analysed texts rejects the Iraq written by the patriarchal nationalist discourse and rejects the Iraq written by the colonial project, and the grotesque body is a sign of a process of rejection, abjection: the subject is defining itself; it is becoming – agreeing, then, with Mohammad Arkoun:

The speaking individual becomes free of the constraints and limits of logocentrism only through the experiences of love and death. For it is through love and the confrontation of death that a feeling of a genuinely ineffable truth is created. (3073)

Contemporary Iraqi fiction is restructuring the grammatology of the body in Iraqi literature and social decorum. As Arkoun suggests, the systemic death and dismantling that

²⁰⁹ The authors whom I discussed in Chapter II.

Iraqi people and their heritage have gone through has given birth to the grotesque body, yet it is this grotesque body, as Bakhtin defines it, that gives birth to a new body, a hope. The emergence of the grotesque body and the rethinking of sexuality are 'statements' in the Foucauldian sense; they carry a discursive meanings in the new semiosphere that is contemporary Iraq: neither one thing (the nationalist religious narrative), nor the other (the orientalist and colonial war propaganda); it is rather both and in-between. The emergence of such writings represents an expression of self-love and self-compassion as they try to reorganise and express the violent epistemological and emotional shifts caused by political oppression, wars, hunger, deprivation and dehumanisation. The re-presentation of the body in contemporary fiction is an act of sublimation that separates – abjects, in Kristeva's terms – the self from its others.

V. Conclusions

“You must find the body / in another idea,”²¹⁰

Maḥmūd Darwīsh

In the previous chapters, I have traced a genealogy of the body in the context of contemporary Iraq. At the beginning of this research, I posited a hypothetical shift in the perception of corporeality clearly present in fiction. The examination of both the history and the development of the body’s representation in fiction, having passed through the cataclysmic strategies of the discourse of the war on terror in terms of the body and sexuality, have shown that, at least in the examined works, there is a different concern for corporeality manifested in the grotesque body and the reassessment of gender and sexuality. This difference primarily entails perceiving the body as an instrument that fades in the private realm into the public. The Iraqi private realm used to be governed by feminine aspects which were culturally associated with vulnerability, shame, and repressed sexuality – as opposed to a public realm which was governed by patriarchal masculine values representing social and national pride. The body has now become a stage on which the traits associated with the private realm identify the Iraqi subject. The exhibition of corporeality which was seen as transgressive in the first semiosphere becomes central in the third (contemporary Iraqi fiction). The centrality of bodies in their crude materiality in post 2003 narratives by Iraqi authors indicates a desire and a will to show, exhibit and open the body up to the world to be looked at, discussed, and empathised with. On a certain level, it is possible to affirm that

²¹⁰ From Darwīsh’s ‘In Praise of the High Shadow’ 11.

"عليك أن تجد الجسد / في فكرة أخرى،" من قصيدة مديح الظل العالي: 11.

the exposition of corporeality, the exhibition of its materiality and sexuality indicates the willingness to challenge the long history of nationalist, religious and cultural censorship. Moving from the private sphere to the public, from the invisible to the visible, from the silenced to the outspoken, from the repressed to the celebrated, as expressed in the violence of the flesh, implies a necessity for the flesh to be seen and heard. To respond to this necessity is the first indication of a shift in the perception of corporeality in a semiosphere that has imposed the necessity of hiding the body. The question is, however, where did this necessity come from? Is it only the need to rebel against the years of censorship and deprivation? Or is it a necessity to bring forward something different and new? Rebellion is one way to interpret the deployment of corporeality, but I believe there is more to it.

On metaphysical rebellion in *The Rebel* (1951), Camus perceives rebellion as a process of self-evaluation by means of identification and rejection or negation. For him, rebellion is not merely protesting for rights, it is a cry for sovereignty over the self. Camus defines metaphysical rebellion as “the means by which a man protests against his condition and against the whole creation. It is metaphysical because it disputes the ends of man and creation. [...] We find an assessment of values in the name of which the rebel refuses to accept the condition in which he finds himself” (Camus 11). The first instance of rebellion is thus the awareness of the self’s condition, and then the rejection of that condition. Camus specifies that this awareness takes place via an act of identification, in which the rebel becomes aware of being undermined or violated (2–4). This implies an identification with two images or mirrors: one is the ideal self as seen and/or imagined by the rebel himself and the other is a humiliated self that the rebel identifies with but which he denies and rejects in order to assert the ideal self. This is why Camus insists on the idea that rebellion, paradoxically, is an expression of an urgent need for unity and coherence (11), a unity between the value with which he is treated and the values he demands to be recognized.

Rebellion, then, is the rejection of an episteme within which the subject finds himself articulated because of a latent ideal self-image that is supposed to be the closest to the real self in the rebel's frame of self-recognition. The grotesque body and the rewriting of sexuality, then, could be seen as rebellion against the stereotypical depiction employed by the religious nationalist and colonial orientalist discourses.

Camus's views can be applied to the Iraqi case as, on the one hand, they come from a visionary who could articulate his views on rebellion from different positions in different semiospheres at a time of epistemological violence: he could see colonialism from the perspective of both the coloniser and the colonised. On the other hand, existentialism – Sartre and Camus in particular – inspired in the twentieth century a counterculture which became popular among Iraqi intellectuals (Di-Capua, *No Exit* 110). Muhsin al-Musawi writes: “Iraqi writers have found themselves since the late 1940s more at home with Camus and Sartre” (113). This counterculture emerged in the spirit of decolonisation to “promote individual and collective self-awareness, [to] call for the acceptance of responsibility for one's circumstances, or [to] organize political action” (Di-Capua, *No Exit* 76). Existentialism among Arab intellectuals, and Iraqis in particular, suggested a decolonialised answer that resisted the nationalist and ba'athist project of transforming the Arab self, which they considered a first step towards Arab imperialism (Di-Capua, *No Exit* 146). Existentialist thought, then, has taken part in the Iraqi tradition of decolonising intellectual history and which rejecting both colonial and nationalist bigotry – against which contemporary authors are also writing today. I do not claim, however, that contemporary Iraqi fiction is existentialist as such; rather, I am suggesting that there may be a continuity of these decolonising and antinationalist discourses between those early existentialist intellectuals and contemporary Iraqi authors. That being the case, if early existentialists deployed sexuality (masculinity) in order to express political anxieties in their decolonising project –

as Bahooora suggests and as I examined in Chapter II, contemporary authors seem to go beyond sexuality by embracing corporeality in its utmost materiality as their stage of action.

Moreover, Camus's view on metaphysical rebellion was often confused with collective revolution by many Iraqi authors such as the Iraqi poet 'Abd al-Wahāb al-Bayāti, among others (Di-Capua, *No Exit* 165). Rebellion in contemporary Iraqi fiction, I argue, happens on a philosophical level that does not involve calling for a collective action; it is, rather, to dwell on the human ordeal in its pursuit for happiness in a fast-moving world and in a context tangled with multi-layered forms of coercion and the abuse of power. It is perceived in the personal and singular ownership of the body; to do with it, to write it and write about it what distinguishes it from the historical discourses that shadow it. Rebellion, then, is the enactment of the desire to transform the symbolic order, to dismantle the big Other interwoven with the construction of corporeality since the mirror stage. This shows that, in its essence, rebellion is a linguistic act, a dissolution of statements in the Foucauldian sense, the emergence of new signs at the centre of the semiosphere, pushing old ones towards the boundary as in Lotman's theory of cultural semiotics. The rebel, in the new narratives, is the Iraqi corporeal subject who detaches himself from the constructions of sexed identity articulated in the rejected symbolic orders. This is what makes the body a sign; it pairs the subjectivity of the signifier with a rejected signified, and it is what makes the body abject: "It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object" (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 4).

The enactment of the discourse of the war on terror operates on the experienced corporeal reality as a mechanism of subjugation. The cultural reproduction of the three feminising strategies discussed in Chapter III creates a perceptual reality in which Iraqi individuals – viewed through the body – find themselves passive, visible, and viewed as

occupying an ontological status that corresponds to femininity in the semiosphere prior to 2003. By exposing the images of Abu-Ghraib and by relying on the visibility of the enemy, the discourse of the war on terror created what Žižek calls ‘a sublime body’ – a body woven or ‘veiled’, as Yeğenoğlu would say, by ideological threads (*The Sublime Object* 163), a continually vincible, rejected, and despised body, a fantasy by which to support colonial (American) exceptionalism. In *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Giorgio Agamben describes Auschwitz as “the devastating experience in which the impossible is forced into the real” (148). The same can be said about Abu Ghraib and the strategies of representation enacted on the body of the Other in the discourse of the war on terror. They are not mere exploitations of “the Muslim prohibition against nudity, homosexuality, and masturbation in order to tear down the cultural fabric that keeps the integrity of these people intact” (Butler, *Frames of War* 89). Even if the images were intended to do this, they also forcibly violate the frames of recognition in which the people see and perceive themselves, as the images impose new frames by which ‘to frame’ them. The materiality of the body, which was perceived as collectively private, hidden and thus as maintaining the decency of the human being, is now publicly exposed, essentialised, reified, and framed as monstrous. The very idea, the very term ‘invasion’ implies a breach. The Latin porigin of the word, *in + vadere* means ‘to go into, to walk in’, and, by extension, to penetrate a presumably closed, if not private space which is not mine, which is to say I am not in it, nor is it within my domain – from whence I can reconfigure its structure.

