Writing Through the Body

Iraqi Responses to the War on Terror

Hanan Jasim Khammas

UBe

Género(s)

Writing Through the Body

Writing Through the Body

Iraqi Responses to the War on Terror

Hanan Jasim Khammas

Universitat de Barcelona
Edicions

Género(s)

© Edicions de la Universitat de Barcelona
Adolf Florensa, s/n
08028 Barcelona
Tel.: 934 035 430
comercial.edicions@ub.edu
www.edicions.ub.edu

Directors
Mariela Fargas Peñarrocha and Helena González Fernández

Scientific comitee
Mónica Bolufer (Universitat de València), Agnès Garcia Ventura (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona), Elena Laurenzi (Università del Salento), Margalida Pons (Universitat de les Illes Balears), Mònica Rius Piniés (Universitat de Barcelona)

Cover illustration
Cover image © Amer Al-Obaidi, 2011
The Blue Dream, Digital Photograph

In collaboration with:

ADHUC | **Centre de Recerca Teoria, Gènere, Sexualitat** UNIVERSITAT DE BARCELONA

ISBN: 978-84-1050-039-6
Edition date: 2024

This document is under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-commercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 Unported License. To see a copy of this license click here http://creative commons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/legalcode.

In memory of Professor
Jaume Botey i Vallès
(1940–2018)

Table of contents

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deep and lasting gratitude to Professor Andrew Monnickendam and Professor Mònica Rius-Piniés, whose invaluable remarks and unconditional support made this work possible. 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, where part of this research work was conducted. I also want to express my gratitude to the professors Anna Gil Bardají, Ada Barbaro, Gonzalo Fernandez Parrilla, and Dr Charles Eager for their invaluable notes and comments. Publishing this book was possible due to the much appreciated collaboration between ADHUC–Research Center for Theory, Gender, Sexuality and the UNESCO Chair Women, Developments and Cultures, and the administrative support of the research project Gender(s) and Language(s) in Contemporary Arabness, funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities/National Agency of Research – MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033. Finally, there are no words that could express my gratitude to all my family, especially to my mother, Eman, for the infinite support, the life lesson on sovereignty, and for giving us an Iraq we can believe in.

Note on transliterations and sources

Texts and names in Arabic, Iraqi dialect, or Kurdish, which are not translated into 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 text, and the original is provided in footnotes. Electronic books cited, particularly some Kindle editions, use location number (L.) rather than page number; this explains some large numbers in the parenthetical citations.

Introduction

In 2018, the Iraqi author and literary editor, Samuel Shimon, put together the pieces for the first Iraqi noir fiction anthology, *Baghdad Noir*, which was part of Akashic Books noir series, among *Beirut Noir* (2015), *Marrakech Noir* (2018) and *Tehran Noir* (2014), and many others. This anthology successfully aimed at a plural perspective of Iraqi and non-Iraqi, home and exiled authors, narrating the city to show how Baghdad is part of the consciousness of its residents, ex-residents, neighbours, visitors and invaders. All authors of this anthology have lived in the city for a period of time in their lives, and Baghdad is a locus of semiosis in these authors' works and in their cultural dialogue. The editor of *Tehran Noir*, Salar Abdoh, for instance, is one of the authors in Baghdad Noir, together with the American author and veteran, Roy Scranton, who served in Baghdad during the years 2003–2006. Among the authors, there is also the Tunisian Hayet Raies, and some of the most popular names of the contemporary literary scene in Iraq. In his introduction, Shimon observes the peculiar fact that between the US-led 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 throughout the entire twentieth century (Shimon: 16). This fact requires a moment of attention, as not only did the country produce more fiction in fifteen years that it had previously done in one hundred years, but also these works were written mostly in Arabic by Iraqi authors both inside Iraq and in exile. I had the privilege of verifying this information by consulting the not yet published *Index of the Iraqi novel 1919–2019* by the late scholar Najm ʿAbd Allāh Kāẓim, who had been working on this major opus for more than twenty years.[1] According to his research, 571 novels were published between the years 2003–2014 only, and 729 novels in the entire twentieth cen-

1 The document I consulted was still a work in progress, supposed to be published in the early months of 2020, but it was interrupted by the global Covid-19 health crisis, which led to Professor Kāẓim's death in July that same year. 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.

tury since the publication of the first Iraqi novel, *Jalāl Khālid*, in 1919. This shows that, in addition to an extraordinary tendency towards writing fiction, there is a shift in the dominant genre when it comes to self-expression, especially when we consider that up until 2003 the predominant literary genre in Iraq was poetry (Bahoora, 2017: 247).

Although writing fiction has become a general tendency in literary development in the Arabic language, contemporary Iraqi fiction also witnessed the emergence of new fictional genres, and by new, I am referring to the new literary production in Arabic and by Iraqi authors. The first anthology of science fiction written by Arab authors within, and about Arab contexts and issues 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 that of the Nakbah. And 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.[2] In addition to science fiction, there is also fantasy fiction, which is – 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 Ḍiyāʾ Jubaīlī, among others.