This is how the grotesque body and the reassessment of sexuality become a representation of double abjection by which the subject separates itself from these frames and becomes an embodiments of rebellion which expresses rejection and the negation of colonial representations. At the same time, however, these open the space to articulate new frames of recognition sustained by new counter-embodiments now that the previous

discourse of corporeality is shattered and no longer valid for sustaining the present situation. The aesthetic innovation of the grotesque in Iraqi fiction and the reassessment of sexuality indicate a search for new aesthetic embodiments and an abandonment of the logocentric assumption of corporeality as something fixed, governed by unmoveable political and religious imperatives, which materialises the singularity of one's identity in an anticolonial context. The hyperbolisation of the body and the attempt to rewrite gender and sexuality concurs with what Elizabeth Grosz calls 'the pliability of bodies':

Bodies themselves, in their materiality, are never self-present, given things, immediate, certain self-evidences, because embodiment, corporeality, insist on alterity, both that alterity they carry within themselves (the heart of the psyche lies in the body; the body's principles of functioning are psychological and cultural) and that alterity that gives them their own concreteness and specificity (the alterities constituting race, sex, sexualities, ethnic and cultural specificities). Alterity is the very possibility and process of embodiment: it conditions but is also a product of the pliability or plasticity of bodies which makes them other than themselves, other than their "nature," their functions and identities. (209)

That the body and its functions can be written and rewritten transgressively and still maintain the alterity and uniqueness of cultural specificity is another new perception of the body in contemporary Iraqi fiction.

Grosz suggests the Mobius strip, inspired by Lacanian theory, as a possible model "by which bodies and their sexual differences are to be understood" (209), in the sense that the concept allows us to illustrate the body and mind relations in a twisted continuum where neither the mind nor the body can be understood without the other. The representation of corporeality here works in similar dynamics; on the one hand, it sublimates the corporeal

void caused by the negation of the frames of recognition, both traditional and colonial, into an aesthetic proposal, and, at the same time, it posits the question of writing trauma and the ugliness of war and invasion. This means that it is not sufficient to look at the body in contemporary Iraqi fiction as an embodiment of trauma and the horrors of dictatorship and war or invasion; it is also celebration of subjectivity by means of writing from and about the body, questioning what one is and is not, attempting to define one's own position in relation to history, global politics, and culture. Therefore, just as we can examine body representations, we can also examine body writing, as well as the process of writing or thinking through the body, abandoning male supremacy – discussed in Chapter II – and moving towards a writing of the body to be determined or not. What the examined texts show is ambivalence, a rejection of framed bodily images, but refraining from, or not yet capable of, offering a clear alternative; a corporeality in the making, emerging from the dead frames towards a new form, hence the grotesque. What is clear though, is that the new image is an image of the “‘other’ war actor” – as Masmoudi puts it (215). It is an image of vulnerability that does not justify for patriarchal militarism, an image that expresses devastating horror and annihilation, yet shows resilience in the very capacity of owning and producing a self-image.

That said, this alterity should, nevertheless, be submitted to careful examination and constant reassessment, for it can very easily fall back into readily made frames. In a webinar with Sinan Antoon, I asked him what he thought about the way contemporary Iraqi fiction is dealing with the depiction of violence, and part of his answer focused on the problem which I posit here. In his words

A lot of Iraqi writers are trying to compensate for so many epochs that have not been written about, but, frankly, also there is the other two-fold problem of so many Arab

writers writing for translation, because that is one way to reach the outside world and to get some monetary compensation. And the other problem is these new state-sponsored prizes in the Gulf, and I acknowledge I participated in them in the past, and some of work was shortlisted, but these prizes have had a very deleterious effect on the type of novels that are written [...] In a way it almost overdetermines the themes and ways that novelists write, because throughout the history of these prizes they have tended to favour certain types of narratives that are already speaking to the putative audience of translated works and they fund a lot of these translations, so [...] a lot of writers are thinking, 'Oh! I should write about minorities' because that's what will get the attraction of the global north.²¹¹

I agree with what Antoon implies here: there is a systematic rewarding for the sort of writing that can be interpreted as tantalising the orientalist fantasy and as justifying at least some 'statements' of the discourse of the war on terror. This requires further attention because, in such a case, not every celebration of corporeality constitutes rebellion and a dwelling on subjectivity. This would be an impairment to the ethics of writing about violence, and the deployment of corporeality would serve the old frames of war. If a certain writing of violence is required, desired, and rewarded, then it is imperative that certain violence be written about.

In Chapter III, I established a distinction between bodies to be saved and bodies to be doomed and the saviour's body in the narrative strategies that justify the war on terror. What if the narratives of victims were to apply the same strategies? While it is clear who the saviour is (the complex American hero), and who is to be doomed (the savage sex-freak terrorist), who to be saved is not altogether clear. What if counter narratives insisted on the

²¹¹ From the webinar 'Sinan Antoon, Literature and Surveillance: A Reading and Conversation with Olivier Morel' organised by the research collective 'Literatures of Annihilation, Exile, and Resistance' at University of Notre Dame. <https://litofexile.nd.edu/events/2020/11/06/sinan-antoon-literature-and-surveillance-br-a-reading-and-conversation/>

victim's victimhood in the depiction of all kinds of atrocities to create the effect of shock so that the grievances can at least be perceived? Will the depiction of these atrocities be an aesthetic proposal to reject the frames of recognition established by the traditional and orientalist discourse? Or does it participate in the creation of a collective imagination in which victimhood is only justified through utter misery and suffering? Will it be a narrative of victimhood or victimisation which promotes suffering as a consumable product that satisfies the Other's narcissistic demands, rather than awakening the impulses for a better change? During my virtual research residency and the Centre for Comparative Literature at Goldsmiths University of London, I developed a definition of the term 'the banality of violence' to describe the employment of corporeal suffering and violence, which responds to the attraction of the global north, does not propose a discourse of alterity as does my proposal of reading the grotesque body.

The concept of the banality of violence clearly echoes Hannah Arendt's concept of the banality of Evil. Nevertheless, it has been employed in academic research to refer to different things. On one hand, Ema Jelínková finds banality in "the sense of commonness or ordinariness, unexceptionality, as opposed to monstrosity, perversity, exceptionality" (54), "not in the sense of triviality" (49). Habibul Haque Khondker finds that the banality of violence "is related to the lack of a culture of civility—a broad cultural code and a social compact where tolerance, responsibility, and respect are the core values" (409). More specifically, Kathleen M. Bee describes it as "[t]he culture of violence that suffuses organised racism" (61), and finally, Dayan López Bravo simply understands it as the rationalisation, naturalisation, or normalisation of violence (113). While all these readings cover the definition of the concept in their respective areas of study, I propose a definition of the banality of violence which relates to Hannah Arendt's definition of banality. If the banality of evil comes from "the strange interdependence of thoughtlessness and evil"

(Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* 288) or from “a failure to think” (xiv), the banality of violence is the failure to see the purposelessness or the moral ends of violence.

In her essay *On Violence*, Hannah Arendt sees violence as “rational to the extent that is effective in reaching the end that must justify it” and that it “can remain rational only if it pursues short-term goals”. She continues: “Violence does not promote causes, neither history nor revolution, neither progress nor reaction; but it can serve to dramatize grievances and bring them to public attention” (79). This is evident in most cases where the materiality of the body plays a central role in war fiction: the value of the depiction of violence is in making injustice visible, therefore it indulges in the depiction of violence and atrocities so that its catastrophic impact is remembered and, hopefully, avoided. However, to what extent will that be effective? To Arendt it can only be effective if it has served short-term ends, and to that Butler and Sontag add that the long exposure to images of atrocities impairs if not causes emotional numbness towards the pain of others. Dissent writing and the depiction of violence in the literature of the Middle East not only seem to be ineffective in fighting injustice, but they have also provoked violence – in political persecution and exile for instance – and now some of that body of work might be tendentious in relying on specific narratives of conflict and violence. As Arendt argues, if the goals of violence are not met, violence becomes an ontological practice of the body politic. Here is where the problem becomes critical: if violence has become an ontological practice of the body politic, what end does the depiction of atrocities serve?

In ‘Critique of Violence’, Walter Benjamin investigates the notions of the legality of violence, specifying two categories, legitimate and illegitimate violence “based on the presence or absence of a general historical acknowledgement of its ends” (249). Based on his examination of the functions of military or state violence (law-making or law-

preserving), violence in the Middle East can be described as law-preserving in the sense that it preserves an invisible law that maintains the need for violence. The narrative and the political discourse which addresses violence in the area, both internally and externally, endorse cause-and-effect dynamics which invoke the constant need for violent intervention. That is, the political discourse that accompanies military operations, whether local or colonial, is constantly relying on an interpretation of violence that seems to serve legal ends, and therefore it is enacted through the law-preserving function of violence. The problematic aspect of this function is that it operates within what Slavoj Žižek defines as ‘objective violence’, the invisible “violence inherent to [the] ‘normal’ state of things” (*Violence 2*). The banality of violence occurs when objective violence functions as a law-preserving instrument serving what apparently seem like legal ends, yet these ends are never definitely met, and there is no awareness (no thinking) of the inevitable evil coming from it. As Arendt argues, it is dangerous to think that good can come out of evil, and that power, sovereignty, or freedom in this case, can come out of violence. Similarly, the depiction of violence can only assert the grievances and the suffering of the victim; it does not assert its identity in any way other than being violated. My claim can be summarised in the statement that it is not enough to look at the immediate ends of writing and depicting violence. It requires further thinking so that its ends it can be met.

When literary and artistic works use an excess of crude and explicit depictions of violence inflicted on the body – aiming at calling the public attention to certain humanitarian crises or the tragicness of military conflict – they are also converting the stories, bodies, and people they are writing about into a consumable product. The paradox lies in the fact that, by aiming at voicing the silent, the futile attempt becomes a mere description of how things are. If victims of violence are consistently framed as bodies to be saved without actually saving them, then we are perpetuating that narrative so as to make it material reality. The

image of the helpless victim becomes the helpless reality of the victim. It becomes a case more of interiorising the discourse of annihilation as an ontological status of the victims, rather than of managing the epistemic violence they undergo, for the depiction of victims generates more victimhood. As Susan Sontag explains, it is the power of the image to make something real (not more real) (*Regarding the Pain of Others* 19). Laura Mulvey explains that “the still image can generate identification and represent enigma without recourse to narrative closure” (*Visual and Other Pleasures* 141). Images, she continues, “do not describe or show. They elicit a response from the spectator that is emotional in addition to intellectual recognition of a political discourse” (130). In the act of seeing, the psychodynamics of voyeurism and the power relations between victims and perpetrators can affect the process of identification as “the mode of addressing the process of exchange between an art object and its spectator positions the subject and affirms identity” (128). This means that the constant production of images and representations that incite pity and empathy will govern the frames of recognitions in which we, spectators, frame ourselves and frame the victim in the image.

In Chapter III, I have shown how some representations of the ‘victims’ in the fiction of American Iraq veterans dehumanise the Iraqi population by reducing them to two categories: the ‘enemy’ – insurgents, terrorists, misogynists – or to ‘relics of war’, a concept which I use here to refer to the representation of dehumanised war victims, such as the Iraqi war victims, who are usually presented as wretched, subaltern subjects annihilated by poverty, frustration and sexual repression or abuse. I borrow the term ‘relic’ from Mikhail Bakhtin’s description of authoritative discourse: “If completely deprived of its authority, it becomes simply an object, a relic, a thing” (*The Dialogic Imagination* 344). Although there is a third figure which requires further examination, that of the collaborator, the translator, the good savage, whose depiction can swing between the limits of being a relic – as in *The*

Yellow Birds – and the camouflaged enemy – as in *Homeland*. My definition of ‘war relics’ entails subaltern subjects, representations of whom engage the aesthetics of relics: scruffy, out of time, deprived of civilization, squalid, fragile even while their very presence entails an importance of a religious nature, evoking the holiness and the sanctity of a ‘just’ war, which has been waged to save them in the first place (or which is still needs to be waged). A clear picture of the ‘relics of war’ can be seen in Phil Klay’s raped Iraqi children or the Iraqi corpse being licked by a dog in his short story ‘Redeployment’, or in those children used to plant improvised explosive devises in ‘War Stories’, as well as in the man and woman who lead Bartle to Murph’s castrated body in *The Yellow Birds* – especially in the film adaptation. All these annihilated, defenceless bodies remind us why this war needs to be fought: to use ‘our’ privilege and save those relics.

There is no argument against such works embodying the ultimately noble intention of making us perceive combat as the utmost horror imposed on good youthful men by their superior and decision makers; veteran’s fiction in most cases offers anti-war narratives showing us a different side of the story. However, we need to think further. American veteran’s fiction, particularly in the examined texts, is not concerned with Iraqi soldiers; in fact there are hardly any Iraqi soldiers in their narratives. For the American Iraq veteran authors there are only locals and insurgents, no Iraqi state, no army whatsoever. What veterans’ fiction – as well as Iraq ‘war’ films like *American Sniper* (2014) – offer is a narrative of victimisation in which the victims are young American soldiers and the only war criminals are the insurgents who kill American soldiers and other Iraqi people, as well as the decision makers, generals, coronels, and politicians. This narrative, which dehumanises Iraqi victims, invests violence in what Walter Benjamin terms ‘law-preserving violence’: violence that perpetuates and serves the ‘legal’ ends of the powerful state (299).

This can also be the case for the media, literature and art which assumes the ambitious task of showing the world the suffering and the violence of wars and catastrophes, such as some of the works that depict the Syrian civil war – like Jan Dost’s *Green Bus Leaving Aleppo* (2016), and the documentary *For Sama* (2019),²¹² or the victimhood caused by ISIL – like Ali Bader’s *The Infidel Woman* (2015), or the refugee crisis – like Abdallah Al-Khatib’s documentary *Little Palestine* (2021). These works perpetuate an image – and an imaginary – of the ‘relicness’ of the people they present, which can quickly turn into stigma which both criticism and literary and artistic production need to challenge. This is because such works rely on self-orientalising and a discourse of pathos to be selected and promoted in film festivals and book fairs, rather than to address critically the question of hegemony and resilience. Like veterans’ fiction, works that employ scenes of violence and extreme vulnerability as a mechanism of protest to condemn the unquestionable injustice and atrocities, without claiming the subjectivity of the victims and their capacity to return the gaze which deprives them of authority, can only expand the narrative of victimisation and the need for a ‘saviour’. The excess of information on the suffering of others, and the massive production of such images, as Susan Sontag argues, does not alleviate the victims’ pain. As the reality on the ground shows, it does not stop violence or amend circumstances, for this is not a ‘law-making violence’; rather, this is an employment of violence that preserves the ‘relic’ nature of its subjects.

What such depictions can do, however, is to ease the viewers’ moral consciousness by the act of sympathising with the pain of others, distancing them from the victims, yet giving the viewers a sense of authority and moral satisfaction in being aware of and feeling others’ pain without living it. The consumption of ‘war relics’ grants the viewer the full experience:

²¹² Nominated to nine prestigious awards, winning twelve.

that of watching, of feeling and of knowing and of judging. It gives them an entitlement to speak of the victim's victimisation and to 'do' something about it, to 'intervene', 'help' or 'save' 'them' – the classic clichés of modern colonial chauvinism.

This is the banality of violence: it is the excess of images and imageries in narratives of military conflict and humanitarian crisis, it is the way in which violence is perpetuated in the apparently most humanitarian and noble purposes of an artistic work. It lies in the unconscious preservation of victimhood narratives, reducing the depicted subject to an image of a dehumanised relic that serves to justify the source of its victimisation in the name of defending its rights. The banality of violence thus lies not only in the purposelessness of violence: it also resides in the ineffectiveness and the chaotic randomness of writing about and depicting violence. The banality of violence is the lack of thought and meditation on how the author should implement images and narratives of atrocities and how their narratives not only fail to eradicate evil, but also perpetuate it. It is the indifference to what the reader makes of it.

The key aspect to realise here is that post-war and invasion narrative in contemporary Iraqi fiction is ambivalent. There are texts – like the ones examined in this research – which deal with corporeality as a sign of merged histories and as a symptom of development, and there are others which deploy the body in a discourse of pathos that responds to colonial fantasies. The grotesque body is a manifestation of the post-breakage moment, it indicates that some change is happening, and that corporeality is undergoing a process. However, one can foresee and warn against the representation of violence before it becomes an example of the banality of violence. As Žižek puts it, “do not fall in love with your suffering, never

presume that your suffering is in itself a proof of your authenticity. Renunciation of pleasure can easily turn into pleasure of renunciation itself'.²¹³

Further research can reveal whether corporeality in contemporary Iraqi fiction has fallen back into the old frames of war and thus become a further manifestation of the banality of violence, or whether it has managed to take the grotesque representation of the body to a different place where new developments of the body can open up new interpretations. Similarly, more studies are required to show how the grotesque representation of corporeality is present in other literary genres in Iraq and in other literatures in Arabic of the surrounding areas, especially literatures written in a post-war and violent context. The present study, additionally, raises a series of questions which require further academic examination such as the relationship between and the history of the grotesque and Orientalism, to see if there are other responses to colonial and orientalist discourse characterised by grotesque aesthetics. Furthermore, there is the possibility of examining other manifestations or genres that are criss-crossed with the grotesque such as the *Doppelgänger*, repulsive realism, or the gothic. Other than the aesthetics of the grotesque, there is a potential in examining the existence and the history of sexual terrorism in war propaganda, particularly other American wars, and their impact on, for instance, Central American, Korean, Vietnamese, and Asian American contemporary writings. What is more, Agamben's commentary on the Muselmann in *Remnants of Auschwitz* as an ethical conundrum draws attention to the possibility of a comparative examination of the depiction of atrocities in the post 2003 Iraqi narratives and how they relate to other human and moral catastrophes, such as the holocaust, and wars in the age of massive media technology such as the recent Russian-Ukrainian war. Moreover, having established corporeality in