Other than the question of genre, shifts in contemporary Iraqi fiction are also present in the increased interest in translating and awarding 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".[3] 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 Trans-

2 Both anthologies are winners of the English PEN award. Since 2008, the Syrian Public Book Board has been publishing the *Science Fiction journal*, where sci-fi literary texts and studies both in Arabic and in translation are promoted. See عمران ʿUmrān.

3 See Yassin-Kassab for full article.

lation. There are also Ḍiyāʾ Jubaīlī, who won Al Tayeb Salih Award for Short Stories in 2017; Ahmed Saadawi, who won the International Prize for Arabic fiction for his *Frankenstein in Baghdad* in 2014; and ʿĀliah 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, on one hand, that Iraqis have a lot to tell us, and, on the other, that there is international concern about what Iraqis have to say after 2003, and it is all happening in creative writing. 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" (Stahl, 2010: 88) in terms of communicating and informing about the war. In this sense, telling the world what happened in Iraq in 2003 is an example of what Said describes as "imperial arrogance unschooled in worldliness, unfettered either by competence or experience, undeterred by history or human complexity, unrepentant in brutal violence and cruel electronic gadgetry" 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" (Žižek, 2004a: 5).

Žižek's statement highlights another interesting aspect, because of which the Iraqi case requires examination: the 2003 war and invasion were also fought semiotically. Referential authors, such as Judith Butler in her *Frames of War* (2009) and Slavoj Žižek in his *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. Not only visual symbolism, the images depicted in the literary and journalistic narratives in favour of the invasion, as we shall see in the following chapters, participated in the creation of a semiotic sphere – "semiosphere", as coined by Juri Lotman (1922–1993) – in which human bodies, both Iraqi and American, are central to self-expression and resistance, as well as being central to manipulating history. 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" (Žižek, 2004a: 5). What this book aims at showing is the implication of this military strategy for the Iraqi people themselves, who are doubly victims of this war, once by living it and twice by watching it. The long-term impact on the Iraqi people's perception of reality and conceptualisation of identity is a concern which is somehow ignored. How do Iraqis feel about being seen as a pretext or an exemplary case to stake out the coordinates of the New World

Order? And how does that relate to the way they see themselves? 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 (pre)invasion developments, and, for years, the state media had been the only source for following the political meltdown. Prior to the invasion, state media, being the only source of information, reflected only the state's views on practically everything for decades. It was only in the 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 outside it; for one thing, both sides considered the invasion a "war" in their discourse. Iraq's contact with other cultures, languages, media, and other sources of knowledge became suddenly and drastically wider, something which influenced the perception of reality, and hence, corporality and identity. Thus, the proposition here, to read contemporary Iraqi fiction, not only as a register of grievances and trauma caused by dictatorship and military invasion of a colonial nature, but also to read post-invasion writings as a response to semiotic, cultural, political, religious, and aesthetic discourses which ruled Iraq before the invasion, on one hand, and those which incentivised the public opinion to invade Iraq in 2003, on the other. To read it by focusing on that element which was central to the war on terror and the invasion of Iraq: the visual symbolism, the body.

But why, one may ask, does the body matter here? On a general scale, Roger Cooter 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" (Cooter: 393), and such universal preoccupation with the body does not certainly exclude cultural specificity. Recent literature in Arabic has also shown an increased concern with the body; Abir Hamdar describes this preoccupation as a turn, an alternative path for resisting identity crisis: "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", and she also 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" (Hamdar: 132). This is particularly true, because as military and political conflict in the region differed in their approach to violence, 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 – which I shall refer to henceforth as the genocidal embargo; military invasion and occupation, and last but not least, terrorism. On the other hand, amidst all the political turmoil and

the various colonial processes in the Middle East, when it comes to fictional writing, Iraqi scholars Falīḥ al-Ricābī and Ṭuʿamah Muṭaīyr Ḥusaīn claim that the body has an "enchanting authority" (*sulṭah sāḥirah*) (al-Ricābī & Muṭaīyr Ḥusaīn: 69), which has been employed in contemporary Arabic fiction recently to demonstrate social and political complexities of Arab and Muslim men and women.

Arab-Islamic heritage concerning the body had been going in the opposite direction, as it emphasised that the distance from the body is what determines the righteous and 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, and that this opposition led to the disdain of plurality, difference, the need for the Other, and dismissiveness towards time, history, desire and feeling (al-Muṣbāḥī: L.1421).[4] Hishām al-ʿAlawī 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 (al-ʿAlawī: 10). Following the classical Aristotelian tradition, al-ʿAlawī adds, Islamic philosophy saw the body as an obstacle in the soul's way in its eternal quest for happiness (al-ʿAlawī: 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 "enchanting authority". This is especially true in fiction in which understanding the structures and the frameworks that accompanied or led to this turn becomes an urgent task; this is where the present book also provides a roadmap in the context of contemporary Iraq.

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, we shouldn't oversimplify the significance of this turn as merely a celebration of freedom after the collapse of pan-Arabism and the loss of a collective identity, as she suggests: "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

4 "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."

the freedom of the body from all social, cultural and sexual restrictions" (Hamdar: 33). Hamdar here ignores the categorical difference between collective identity and hegemonic identity. The pan-Arabist ideology does not represent collective identity, at least not 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 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.[5] 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. In addition to revealing the grievances borne and injustice suffered by people, writing about or through the body also informs us of their detachment from established structures of knowledge. 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" (Aghacy: 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). This book, nevertheless, suggests 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, argued here, 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.