²¹³ From the Žižek-Peaterson debate: min, 45:25.

contemporary Iraqi fiction as an act of writing through and about the body as a way of configuring new frames of recognition, one cannot help but wonder whether there is space to examine such writing of corporeality as application of '*écriture féminine*', and how it can add to or be influenced by the established theory. Also, particularly in the work of Hassan Blasim and 'Āliyah Mamdūh, there is the question of femininity as monstrosity, which can shed light on different approaches to corporeality in Iraqi fiction. As Hannah Arendt suggests, change does not come about only through violence: all human action, the very capacity of action, to create something new, something unexpected, can interrupt processes in the realm of human affairs (*On Violence* 30). If the flesh needs to be heard, for the body to become a space of expressivity and self-realisation, we need to move the discussion from atrocities and war traumas as an objects of study *per se*, and find the body somewhere else, somewhere better, somewhere where pain is meaningful. Future translations and scholarship on Iraqi literature can be crucial to that matter.

نتائج البحث

"عليك أن تجد الجسد"

في فكرة أخرى،²¹⁴

محمود درويش

في الفصول السابقة تتبعنا أصول تكوين مفهوم الجسد في سياق ثقافة العراق المعاصر. في بداية هذا البحث، افترضنا انعطافاً لمفهوم الجسمانية تتضح بصورة خاصة في الفن السردي. بعد مراجعة كل من تاريخ تمثيل الجسد في السرد وتطوره، وبعد المرور بالإستراتيجيات الكارثية لخطاب الحرب على الارهاب فيما يتعلق بالجسد والجنسانية، أظهرت هذه الدراسة، في الاعمال المدروسة على الأقل، ان هناك اهتماماً مختلفاً بالجسمانية ينكشف من خلال الجسد الغزوتسك، ومن خلال اعادة تقييم الجندر والجنسانية. ونجم عن هذا الاختلاف تصوّر للجسد بوصفه اداة تُفجّم المجال الخاص بالعام. كان المجال الخاص في المجتمع العراقي قبل الغزو الذي قاده الولايات الأمريكية المتحدة عام 2003 محكوماً بصفات تندرج تحت فئة الأنوثة مثل الضعف والعار والكبت الجنسي، بعكس المجال العام الذي تطغى عليه قيم النظام الأبوي للذكورة والرجولة بصفتها صورة للفخر القومي والاجتماعي. إن الجسد الآن أصبح بمثابة المسرح الذي تُجسد عليه سمات المجال خاص للتعريف بالذات العراقية. وعليه فإن مركزية الجسد بماديته الفجة في سرديات الكُتاب العراقيين ما بعد 2003، تشير إلى رغبةً ونزوعاً نحو كشف الجسد، وعرضه وفتحه امام العالم، لكي ينظر اليه ويُناقشه ويتعاطف معه. والى حد ما، من الممكن ان نؤكد ان كشف الجسمانية، واستعراض مادية الجسد وجنسانيته يشيران إلى الرغبة في وقوف بوجه تاريخ طويل من الرقابات القومية والدينية والثقافية. وإن الانطلاق من الخاص الى العام، ومن اللامرئي الى المرئي، ومن المسكوت عنه الى المعلن عنه، ومن المقموع إلى المُحتفى به، والمُعبر عنه من خلال عنف اللحم البشري يتضمن حاجة ذلك اللحم المُلحّة لأن يُرى وأن يُسمع. وإن الاستجابة لهذه الحالة هي أول مؤشر على انعطاف مفهوم الجسمانية في فضاء دلالي كان يفرض ضرورة اخفاء الجسد. لكن السؤال، مع ذلك، يبقى: من أين جاءت هذه الحاجة؟ أهي مجرد حاجة الى التمرد على سنين طويلة من الرقابة والجُرمان؟ ام انها ضرورة المجيء بشيء جديد ومختلف. فالتمرد هو طريقة واحدة من طرق فهم تطور الجسمانية، وأنتني اعتقد ان ثمة ما هو أكثر من ذلك.

²¹⁴ من قصيدة مديح الظل العالي: 11.

في شرحه للتمرد الميتافيزيقي في *المتنرد*، يوضح كامو مفهوم التمرد على انه صيرورة تقييم الذات من خلال المطابقة (او التماثل) ثم الرفض او الانكار. فعند كامو، التمرد ليس مجرد احتجاج من اجل الحقوق، بل هو صرخة من اجل السيادة على الذات، وهو يعرف التمرد الميتافيزيقي على انه "وسيلة يحتج الفرد من خلالها على وضعه ضد الخلق كله. وهو ميتافيزيقي لأنه يحاجج الغاية من وجود الفرد ومن الخلق [...] نجد فيه اعادة للنظر في القيم التي يرفض من خلالها المتنرد أن يتصاع للوضع الذي يجد نفسه فيه" (11 Camus).

وبناءً على ذلك فإن اول خطوة في التمرد هو الوعي بوضع الذات، ومن ثم رفضه. ويحدد كامو أن هذا الوعي يتأتى من خلال المماثلة حيث يدرك المتنرد أنه مضطهد ومُنتهك (2-4) وهذا يتضمن تماثلاً مع صورتين/ مرأتين: احدهما تعكس صورة الذات المثالية كما يراها أو يتخيلها المتنرد نفسه، والاخرى هي الذات المهانة التي تنطبق عليه، والتي يرفضها أو ينكرها لكي يؤكد ذاته المثلى. لهذا يصبرُ كامو على فكرة أن التمرد، على العكس مما قد يبدو عليه، هي تعبير عن حاجة ملحة للاتحاد والتناسق أو الانسجام بين القيم التي يُعامل بها وتلك القيم التي يُطالب بالاعتراف بها. فالتمرد إذن هو رفض لمنظومة معرفية يجد الفرد فيها نفسه ممثلةً بصورة لا يرضاها، وذلك بسبب وجود صورة أخرى للذات الكامنة التي يفترض ان تكون الاقرب الى الذات المثلى بحسب وعي المتنرد لذاته. وكذلك هو الجسد الغزوتسك واعداء كتابة الجنسانية الذي يُمكن ان يُعتبر تمرداً ضد التصوير النمطي المُستخدَم في الخطاب الديني القومي والاستعماري الاستشراقي.

يمكن تطبيق آراء كامو على الحالة العراقية. فمن جانب تأتي آراؤه من رؤية قادرة على التعبير عن التمرد من مواضع مختلفة في فضائين دلاليين مختلفين في طور عنف معرفي: فهو قادر على رؤية الاستعمار من منظور المستعمر والمستعمر في آن معاً. ومن جانب آخر أثرت الوجودية – سارتر وكامو بخاصة – على الثقافة المضادة للاستعمار التي كانت شائعة بين المثقفين العراقيين (11 Di-Capua, *No Exit*). يقول محسن الموسوي: "وجد الكتاب العراقيون أنفسهم منذ اواخر الاربعينيات أكثر انسجاماً مع كامو وسارتر" (113). وقد ظهرت هذه الثقافة المضادة كجزء من روحية التحرر من الاستعمار "لكي تنهض بالوعي بالذات على المستوى الفردي والجمعي لكي تدعو الى تحمل مسؤولية الفرد لظروفه، او للدعوة الى تنظيم النشاط السياسي (76 Di-Capua, *No Exit*). فقد قدمت الوجودية إجابة تحزيرية من الاستعمار وقاومت المشروع القومي والبعثي لتغيير الذات العربية التي اعتبروها مرحلة أولى نحو الامبريالية العربية (146). ولذلك فإن الفكر الوجودي كان قد أسهم في تكوين الفكر العراقي الداعي للتحزير من الاستعمار وفي الوقت ذاته رفض التعصب الاستعماري والقومي على حد سواء، وهو التعصب الذي يُناهضه الكتاب العراقيون المعاصرون ايضاً. لا أدعي

الجزم هنا ان السرد العراقي المعاصر يندرج ضمن إيديولوجية وجودية بهذا الشكل، بل أتوه الى امكانية استمرارية تلك الخطابات التحررية من الاستعمار والقومية عند أولئك المثقفين الوجوديين العراقيين الاوائل، لتصل الى الكُتاب العراقيين المُعاصرين. وفي هذه الحالة إذا كان الوجوديون العراقيون الاوائل قد استخدموا الجسمانية (الذكورية) للتعبير عن القلق السياسي في المشروع التحرري من الاستعمار كما يقول بهورة، وكما وضحتُ في الفصل الثاني، يبدو ان المؤلفين المعاصرين قد مضوا الى ابعد من الجسمانية ليعتمدوا الجسمانية بأقصى صورها ماديةً كمسرح لنشاطهم.

علاوةً على ذلك، كانت آراء كامو في التمرد الميتافيزيقي غالباً ما تختلط عند الكُتاب العراقيين بالثورة الجماعية كما حدث عند الشاعر العراقي عبد الوهاب البياتي، بين آخرين (165 Di-Capua, *No Exit*). لكن التمرّد في السرد العراقي المعاصر، وهي الفكرة التي اطرحها انا، يحدث على مستوى فلسفي لا يتضمن الدعوة الى فعل جماعي، بل بالأحرى أنه يُعنى بمحنة الانسان في سعيه نحو السعادة في عالم سريع الحركة وضمن سياقات متشابكة مع تعددية مستويات تطبيق اشكال القسر وانتهاكات السلطة. فالتمرّد هنا يمكن فهمه للجسد كملكية شخصية وفردية، ليتم تفعيله والعمل به، وكتابته، والكتابة عنه بما يميزه عن الخطابات التاريخية التي تطغى عليه وتُشوش صورته. ولذلك فإن التمرّد هو تفعيلٌ للرغبة في تغيير النظام الرمزي، وتفكيك للآخر الأكبر المتشابك في نسيج بنية الجسمانية بدءاً بمرحلة المرأة، عند لاكان. وعليه فإن التمرّد في جوهره هنا هو فعلٌ لغوي، تحلّلٌ للعبارات في فهم فوكو للمصطلح، وظهور مقصود لعلامات وعبارات جديدة في مركز الفضاء الدلالي، مُزيحاً العلامات القديمة نحو الحد السيميائي المحيط بالفضاء الدلالي كما تقول نظرية لوتمان في سيميائية الثقافة. والمُتمرد في السرديات الجديدة هو الذات العراقية الجسمانية التي تتأى بنفسها عن كل بُنى الهوية المبنية على أسس جنسية في الأنظمة الرمزية السابقة والمرفوضة. وهذا هو بالتحديد ما يجعل من الجسد دلالة تجمع بين الذات الدالّة والمدلول المرفوض، وهو ما يجعل الجسد دلالة الذات المنبوذة: "انه شيء مرفوض لا فكك منه، شيء لا يمكن حماية الذات منه كما نحمي أنفسنا من شيء ما" (4 Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*).

يشغل تفعيل خطاب الحرب على الارهاب على الواقع الجسمني كآلية مُجربة تهدف الى الاخضاع. ان اعادة انتاج الإستراتيجيات التائيشية الثلاث التي ناقشناه في الفصل الثالث، تخلق حقيقةً ادراكيةً حيث يجد الافراد العراقيون - منظورا إليهم من خلال الجسد- أنفسهم سلبيين ومطواعين ومنظورا إليهم هكذا كحالة انطولوجية تتواءم مع مفهوم الانوثة في الفضاء الدلالي قبل 2003. فمن خلال نشر صور ابو غريب وبالاعتماد على مُحاربة العدو من خلال تصويره، قد خُلِق خطاب الحرب على الارهاب ما سمّاه ژيژك بالجسد المتسامي (*Subline Object* 163)، او الجسد المنسوج - او

المُبرقع على حد تعبير يغيغو غلو- بخيوط أيديولوجية، وهو جسد مهزوم ومرفوض ومُحتقر بصورة مستمرة، جسد كما يراه ويخلقه الوهم الذي يدعم الاستعلاء (الأميركي) الاستعماري.

في بقايا/أوشفيتز يصف جورجيو اغامبين أوشفيتز كـ "تجربة مدمرة كاسحة حيث يُقحم المستحيل داخل الواقع" (148). الشيء نفسه يمكن ان يقال عن ابو غريب وعن إستراتيجيات التمثيل المستخدمة ضد جسد الآخر في خطاب الحرب على الارهاب. فهي ليست مُجرد انتهاك " لتحريم المسلمين للعزّي والمثلية الجنسية والاستمناء بهدف تمزيق النسيج الثقافي الذي يحافظ على كرامة هؤلاء الناس مصانة" (89 Butler, *Frames of War*). وحتى لو كانت الصور تهدف الى ذلك، فهي أيضاً تنتهك عُنوة الأطر المعرفية التي يرى هؤلاء الناس ويفهمون أنفسهم من خلالها، لأن هذه الصور تفرض أطراً جديدة "يتأطرون" بها. أن مادية الجسد، التي كانت تُفهم جمعياً على أنها شيء خصوصي، مخفي وبذلك تحفظ كرامة الانسان، قد انكشفت على الملأ، وجُعِل منها مفهوماً جوهرياً للذات التي تمّ تجسيمها وتأطيرها كشيء وحشي. ان فكرة الغزو بحد ذاتها تنطوي على فكرة خرق الحاجز – في اللاتينية (in + vadere) اي الدخول في، السير داخل، الإيلاج الى داخل ما يُفترض به أن يكون مجالاً مغلقاً او خصوصياً، ليس ملكاً لي، فأنا لستُ داخله، كما أنه ليس من ممتلكاتي، ومن ثم اعادة تشكيل بنيته.

بهذا الشكل أصبح الجسد الغروتسك وكذلك اعادة النظر في الجنسانية، تمثيلاً مزدوجاً للذات المنبوذة تفصل من خلاله الذات نفسها عن تلك الأطر ليصبح تجسيدا لثَمَرْد يُعبر عن رفض التمثيلات الاستعمارية والتقليدية وانكارها. وفي الوقت نفسه، يفتح المجال للتعبير عن أطر جديدة للمعرفة تُكرسها تجسيدياً مُضادة جديدة الآن بعد أن تمّ تهشيم الخطابات الجسمانية السابقة التي لم تعد صالحة لتجسيد الحالة الراهنة. كذلك تؤثر جماليات لجسد الغروتسك واعادة النظر في الجنسانية على أن هناك بحثاً عن تجسيديات جمالية جديدة، كما وتُشير الى الابتعاد عن الافتراض المركزي للجسمانية كشيء ثابت محكوم بحتميات سياسية ودينية جامدة تُجسد فَرادة هوية الشخص ضمن إطار مناهضة للاستعمار. ان التضخيم والمبالغة في تصوير الجسد ومحاولة اعادة كتابة الجندر والجنسانية يتفق مع ما تُسميه اليزابيث غروز طواعية الجسد:

ان الاجساد بذاتها، في ماديتها، لا تمثل نفسها ابدأ، ليست مفروغاً منها، ولا مباشرة، ولا واضحة تلقائياً لأن التجسيد والجسمانية يصران على الغيرية. الغيرية بكلا معنييها، الغيرية التي تحملها الأجساد في داخلها (قلب الذات العقلية يكمن في الجسد، مبادئ الجسد الوظيفية والتي هي نفسية وثقافية) والغيرية التي تُعطي للأجساد صفاتها التي تُميزها وتُحددها (الغيريات التي تتضمن العنصر، الجنس، الجنسانيات، والخصوصيات العرقية

والثقافية). الغيرية هي إمكانية ومعالجة التجسيد: تحدد الأجساد، ولكنها أيضاً نتيجة طواعيتها ومرورتها التي

تجعل الأجساد أكثر من كونها ذلك، أكثر من "طبيعتها"، ووظائفها وهوياتها. (209)

وهذا يعني أن يُمكن الجسد من خلال كتابته وإعادة كتابته وإعادة كتابة وظائفه بشراسة وبصورة مغايرة أبداً، وبظل مع ذلك محتفظاً بمرورته وفرادته وخصوصيته الثقافية. هذه هي المفاهيم الجديدة للجسد في القص العراقي المعاصر.

تطرح غروز شريط موييوس، مستلهمةً به من نظرية لاكان، كنموذج ممكن " لفهم الجسد واختلافاته الجنسية" (209). بمعنى أنه يسمح بتصوير علاقة الجسد بالعقل في استمرارية ملتوية حيث لا يمكن فهم العقل ولا الجسد من دون أحدهما الآخر. وكذلك تمثيل الجسمانية هنا، يعمل بالآلية نفسها. فمن جانب يتسامى بالفراغ الجسماني، الناتج عن انكار الاطر المعرفية سواء التقليدية كانت ام الاستعمارية، نحو طرح جمالي. كذلك وفي الوقت نفسه، يطرح اسئلة حول كتابة صدمة الحرب والغزو وبشاعتها. مما يعني أنه لا يكفي أن ننظر الى الجسد في السرد العراقي المعاصر كتجسيد للصدمة وفضائح الدكتاتورية من جهة والحرب والغزو من جهة أخرى. بل تجب دراسته كاحتفاء بالذات الفاعلة من خلال الكتابة عبر الجسد وعنه، طارحاً اسئلة عن ماهية الفرد ولا ماهيته، في محاولة للتعرف على موقع الفرد ازاء التاريخ والسياسة العالمية والثقافة. ولذلك، وبقدر ما نستطيع أن نتفحص تمثيلات الجسد، يمكننا أن نتفحص ايضاً كتابة الجسد، والكتابة او التفكير من خلال الجسد، نابذين الاستعلاء الذكوري والاستعماري – الذي تحدثت عنهما في الفصلين الثاني والثالث – نحو كتابة للجسد في طريقها الى أن تُقرر أو ألا تُقرر. وما تكشفه النصوص المدروسة هنا ازدواجية الجسد، رفض لصور الجسد المؤطرة من دون طرح بديل واضح. انها جسمانية في طور التكوّن، تنبثق من خلال اطر مينة نحو شكل جديد، ومن هنا جاء الجسد الغروتسك. وان ما هو واضح هنا هو أن الصورة الجديدة هي صورة فاعل حرب "آخر" - كما تتحدث عنها مسمودي (215). انها صورة الهشاشة التي لا تُبرر العسكرية الابوية، صورة تعبر عن الرعب الكاسح والابادة، ومع ذلك تُبدي مقاومة في قُدّرتها على امتلاك صورة ذاتية وانتاجها.