For many critics of Arabic literature, the body and its sexuality are employed as a reflection of the tumultuous development of contemporary politi-

5 The academic and non-academic work done by feminist and queer communities in the region is a testament to this revision of history and heritage.

cal history and national identity.[6] However, in the following chapters the body is approached as John B. Thomson defines it in his introduction to Pierre Bourdieu's *Language and Symbolic Power* (1982), as "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" (Bourdieu, 1992: 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.[7] The 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 a rewriting of history. The capacity of corporality to incorporate history is stipulated in Jean-Luc Nancy's definition of the body in *Corpus* (2008):

> 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", [...] 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 (Nancy: 15-17).

Nancy's definition of body adds a spatial and geographical dimension to the eminence of history, which 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 – develops to a new manifestation of corporality

6 For full discussion see, for instance, Ouedghiri Ben Ottmane, p. 17; Shaaban, p. 179; Klemm, p. 493, and Al-Hassan, p. 204.

7 For further discussion on the question of history and the formation of the Arab mind, see Chejne, p. 383, and Abed al-Jabri, p. VII-X.

which appears 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 rewriting of incorporated histories, a redefinition of the meaning of the body and the way it is written about. It is a process which, thus, is directly linked to the neocolonial hegemony and to the history of the conceptualisation of corporality in the *status quo*. 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 discourses surrounding the colonial and postcolonial realities.

In broad terms, my claim relies on Homi Bhabha's view that in postcolonial contexts and aftermaths of wars, the perception of the body corresponds to the confrontation or amalgamation between the different socio-cultural discourses before and after the epistemic violence, resulting from the colonial process, takes place. Bhabha uses Fanon's work to exemplify the psychic and semiotic displacement in conceptualising the body, which emerges at the encounter between narratives that represent the colonial subject. The colonial subject – the Iraqi in this case – finds their 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 the subject's subjectivity. Thus, to understand how the representation of the body in contemporary Iraqi fiction responds to the aftermath of the war on terror, it must be understood that there is, on the one hand, the traditional and nationalist discourse that ruled Iraq since the formation of the republic in 1958, and, 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 generalised, oversimplified, and primitive stereotypes of corporality are presented in order to assert a knowledge of what being an Iraqi means. These discourses are legacies of Orientalism as defined by Said, and of "Orientalism in reverse", as described by Sadik Jalal al-ʿAzm. Orientalism, Said explains, is a Western belief that there is an ontological difference between East and West, and that this difference is imperative for their political, economic and cultural interaction; he claims, moreover, that it has become a performative, constant praxis, which was institutionally supported for centuries 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 him-

self 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 (Said, 1979: L. 126-130). Based on Said's views, Sadik Jalal al-ʿAzm formulated 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-ʿAzm: 231). Al-ʿAzm 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. The novelty that Orientalism in reverse introduces to the equation of conflict is that Orientalism goes both ways, with not only the West having the power to generate systematic knowledge about the Orient, but also, 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 Baʿthist 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 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 Bhabha's explanation: "The 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, coherent 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 book 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. This clash of imaginaries is 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 had been dealing with for decades prior to the invasion, detailed in chapter I, once met by the representation of Iraqis/non-white/non-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" (Butler, 2009: 3). The war, the invasion, and the occupation, along with sophisticated technology and immeasurably superior media and visual symbolism, discussed in chapter II, exposed the body to another force: the discursive shock and awe displayed in the 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 III, characterised by "grotesque aesthetics", is employed to convey agency, dissent and self-determination. This claim is maintained by relying on the theoretical principles of cultural semiotics as put forward by Juri Lotman, and the mirror stage and its relation to the formation of the subject as explained by Jacques Lacan. Lotman created a universal model for semiotic cultural analysis, which helps to understand the semiosis of cultural processes; he termed this model the "semiosphere", which he defined as "the semiotic space necessary for the existence and functioning of languages" (Lotman, 1990: 123). To Lotman, a sign is the atomic element and the first instance in the construction of the semiosphere, and it is only within its specific semiosphere that a sign can be understood and the semiosis in the communicative process make sense (Lotman, 2005: 206). Within the semiosphere, the interaction and the relation between the different signs makes the semiosis possible. The political and cultural discourses regarding the war

on terror and the invasion of Iraq can be seen as 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 facts, images, and visual symbolisms are filtered without translation or semiotisation. This lack of semiotisation explains Bhabha's previously cited 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" (Bhabha: 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.[8] 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 result of cultural translation and semiotisation. 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 semiotic universe of the invaded culture, breaking its preestablished chains of semiosis.

As for how this process affects the formation of subjectivity, 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 (Lacan, 2016: 32, 59, 91, 120). The image of the body in the mirror is never sufficient to 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, 2006: 8-9). It should be reminded 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

8 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.