على الرغم مما سبق، لابد لهذه الغيرية من أن تدرس بعناية ومراجعة مستمرة، لأنها يمكن ان ترتد بالجسد الى الاطر الجاهزة والسابقة. في ندوة مع سنان انطون سألته عن رأيه في كيفية معالجة السرد العراقي المعاصر لموضوعة العنف، فتركز جزء من اجابته على المشكلة التي انطرق اليها هنا حيث قال:

يحاول الكثير من الكُتّاب العراقيين ان يُعوضوا عن الكثير من الفترات التي لم يُكْتَب عنها، ولكن بصراحة هناك أيضاً مشكلة ذات بُعدين عند الكثير من الكُتّاب العرب الذين يكتبون، من جهة، من أجل أن تُترجم اعمالهم كوسيلة للوصول الى العالم الخارجي والحصول على بعض المردود المالي. ومن جهةٍ اخرى نجد مشكلة تلك

الجوائز الجديدة الممولة من قبل دول الخليج، وانا اعترف بأنني شاركت في البعض منها في الماضي وبعض أعمالي وصل الى قوائمها القصيرة، ولكن كان لهذه الجوائز تأثير ضار جداً على نوع الروايات التي تكتب [...] بطريقة ما، تفرض هذه الجوائز مواضيع الروايات واسلوب كتابتها، لأنه عبر تاريخها كانت ترجح تلك الجوائز نمطاً معيناً من السرد الذي يخاطب المتلقي المفترض للأعمال المترجمة، وذلك لأنهم يمولون أيضاً الكثير من تلك الترجمات. [...] ولذلك فإن الكثير من الكُتاب يفكر: " اوه! ربما يجب أن اكتب عن الأقليات" لأن موضوعهم يجذب الاهتمام في الشمال العالمي.²¹⁵

اتفق ما يقوله انطون ضمناً: ثمة مكافأة نظامية لأسلوب الكتابة الذي يمكن أن يُوصف بأنه يُداعب مُخيلة الفنّازيا الاستشراقية ويُبرر الى حد ما بعض "عبارات" خطاب الحرب على الارهاب. وهذا ما يتطلب المزيد من الانتباه لأنه في هذه الحالة لن يكون كل احتفاء بالجسمانية تمردا يعالج الذات الفاعلة، بالضرورة. وسيكون خرقاً لأخلاقيات الكتابة عن العنف، كما أن استخدام الجسمانية قد يخدم الاطر القديمة للحرب. فإذا افترضنا أن نمطا من الكتابة عن العنف بات مطلوباً، ومرغوباً به، ومكافئاً عليه، فإن نوعاً من العنف يصبح حتماً لكي تتم الكتابة عنه.

في الفصل الثالث، أسستُ ثلاث فئات للتمييز بين الأجساد في إستراتيجيات السرد التي تبرر الحرب على الارهاب، تلك التي ينبغي ان تُنفذ، والاجساد الملعونة وكذلك جسد المُنفذ. ماذا لو طُبِّقت سرديات الضحايا الإستراتيجيات نفسها؟ فبينما نعرف بوضوح من هو المُنفذ (البطل الامريكى المُعقد) ومن هو الملعون (الارهابي المتوحش المهووس بالجنس)، الضحية التي ينبغي انقاذها ليست بذلك الواضح. أن ما اكدتُ عليه السرديات المضادة هو صفة الضحية عند الضحية في تصوير جميع انواع الفظائع الوحشية من اجل خلق تأثير الصدمة بحيث يمكن إدراك حجم المظالم على الاقل. هل سيكون تصوير هذه الفظائع طرْحاً جمالياً من اجل رفض اطر المعرفة المؤسسة من خلال الخطابات التقليدية والاستشراقية؟ ام انه يساهم في خلق مخيلة جمعية يتم من خلالها تبرير مفهوم الضحية عبر البؤس المطلق والمعاناة؟ هل سيكون سرداً في مفهوم الضحية ام اىذاء الضحية بطريقة تهدف الى الرفع من شأن المعاناة وجعلها سلعةً مُستهلكة تُرضي الحاجات النرجسية عند الآخر بدلاً من أن توظف نزعاً حقيقية نحو التغيير إلى عالم أفضل. خلال اقامتي البحثية الافتراضية في مركز الادب المقارن في جامعة كولدمسثس في لندن، توصلتُ الى تعريف لعبارة " نفاهة العنف"، تعبير أستخدامه

²¹⁵ <https://litofexile.nd.edu/events/2020/11/06/sinan-antoon-literature-and-surveillance-br-a-reading-and-conversation>

لوصف توظيف المعاناة الجسدية والعنف، التي يستجيب لجذب الشمال العالمي، ولا يطرُح خطاباً مغايراً كما في طرحي لقراءة الجسد الغروتسك.

من الواضح ان عبارة تفاهة العنف تُذكر بمفهوم حنّا أرندت لتفاهة الشر. ومع ذلك فقد استُخدمت العبارة في البحوث الاكاديمية للإشارة الى اشياء مختلفة. فمن جانب تجد ايما يلينكوفاً التفاهة في "المألوفية، العادية، عدم الاستثنائية كقبيض للتوحش، والشذوذ والاستثناء" (54)، "وليس بمعنى التفاهة" (49). بينما يجد حبيب الحق خوندكر ان تفاهة العنف "ترتبط بفقدان ثقافة التحضر – رمز ثقافي واسع وتوليف اجتماعي حيث التسامح، والمسؤولية والاحترام هي القيم الاساسية" (409). وتصفها كاتلين م. ب "ثقافة العنف التي تعزز العنصرية المنظمة" (113). بينما تغطي كل هذه القراءات المفهوم في مجالات البحث الخاصة بكل حالة، أحاول هنا ا طرح تعريفاً آخر لتفاهة العنف ينسجم مع تعريف حنة أرندت للتفاهة. فاذا كانت تفاهة الشر تتأتى من "الاعتماد المتبادل بين انعدام التفكير والشر" (Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* 288) او من "العجز عن التفكير" (14) فإن تفاهة العنف هي العجز عن رؤية عدم جدوى العنف او انعدام الهدف الاخلاقي له.

في مقالها "عن العنف" ترى أرندت أن العنف "منطقي بقدر تأثيره في بلوغ الاهداف التي ينبغي أن تبرره وأنه "منطقي فقط إذا استطاع ان يحقق أهدافاً على المدى القصير. فالعنف لا يدعم قضية، ولا تاريخاً او ثورة، ولا تقدماً او ردة فعل، ولكنه يخدم في اضعاء بعد درامي على المظالم ويضعها امام الاهتمام العام" (79). يتضح ذلك في أكثر الحالات التي تلعب فيها مادية الجسد دوراً مركزياً في قصص الحرب، لأن قيمة العنف في التمثيل تكمن في جعل الظلم مرئياً، ولذلك فإن الكاتب أو الفنان يوغل في تصوير العنف والفظائع الوحشية لكي يجعل التأثير الكارثي حياً في الذاكرة على أمل تفاديه. ولكن الى اي مدى يكون ذلك مؤثراً؟ بالنسبة لأرندت يمكن ان يكون ذلك مؤثراً فقط إذا حقق غايات على المدى القصير، وتضيف بتلر وسونتاغ ان التعرض الطويل الأمد لمشاهد الفظائع تتلف الحساسية تجاه إن لم تسبب البلادة العاطفية ازاء آلام الآخرين. وربما لذلك يبدو أن كتابات المعارضة وتصوير العنف في أدب الشرق الاوسط ليست مؤثرة في محاربة الظلم، بل انها تحث على العنف أحياناً – وذلك واضح في القمع السياسي والمنفى والتهجير القسري الذي يتعرض له الأدباء والفنانون على سبيل المثال – وقد يكون بعضها الآن مُعرضاً في اعتماده على سرد معين من الصراع والعنف. وكما تناقش أرندت، إذا لم تتحقق اهداف العنف، يصبح العنف ممارسة انطولوجية للجهاز السياسي. هنا تصبح المشكلة عويصة، فإذا أصبح العنف ممارسة انطولوجية للجهاز السياسي، اي هدف يصبو اليه تصوير العنف والفظائع الوحشية؟

في "نقد العنف"، يتحرى والتر بنجامين عن مشروعية مفاهيم العنف، مُحدداً تصنيفين: العنف المشروع واللامشروع "بناء على وجود او غياب الاعتراف التاريخي العام لأهدافه" (249). وبناء على دراسته لوظائف العنف العسكري وعنف الدولة: صناعة القانون او المحافظة عليه، فإن العنف في الشرق الاوسط يمكن ان يوصف على انه يحافظ على القانون بمعنى انه يحافظ على قانون غير مرئي يُدعى الحاجة الى العنف. أن سرديات الخطاب السياسي المعني بالعنف في المنطقة سواء من داخلها او خارجها يتبنى منطق الفعل ورد الفعل المُبرر أو المُحرض على التدخل العنيف. وبمعنى آخر، ان الخطاب السياسي المُصاحب للعمليات العسكرية المحلية والاستعمارية تعمل على تأويل للعنف لجعله مشروعاً، بذلك يتم تبريره كعنف يحافظ على القانون. المشكلة تتجسد عندما تتحول هذه الوظيفة الى ما يصفه زيژك بالعنف المُتجرد، العنف اللامرئي "المتأصل في طبيعة حال الأشياء" (*2 Violence*). تفاهة العنف تكمن في أن يصبح العنف المُتجرد وظيفة للعنف للحفاظ على القانون الذي يخدم اهدافاً مشروعاً، ولكنها لا تتحقق ابداً، وليس هناك وعي ولا تفكير يعي الشر الناتج عن ذلك. كما تناقش آرندت، ان من الخطر التفكير في ان هناك خير يمكن أن ينتج عن شرٍ ما، وان السلطة، السيادة، أو الحرية في هذا السياق خاصةً، يمكنها أن تأتي عن طريق العنف أو عن طريق العنف في التعبير. بنفس الطريقة فإن تصوير العنف لا يمكنه إلا تثبيت مظالم وعذاب الضحايا، لا يمكنه ان يثبت هويتها بأي صورة سوى إنها مُعتَفة. مختصر القول انه لا يمكن الاكتفاء بالنظر إلى اهداف العنف المباشرة عندما نُصور العنف ونكتبُ عنه، هناك حاجة ماسة الى التفكير ابعد من ذلك.

عندما يقوم العمل الفني والأدبي بتصوير العنف بأشبع صورته – لدعوة الرأي العام الى الانتباه الى المظالم الإنسانية وتراجيديا الصراع العسكري – فانه يقوم أيضاً بتحويل هذه القصص، والأجساد، والناس الذين يكتبون عنهم الى منتج استهلاكي. المفارقة تقع في أن محاولة رفع صوت المسكوت عنه تصبح محاولة فاشلة في مجرد وصف حال كما هي عليه. إذا استمرينا في تصوير الضحايا في أطر الأجساد التي يجب انقاذها بدون انقاذها فعلاً على ارض الواقع، فإننا نقوم بتخليد هذه الصورة كواقع مادي وليس كظرف طارئ. صورة الضحية المَغلُوب على أمرها تصبح واقع وهوية الضحية المَغلُوب على أمرها. سيكون هذا التصوير عملية تثبيت لخطاب الأباداة كوضع انطولوجي للضحية بدلاً من وسيلة لمعالجة العنف المعرفي الذي تمر به، فتصوير الضحية يخلق مادية ضحيتها المطلقة. كما تشرح لنا سوزان سونتاغ، أن في وسع الصورة أن تجعل الأشياء حقيقية وليس أكثر حقيقةً (*19 Regarding the Pain of Others*) لورا ملفي تشرح أنه " يمكن للصورة الثابتة أن تُؤلد هويةً وأن تمثل لغزاً بدون الحاجة الى سردٍ يُتمم معناها" (*Visual and Other Pleasures* 141). الصور، تواصل ملفي، "لا تصف او تعرض، بل تستنبط معرفة المشاهد العاطفية والفكرية بخطاب سياسي ما" (130). أن تكون مُشاهداً (ولست المُشاهد) فالعلاقة النفسية بين القدرة على أن تَرى الشيء دون أن تكون

الشيء المرئي وبين الرابط بين الضحية والمتعدي يمكن أن تُسيّس عملية صنع الهوية لأن "الصيغة التي يتم من خلالها معالجة التبادل بين العمل الفني ومشاهده تحدد الفاعل [كنقيض للمفعول به] وتؤكد هويته" (128). وهذا يعني ان الاستمرار في انتاج صور وتمثلات تحرض على الشفقة والتعاطف ستحكم الأطر المعرفية التي نرى أنفسنا من خلالها والتي نُؤطرُ بها صورة الضحية.

كنت قد تحدثت في الفصل الثالث عن تمثيل الضحية في أدب جنود الغزو الأمريكي وعن كيفية نزعمهم للإنسانية عن صورة الشعب العراقي بتقليصه الى فئتين: العدو (العصاة، الإرهابيون، الكارهون للمرأة) و "رثاث الحرب" وهو مفهوم ابتدئته لوصف الصورة التي يُمثّل بها ضحايا الحرب، كضحايا حرب واحتلال العراق، الذين عادةً ما يُصورون كذواتٍ بالية، تابعة، لا صوتٍ مميز لها، مُباداة بفعل الفقر والإحباط والكبت أو الانتهاك الجنسي. أستعير تعبير "رثاث" من تعبير ميخائيل باختين في وصفه للخطاب السلطوي في الرواية "عندما يفقد الخطاب السلطوي سلطته، فإنه لا يصبح سوى مادة، رثاث، شيء" (*The Dialogic Imagination* 344).²¹⁶ وعلى الرغم من وجود شخصية ثالثة جديرة بالفحص والتحليل، شخصية المتعاون مع الاحتلال، أو المترجم، الهجري النبيل، الذي تتأرجح صورته بين حدود رثاث الحرب – كما في *The Yellow Birds* – أو العدو المستتر – كما في *Homeland*. تعريفي لرثاث الحرب يشمل التوابع الذين تُزين صورهم جماليات الحرب: الشخصية الرثّة التي تعيش خارج الزمن، المحرومة من الحضارة والتقدم، المنبوذة والهشّة، ولكن وجودها بحد ذاته يكتسب أهمية تكاد ان تكون دينية لأنها تُذكرنا بقضية الحرب العادلة التي سُنت ل "إنقاذها" أصلاً. فيل كلاي يقدم لنا نماذج عديدة توضح هذه الصورة في تجسيده للأطفال العراقيين المغتصبين جنسياً، أو للجثث العراقية التي تلحسها الكلاب في قصته "Redeployment"، كذلك في تصويره للأطفال المدربين على زرع العبوات الناسفة في قصته "War Stories". كذلك صورة الرجل والمرأة اللذان يدلان Bartle الى جثة Murph المخصي والمنتهكة، خاصة في النسخة السينمائية ل *The Yellow birds*. كل هذه الشخصيات المُهمّشة والمُباداة إنسانياً تذكرنا بالحاجة الى هذه الحرب، لإنقاذ هذه الشخصيات البالية، رثاث الحرب.

لا شك بان هذه الأعمال تجسد الهدف النبيل الذي يطمح الى تجسيد بشاعة الحروب، وان الهدف منها هو ان نشعر بحجم الرعب الذي يخضع له الجنود الشباب بسبب عنجهية أصحاب القرار. في أغليته، ان أدب المحاربين وكتابات الجنود ما هي إلا دعوات ضد الحرب. لكن على الرغم من ذلك يلزمننا التفكير الى أبعد من ذلك. أن سرد الجندي الأمريكي،

²¹⁶ ترجمة محمد براءة لباختين تنص على "عندما يفقد الكلام الأمر سلطته، فإنه لا يعود سوى مادة، رفات، شيء". (1987: 110) ولكني أجد أن تعبير "رثاث" أكثر دقة لكونه لا يحصر الفكرة في إطار الماضي والميت.

خاصةً في النصوص المدروسة أعلاه، لا يُذكر الجنود العراقيين، بالنسبة لهم ليس هناك سوى متمردين مُسلحين وسكان محليين، ليس ثمة دولة ولا حتى جيش عراقي. أن ما توفره لنا نصوص الجنود الأمريكيين وأفلام غزو العراق – خاصةً أفلام مثل (2014) *American Sniper* و(2005) *Jarhead* – هو سرد يعزز ضحية الضحية، ولكن الضحية هنا هو الجندي الأمريكي الشاب وأن مجرمي الحرب هم المتمردون المسلحون الذين يقتلون العراقيين والامريكان على حد سواء، بالإضافة الى صناعات الفرار من الجنرالات والسياسيين. والمشكلة تكمن بكون هذا السرد لا يعترف بإنسانية الغالبية من العراقيين الذين لا ينتمون الى هذه الفئات. أن استخدام تصوير العنف في مثل هذه السياقات يستثمر العنف في استمرارية ما يسميه والتر بنجامين "العنف المحافظ على القانون": "عنف يُمارَس لخدمة الأهداف "الشرعية" للسلطة المهيمنة (299).