> 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 can be an active element in the process of semiosis within a determined semiosphere, such as a religious discourse or social decorum, or an ideology. 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 book 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, the perception of corporality is altered 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 insofar as it cannot be proposed to the Other's acknowledgement (Lacan, 2016: 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 themselves 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" (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, 2006: 55).

This is what, I argue, happened in the case of Iraq after 2003, as we shall see in the following chapters, 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.

Amidst this interdisciplinary entanglement, the Foucauldian archaeological method presents the adequate tool to untangle the semiotic processes that construct the sign of the body and its corposphere. The archaeological description is a systematic reorganisation of what has been said or written (Foucault, 2010: 138). If the objective here 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 to 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). The archaeological analysis has the capacity to show the "rules of formation" of the body: "conditions of existence (but also coexistence, maintenance modification, and disappearance) in a given discursive division" (38). This discursive division is understood here as the space where the epistemic violence occurs, and the act of signification was modified. This way, it becomes possible to see 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. Therefore, the major task here is to trace those statements concerned with body to compare and articulate the structures in which they 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. The archive to locate the statements will be that "which defines the

mode of occurrence of the statement – thing [that is], *the system of its functioning*" (129, emphasis in origin). 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.

The organisation of the analysis, therefore, follows a chronological but also systematic logic: the first chapter, for instance, illustrates the rules for the formation of the body in Iraqi society, culture and literature prior to the 2003 US-led invasion. This chapter provides an analysis of 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. The second chapter illustrates statements concerning the body in the discourse of the war of terror prior to, during and after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. It provides analyses of the statements employed by the political discourse of the war on terror and traces their 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 impact the symbolic order outlined in the previous chapter and how, in this sense, it could be considered part of the strategies of military operations. Then, the third chapter focuses on corporality in contemporary Iraqi fiction as a result of and 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 conceptualisation of the body.

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 III, 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.[9] The third feature consists in the fact

9 As mentioned by Bahoora (2017: 260-263); Caiani and Cobham, pp. 1-21; Masmoudi, pp. 10-11; الناشئ (al-Nāshī'): 10, and نايف الفايز (Nāyīf al-Fāyīz) throughout his book .تمثلات الموت في الرواية العراقية 2003–2013

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 influence. This feature situates us on the boundary where hybrid-sourced semiosis is in action. Furthermore, 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 displayed 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" (Masmoudi: 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 the war and terror; and the latter is already examined in chapter I. The texts I choose seem to be deliberately wanting to break the rule that states "violence reproduces violence"; they do not present the occupation as an act of humiliation which incites hatred and violence; rather,

(Tamathulāt al-Mawt fī al-Riwāyah al-ʿIrāqīyah 2003–2013 [Representations of death in the Iraqi novel 2003–2013]).

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 phallocentric national allegories, as well as those texts that perpetuate the orientalist representation of gender and sexuality. I deal with these representations in chapters I and II; 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.

Setting positionality: a note on "testimony"

In *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Giorgio Agamben defines testimony as "an act of an 'author'" (Agamben, 1999: 150). His examination of the different meanings of the Latin word *auctor* concludes in that it "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". 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 book 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 book 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 the question under examination in the flesh, 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 a book that I want to read.[1] 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.

1 "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).

Both when I was only Iraqi and when I became an Iraqi *and* 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 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.

I. This is a man's world. Corporeality in Iraqi society and fiction before 2003

As the subtitle indicates, this chapter focuses on the initial semiosphere, or corposphere: semiosis, meanings, and 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. This chapter will show where the new development is coming from, and it details the corposphere which came into conflict with the corposphere brought about by the discourse of the war on terror. 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. What I try to show, however, is 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 chapter focuses on outlining the conceptual paradigms of the religious and social construction of the body, and 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 Qurʾān as the primary source of the religious construction of the body. For the social and anthropological part, Sana Al-Khayyat's *Honour and Shame: Women in Modern Iraq* (1990) and Abdelwhab Bouhdiba's *Sexuality in Islam* (1975) are salient sources of information. By looking at women's lives through testimonies, Al-Khayyat's book reveals certain peculiarities in the Iraqi social praxis of the body that 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, the approach, here, is to bring together the histories of the Iraqi novel in the twentieth century by Haytham Bahoora and Najm ʿAbd Allāh Kāẓim. These histories consider literary and socio-political contexts for the division of the genre into three general periods with distinct style, content, and context.

The body as a problem

The conceptualisation of the body entails a historical philosophical, psychological, literary, and religious problem in the context of Arab and Muslim societies – similar, perhaps to other societies. This problem – as literary critic ʿAbd Allāh al-Ghadhāmī describes it – lies in the fact that the language that constructs corporality is under male control (al-Ghadhāmī: 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 Qurʾān. I understand this problem as discussed by such Muslim feminist scholars as Leila Ahmed, Fatema Mernissi, Amina Wadud, Mohammed Arkoun and Nasr Abu Zayd, who amphasise 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-ʿulamāʾ 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-ʿAlawī: 10-23). They believe the soul to be the true self that controls the body's perception and movement (al-Muṣbāḥī: L. 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. The question of the body and the soul is often referred to with the term *Ishkālīyat/Jadalīyat al-Jasad* (problem/dialectic of the body), as in the *Mawsūʿat al-Sard al-ʿArabī* (Encyclopaedia of Arabic narrative) elab-