وهذه أيضاً هي حال الإعلام، والأدب والفن الذي يطمح الى عرض العذاب والعنف والكوارث الطبيعية والإنسانية على العالم، كما هي حال بعض الأعمال الأدبية التي تجسد احوال الحرب الأهلية السورية – جان دوست باص / أخضر يغادر حلب (2016) مثلاً – والفيلم الوثائقي من أجل سما (2019)،²¹⁷ كذلك القصص والروايات التي تتحدث عن ضحايا داعش مثل رواية الكافرة لعللي بدر (2015)، أو أزمان اللجوء واللجئين كما في الفيلم الوثائقي فلسطين الصغرى (2021) لعبد الله الخطيب. تكرر هذه الأعمال صورة ومُخيلة التراث لتجسيد الحالات التي تقدمها والتي تتحول يوماً بعد يوم الى مُتلازمة في تجسيد الهوية التي يتحتم على النقد الفني تحديها، وذلك لأنها تعتمد على استئراق الذات وعلى خطاب الشفقة في تسويق الإنتاج الثقافي والفني في المهرجانات الفنية ومعارض الكتب، بدلاً من المسائلة النقدية لقضايا الهيمنة والسمود. كما في أدب الجنود، تكرر هذه الأعمال تصوير العنف والهشاشة كوسيلة للاحتجاج على الظلم وفظائع الحروب، ولكنها لا تردُّ للضحية ذاتيتها في تحديها للنظرة التي تجردها من سلطتها على ذاتها، انها تعزز من ضعف الضحية وحاجتها الى "منقذ". المبالغة في وصف عذاب الآخرين لا تجعلنا نرى أكثر من عذاب الضحية وان علينا التعامل معها كذات معذبة. ان التكرار لهذه الصور، كما تحذرنا سونتاغ لا يقلل من الم الضحية وهذا ما تؤكد لنا الأوضاع على أرض الواقع، أن تصوير العنف بالصور البشعة لا يوقف العنف لأنها ليست عنفاً صانع للقانون، بل عنف صوري يحافظ على طبيعة التراث في صورتها التي ستُصبح هويتها.

ولكن بوسع هذا التصوير ان يقوم بتحريير الوعي الأخلاقي لمشاهدي العنف من مسؤوليتهم بفعل التعاطف مع الأم الآخرين، مُبدين أنفسهم عنهم، ولكن مانحين لأنفسهم الإحساس بالرضا الأخلاقي لكونهم واعين بالأم الآخرين، وأن يشعروا بالأمهم دون أن يعيشوها. إن استهلاك رثاات الحرب يمنح المُشاهد المُتعاطف التجربة الكاملة: تجربة الرؤية،

²¹⁷ المرشح الى تسع جوائز مرموقة وحائز على اثنتي عشر جائزة.

الإحساس، المعرفة، والحكم. كما وتعطيه أحقية الحديث عن ضحية الضحية وأن يفعل شيئاً حياً لها ان "يتدخل" وان "يساعد" او أن "ينقذ" – الكليشيات المعروفة في خطاب شوفينية الاستعمار الحديث.

هذه هي تفاهة العنف: المبالغة بتصوير العنف ومُخيلاته في سرد الصراع العسكري والكوارث الإنسانية، إنها طريقة يستمر من خلالها العنف باسم الاهداف الإنسانية النبيلة التي يطمح لها الفن والأدب. إن تفاهة العنف تنطوي على جفاظ اللاوعي على سرديات الضحية غير الفاعلة مُقلصة صورتها الى رثاثة تنزع الإنسانية عنها، ولا تخدم سوى التأكيد على صورة ضُعفها ودونيتها تجاه القوى التي جعلت منها ضحية. تفاهة العنف اذاً تكمن في فُصر النظر، في انعدام التفكير والمعالجة لدور الكاتب في تجسيده للعنف وطريقة استخدامه له، هي الفشل في توظيف العنف لإيقاف الشر، والنجاح في نشره. أنها تكمن أيضاً بعدم الاكتراث بدور المتلقي في تعامله مع صور العنف.

النقطة الأساسية هنا هي أن ندرك أن سرد ما بعد الحرب والاحتلال في السرد العراقي المعاصر مازال متناقض. هناك نصوص – مثل النصوص المدروسة في هذا البحث – تتعامل مع الجسد كدلالة لتاريخ متناقض وكعلامة تحوّل، ولكن هناك نصوص أخرى تُقجم الجسد في خطابات الشفقة التي تستجيب للمخيلة الكولونيالية الاستشراقية. أن الجسد الغروتسك ظاهرة تعبر عن لحظة ما بعد الانكسار، تشير الى كوننا بصدد تغيير، وأن الجسد في مرحلة تحوّل، ولكن من السهل التنبؤ والتحذير ضد المُبالغة في تجسيد العنف قبل ان يصبح تفاهة العنف. كما حذرنا زِيژك "لا تُعرم عذابك، لا تفترض أبداً أن عذابك بحد ذاته دليل على مصداقيتك. ان التخلي عن المتعة يمكن وبسهولة ان يصبح متعة التخلي ذاتها".²¹⁸

إن دراسات لاحقه كفيّلة بأن توضح إذا كان الجسد قد وقع في الأطر المعرفية السابقة وأصبح تجسيدا لتفاهة العنف أو ان الغروتسك قد نجح في حمل الجسد الى سيميائية أخرى، حيث يمكن تتبّع تطوّر مفهوم الجسمانية وتأويلها بشكل آخر. كذلك يمكن لبحوث مستقبلية متابعة صورة الجسد الغروتسك في الأشكال الأدبية العراقية والعربية الصادرة في المناطق المجاورة خاصةً كرد على ظواهر العنف كالحروب والثورات. إن هذه الدراسة، بالإضافة الى موضوع السرد العراقي، تطرح أسئلة أخرى تحتاج الى متابعة أكاديمية ونقدية مثل طبيعة العلاقة وتاريخ الغروتسك بالاستشراق، أو إمكانية دراسة الظواهر الجمالية التي تتقاطع مع الغروتسك مثل جماليات الشبيه والواقعية المقرفة، والقوطية وما الى ذلك من اجناس أدبية. بالإضافة الى ذلك تتوفر هنا الفرصة لدراسة مفصلة لتاريخ الإرهاب الجنسي في دعايات الحروب،

²¹⁸ من مناظرة زِيژك مع بيترسون، الدقيقة 45:25.

خاصة الحروب الأمريكية وتأثيرها على الفن السردى المعاصر لأمريكا الوسطى وكوريا وفيتنام والأدب الأمريكي-الآسيوي.

بالإضافة الى الجانب الجمالي، فإن تحليل جيورجيو آغامبن لشخصية ال "مُسلمان" في *بقايا أوشفيتز* كحيرة أخلاقية يثير الانتباه الى احتمالية دراسة مقارنة لتصوير الفظائع في السرد العراقي وفي سرديات الكوارث الإنسانية الأخرى مثل الهولوكوست والحروب في أوج عصر التقدم التقني والإعلامي مثل الحرب الروسية-الأوكرانية. كذلك، بما أنني كنت قد وضحت كيف ان الجسمانية في السرد العراقي المعاصر هي كتابة عن ومن خلال الجسد كوسيلة لإعادة تركيب الأطر المعرفية، ربما تتوفر ايضاً فرصة للتساؤل عما إذا يمكننا اعتبار كتابة الجسد هذه ككتابة انثوية على حد تعريف هيلين سكسو، وتقصي ما يمكن أن يُضيف ذلك الى النظرية ومدى أثرها على هذه الفكرة. بالإضافة الى ذلك، وخاصة في اعمال حسن بلاسم وعالية ممدوح، هناك تساؤلات عديدة حول موضوع الأنثوية الوحشية، والتي بوسعها ان تسلط الضوء على توجهات أخرى في كتابة الجسمانية والنسوية في السرد العراقي المعاصر. كما تناقش حنة أرندت، التغيير لا يمكنه ان يأتي فقط من خلال العنف، أن الفعل الإنساني، بل وان قابلية الأنسان على الفعل، على خلق شيء جديد ومختلف، شيء غير مُتوقع، بحد ذاتها كقيلة بتغيير الظرف البشري (*On Violence* 30). إذا كان الجسد بحاجة لأن يُصغى اليه، لأن يكون مسرحاً لتحقيق الذات، علينا ان نُحول دراسة الجسد من فظائع الحروب والصدمة كموضوع دراسة بحد ذاته، الى ان نبحث عن الجسد في مكان آخر، مكان أفضل، الى مكان حيث للألم معنى. الدراسات والترجمات الجديدة للأدب العراقي يمكنها أن تكون مفصلية في هذا الخصوص.

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