orated by the Iraqi ʿAbd Allāh Ibrāhīm (2008, 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 is that it is perceived as originally masculine. That is, the body is perceived within a phallocentric paradigm in which femininity does not merely differ from the centre, but rather it is defined as a deviation and an incompleteness. ʿAbd Allāh al-Ghadhāmī insists that the cultural category "woman" is a linguistic construct, not a linguistic agent (al-Ghadhāmī: 8),[1] and hence language has become virility itself.[2] 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-ʿAlī 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 (al-ʿAlī: 14). Similarly, on language and the formation of its masculine consciousness in the Arab world, Rajāʾ 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" (Salāmah: 34). I examine below how both religious and social decorum consolidate the masculine consciousness that has narrated the body.

Sexual difference in the Qur'ān

The present section focuses on the analysis of the textual representation of the body, not the implicit '*aḥkām*' (laws) on which qurʾānic scholars might agree and disagree. The purpose of such a reading of the body in the qurʾānic text is to outline some of the statements – in the Foucauldian sense being "the elementary unit of discourse" (Foucault, 2010: 80) – that constitute the sociocultural dis-

1 "فالمرأة موضوع لغوي وليست ذاتاً لغوية"

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

course 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 Qurʾān, then it is important to analyse the precise language in which this communing is conducted. The representation of the body in the Qurʾān is enhanced by the anthropological and social conceptualisation of the body in Iraq, unlike, for instance, in 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, this examination focuses primarily on the Qurʾān – 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 Qurʾān, 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 with an analysis of these occurrences in the Qurʾān. Mohammed Arkoun explains that "Muslims [...] focus on the Qurʾān 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: 57). The second reason is that, as Arkoun argues, the Qurʾān 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" (ḫalīfat Allah fīl-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 (yaʾqil) (in dreams, take-offs of imagination, rational speculation, meditation) of the True-Good-Beautiful as opposed to the false-bad-ugly (Arkoun: 181).

Accordingly, if the Cartesian Cogito is *Cogito ergo sum*, "I think, therefore I am", then the qurʾānic subject is formulated as, "I believe what the Qurʾān

stipulates, 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. Thirdly, Ṭāha Ḥusaīn considers the examination of the Qurʾān the beginning of the "true intellectual history of Arabic literature" (qtd. in Salama: 27), and this view is advocated by other scholars, including Mohammad Salama, who states that "[i]f one is willing only to see the Qurʾān 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 Qurʾān or one's fellow human beings will be impossible" (Salama: 116).

As the goal here is to trace a genealogy of corporality in this context, then examining the Qurʾān becomes mandatory. Furthermore, the Qurʾān 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 Qurʾān rather than the exegeses or any other interpretative text, since readers believe it is the direct word of God, and reciting it is not only mandatory, but it is also 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 Qurʾān. Moreover, and most significantly, Iraq witnessed a peculiar period of its history in which a massive reading of the Qurʾān was a state policy. As Zahra Ali describes in her sociological study *Women and Gender in Iraq* (2018), "the [Baʿthist] regime launched its *hamla al-Imaniyya* ('Faith Campaign') at the beginning of the 1990s" (Z. Ali: 112). Ali describes that part of this campaign was the reading of the Qurʾān and giving Qurʾān lessons to women affiliated with Baʿth institutions. What she leaves out of her study is that the reading of the Qurʾān 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 Qurʾān 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 Qurʾān was the only programme. Thus, religious perception of the body is sourced from the qurʾānic text in addition to the exegesis' interpretations and teachings.

Lastly, the focus on the Qurʾān rather than on the exegeses – 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" (Wadud: 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 Qurʾān. The interest is rather in the cognitive denotations of the qurʾānic imageries, perceptions, and representations of the body for a reader who is not a qurʾānic scholar, for this is the language that participates in the construction of corporality in the semiotic space. The images of the body in the Qurʾān, 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 Qurʾān, 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" (The Qurʾān 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 (The Qurʾān 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 the Qurʾān 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 *Nuṭfah*, the Arabic word for sperm, in the text described as *mahīn*, which according to *al-Maūrid* dictionary means "despicable; despised; insignificant; worthless; contemptible; menial; humble; low; base; mean". 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. How seldom you are grateful!" (Qurʾān 32:8-10). This idea is repeated in the āyahs (Qurʾān 16:4; 18:37; 35:11; 36:77). Thus, in addition to being the worst favoured, the human body has its origins in sperm. The Qurʾān 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 ..." (The Qurʾān 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 Qurʾān. The traditionalist literature written after the Muslim conquests made that story popular (Ahmed: 134). Nevertheless, the Qurʾān 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 ..." (Qurʾān 53:45-46). This is also repeated in the Qurʾān 92:3 and 78:8. For Wadud, the Qurʾān 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" (Wadud: 734). However, the Qurʾān clearly states: "We created you, We gave you shape, and then We said to the angels, 'Bow down before Ādam', and they did" (The Qurʾān 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 the Qurʾān 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 ..." (The Qurʾān 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 Qurʾān also establishes gender hierarchy. The *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, 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 (McAuliffe, vol. II: 288).

Amidst this linguistic confusion, the interpreter's role becomes crucial: because Ādam 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.[3] Judith Butler explains that "the 'sex' which is referred to as prior to gender [is] itself [...] a postulation, a construction, offered within language" (Butler, 1993: 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 masculine pronoun. Whilst He clearly indicates that He is neither male nor female "He begot no one nor was He begotten" (The Qurʾān 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 qurʾānic 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 ..." (The Qurʾān 24:2) – the regulations for female sexuality differ from those for the male. On the one hand, the Qurʾān dedicates a surah to women's legal, social and sexual issues under the title "al-Nisāʾ" (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

3 See al-Tamīmī. In the introduction, she insists on: 1) how women's inferiority was an idea ideologically imposed by the interpreters of the Qurʾān, and 2) how Muslim society helped to perpetuate this belief.

and women such as matrimony, intercourse and divorce; yet there are regulations concerning female sexuality exclusively – for instance, menstruation. The Qurʾān 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 Qurʾān* describes menstruation as "a cause of major impurity analogous to that entailed by sexual intercourse" (McAuliffe, vol. III: 376). Coming near women during menstruation is considered an impurity, in much as the same way as in the Qurʾān 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 Qurʾān 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" (The Qurʾān 56:20-36). The idea of the beautiful-eyed maidens given as a reward is also repeated in the Qurʾān 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: 55). According to tradition, these females regain their virginity after every intercourse (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 of sexual pleasures as a reward for Muslim men is an indication that the Qurʾān 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 drives, while women must content themselves with at most one man" (Mernissi: 59). The Qurʾān 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" (The Qurʾān 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 Qurʾān.

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

> 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 (The Qurʾān 4:34).[4]

This translation of the āyah 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: 180), is formed from a specular image that glorifies the masculine body. Moreover, the Qurʾān uses corporeality as an instrument of surveillance: "Suffer 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" (The Qurʾān 36:64-65), 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" (The Qurʾān 41:21-22).

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

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 āyahs 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 (Foucault, 1995: 200-201).

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.

Male supremacy in 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 Ṣwāliḥ 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.[5]

٥ "لطالما نُظرت إلى الجسد نظرة مواربة وملتبسة، بسبب ثقل المحظورات التاريخية، وسطوة ثقافة المحرّم على آليات الإبداع العربي عموماً، الأمر الذي أفرز نصاً هجيناً وناقصاً، وأحياناً ممنوعاً أو منتهكاً، سواء لجهة التأويل، أم لجهة الإقصاء، وبدت المسافة بعيدة بين الخطاب والممارسة"

Ṣwaīliḥ 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 Ṣwaīliḥ 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, 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 are established withing 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" (The Qurʾān 95:4-5). Such an attitude has made the body a parallel text to the culture of repression, as Ṣwaīliḥ 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 cul-

tural 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 (Ṣwaīliḥ).[6]

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 ʿAlī 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).[7] These principles enact the segregation of women into closed, covered or 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 figure; socio-geographical coexistence/transformation between/from the Bedouin life in the Iraqi desert,

6 "أن هذا الهوس في أسطرة 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 تمثلات الجسد المؤسطر في المجتمعات العربية المعاصرة، وقد تمت في ظروف تاريخية وسياسية وعقائدية محددة، جعلت من جسد الزعيم أو القائد لحظة أسطورية غير مرئية"

7 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."

which is 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 (Naẓmī, 2010: 50). The problem of the body in Iraqi society lies in the fact that corporality and selfhood are constructed and interpreted based on this male supremacy. 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 this socio-religious discourse, 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 the semiosis and attributes of masculinity are described.

Masculinity: circumcision, the moustache, and heteronormativity

Anthropologist David Gilmore suggests that all societies institutionalise sex-appropriate roles based on biological difference (Gilmore: 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",[8] meaning that raising one's (her) voice is as scandalous as showing the vulva. Almost every female public appearance is linked to her sexual exposure. Gender roles attributed to the female sex and social behaviours were clearly defined by virtue of the female biological functions. This is the kind of statement of Foucault's archaeology that this chapter traces.

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, vulnerability, 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, i.e., masculine physiology, women have to

8 "طلع جِسها، طلع كُسها"

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

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 percent of girls undergo female genital mutilation, particularly in the region of Kurdistan.[9] Male circumcision is widely celebrated and encouraged for boys between seven days and ten years old. Scholars of *Sharīʿah* and *Fiqh* affirm that it is not obligatory, but that it is highly recommended and considered a *Sunnah*, meaning an imitation of 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*, and *Taṭhīr*, meaning pureness, 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 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.[10] This is followed by the serving of sweets and juice to relatives and neighbours, and it is usually accompanied by a big male gathering.[11] This means that society performs the entry of the newly born into Islam even before it is capable of pronouncing the *Shahādah*, which is the first pillar of Islam. According to Bouhdiba:

9 See UNICEF press release concerning female genital mutilation in Iraq for further data.

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

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

> 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).[12]

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 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-Khayyat: 79-90). This binarism does not necessarily create one category ("masculine") as opposed to another ("feminine"); rather, it creates a

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

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, 2016: 32), celebrates the masculine body, constituting 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.

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 up 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 hairstyle 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.[13] Long hair for men was never popular, and with the rise of the reli-

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

gious 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.[14]

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,[15] 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 you think] he [Saddam] keeps quiet, wearing a moustache and speaking of noble values?![16]

For a non-Arabic speaker, the expression "wearing a moustache" 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 invasion of Iraq in 2003, Saddam Hussein addressed his soldiers with the line: "Iraq is in your mous-

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

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

16 My translation of Hussein's words. See Archives Iraq, 2021, minute: 2:27.
"عراقي ضابط مقدم، من رحنا حررنا الكويت، أغتصب عربية، مو عراقية ولا كويتية، شكلت عليه محكمة وأنحكم بالإعدام، وقلت لهم والله إلا يُعلق بنفس المكان الي سوى بيها الفعلة. وظل ثلاثة أيام معلق بالمكان أو يومين، حتى يكون شارة. بزمن صدام حسين يُغتصب الكورديات ويسكت صدام حسين ومربي شوارب ويحكي بالمعاني العالية؟!"

tache", meaning, "Protect Iraq as you protect your honour or as you protect your women".[17] In 2003, ʿIzat 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.[18] 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.[19]

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.[20] 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",[21] to express solemnity and strength. In Lebanon, a very popular song from the 1970s sings, "Don't make me swear by the moustache",[22] meaning, "Your question is so unnecessary that it does not need such a strong oath".[23] Abū Shanab (he with the moustache) is a common surname in the Levant region;[24] 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 not do this or that".[25] In Iraq, a popular oath among men is to say "bishārbī",[26] 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",[27] meaning that the value of someone's manhood is in his moustache and virility. Similarly, "A woman's honour is in

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

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

19 See Hume's story for *CNN* for further details.

20 Cited in al-ʿĀnī, p. 104.

21 "شاربه\شواربه يوگف عليه الصقر"

22 "لا تحلفيني بالشنب" طوني حنّا

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

24 *Shanab* is moustache in Levantine and Egyptian accents.

25 Moroccan expression: "لعندك موسطاش الحديد، آجي وقابلني". Iraqi expression : "لو عندك شوارب، ..."

26 "بشاربي"

27 "المرجلة على قدر الشوارب"

a good man's moustache",[28] 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",[29] 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 "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 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 lack of hair on the body, especially facial hair, are the number one signs of femininity, except for extremely religious unmarried women.[30] 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.[31] One of the most popular Iraqi folk characters is the woman who earns her living by removing the body hair of women in the neighbourhood. She is popularly known as the *Ḥafāfah*, and is depicted in paintings and in the permanent exhibit at the Baghdadi Museum.[32] Not removing hair, especially among women between fifteen and fifty years

28 "الحُرمة بشارب الخيِّر"
29 "الرجّال يلّزم من شاربه"

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

31 See Enloe, p. 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.

32 See al-Āghā's painting, *al-Ḥafāfah* (2002), and the Baghdadi Museum Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/AlmthfAlbghdady/photos/1701280464974 39. Built in 1970, the Baghdadi Museum collects 385 life-size sculptures depicting scenes of the Iraqi folklore. These scenes show different profes-

old, can be interpreted as an attempt to imitate men. The canon of feminine beauty in Iraqi folk culture echoes the qurʾānic description of beautiful women: in heaven "[t]here are good-natured, beautiful maidens. [...] Dark-eyed, sheltered in pavilions. [...] Untouched beforehand by man or jinn." (The Qurʾān 55:70-74). These dark-eyed females are thought to have fair skin. Although the Qurʾān 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 generations is "She with the dark eyes".[33] 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 (Ayyūb, 1977: 122).[34]

Heteronormativity

Iraqi society, Arab and Muslim, is heteronormative; not only binary gender difference is imposed, but also normative femininity is 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: L. 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 phallocentric order (Mulvey, 1975: 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,

sions, celebrations, and daily-life activities of the Iraqi society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

33 "أم العيون السود" لناظم الغزالي

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

passive, and penetrated, 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 (Bouhdiba: 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 re-

quired 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.[35] 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 Fuʾād 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 analysis of literary accounts in order to see how fiction deals with these notions of corporeality.

Moral reformation and the body: fiction of the pre-modern period

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).[36]

35 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).

36 "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 ولازالت حتى الآن حتى أصبحت طابعه الخاص"

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,[37] especially when poetry was still the dominant genre in Arabic literary scenes in general and in the Iraqi scene in particular (Bahoora, 2017: 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 Maḥmūd Aḥmad al-Sayyid (1903–1937), *al-Majnūnān* (Two Crazy People, 1936) by ʿAbd 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 ʿAbd 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 (ʿAbd Allāh Kāẓim: 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

37 On the early period of Iraqi literature, see ʿAbd Allāh Kāẓim, pp. 221-240; Aḥmad (1969: 21-54); Bahoora (2017: 247-250), and Allen, pp. 47-48.

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, 2008: 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 the *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, 2011: 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 (Al-Khayyat: 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 of 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 Khālid* 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 this work, one of the protagonist's disappoint-

ments 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, "ʿĀtikah", a woman becomes a sex-worker after being abandoned by her lover.[38] In another story, "Ṭālib Affandī",[39] 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 Ibrahīm hires a biographer to write his life story. The biographer chooses to narrate the story of his employer 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 occasions we see the doctor 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

38 ʿĀtikah is the name of the protagonist. The word means "the one who, when she blushes, becomes extremely red in the face".

39 The name of the protagonist.

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).[40] He does not forget sexual repression:

> 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 name set my blood on fire in my veins, and made 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! (8889).[41]

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. Even though the passage

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

41 "وركبت السيارة وودعت اهلي وصحبي، كما ودعت ابي، وكانت عيناه مغرورقتين بالدموع، وقد تمنيت أن أرقص وأقفز وأصيح بأبي أن يكف عن حزنه وكآبته لأني مبتهج مسرور لترك هذا المحيط الشديد المراقبة الذي يشيب الطفل، ويقتل الشاب، وقد ضحكت فعلاً عندما غابوا عن نظري، دون أن أحس ألماً لفراقهم، واحزن للهفتهم. وكنت طوال الطريق أحلم بشيء واحد. بكأس الخمر التي قرأت عن أوصافها وأفعالها دون ان أجسر حتى على التلفظ باسمها، وبالمرأة 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 يخالجني من عاطفة، وما يخامرني من لهفة. وكم اضطررت ان ألعن النساء في مثل هذه المواقف لطرد الشبهة والظهور بمظهر التقي العفيف الفاضل الأخلاق".

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 on 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.[42] 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).[43]

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, un-

42 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.

43 "لقد كانت ساعة سرور بريئة لا يكدرها رقيب أو واش 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 باعتني وقتها، ورفضت أن تحتال علي في النهاية، وحنت 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 فيّ 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 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 الرحال وازمعت السفر إلى بيروت على الفور."

like 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 (Ayyūb: 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 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-Sāqiṭah" (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.[44]

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 ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq Fāḍil, whose fiction reached a mature artistic level in the polyphonic novel

44 The three stories are discussed in Idrīs, p. 25.

(Thāmir: 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 – without noticing it. That is the difference between the story and the article or the public speech (Fāḍil: 6-7).[45]

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 works 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

45 "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، وبتعبير آخر أن يكون جزءا من القصة لا أن تكون القصة جزءاً منه. وبتعبير ثالث أن لا يشعر القارئ أن الكاتب يسحبه 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."

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 to a society which identifies with these parameters: firstly, appearance is mortal whereas wisdom is divine; secondly, true happiness is in the recognition of the almighty, and thirdly, 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),[46] 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" (Fāḍil: 15).[47] 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).[48] 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 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, "Mashrūʿ 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

46 The protagonist's name.

47 "أنها رأت كتلة صارخة من اللحم تضطرب في المهد [...] فرابها أمره واوجست منه خيفة"

48 "ماما.. ماذا تصنعون بهذه الخليقة الحقيرة؟ إنه مجنون يبكي ويصرخ بلا سبب! وقذر جداً.. يحدث في ثيابه وفراشه، ونفسي تشمئز منه! وليست فيه فائدة لنا. إني أحسن منه، وعاقلة ونظيفة! فلماذا لا تلقون به في الطريق؟"

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).[49] 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 choses 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 the young man's struggle with social structure.

Nevertheless, there are other examples where masculine supremacy is not as straightforward 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 a woman who are equal in education, class and intelligence and who are deeply attracted to each other.[50] 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 realises her mistake and they live happily ever after. The interest in their story, however, is concentrated in a twenty-page conversation between Ṣādiq (the man) and Ṣafiyah (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 (Fāḍil: 412). Ṣafiyah, 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

49 "لم تكن قبيحة حقا، 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."

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

clear example of 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 that 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 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.

Her body, his struggle: fiction of the modern period

The modern period is claimed to be the period of the pioneers. It is the period of the great authors who set the solid foundations 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 wom-

en's movements 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, 2008: 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 organisations 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, which 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 Shujāʿ al-ʿĀnī 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" (al-ʿĀnī: 5).[51] 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, 2015a: 42).[52]

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 instruct about poverty and social injustice: firstly, physical pain, disease, and functional diversity, and secondly, sexuality. Examples found in stories by post-war authors, such as Shākir Khiṣbāk (1930–2018), ʿAbd al-Malik Nūrī (1921–1998), Ghāʾib Tuʿmah Farmān (1927–1990), Fuʾād al-Takarlī (1927–2008) and Mahdī ʿĪssa al-Ṣaqr (1927–2006), focused on how poverty and social status interfere with intimate life and jeopardise the future because they drive men to violence, humiliation, regret and tragic fates.

In Khiṣbāk's story "al-Kasīḥ" (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

51 "أن أدب القصة في العراق، من أوفر الآداب العربية اهتماماً بأمور 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."

52 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'" (Bahoora: 19).

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.

Ghāʾib Tuʿmah Farmān, who is popularly known as the father of modern Iraqi fiction, intensively focuses on illness and disability. In his short story "ʿAmmī ʿAbrnī" (Help Me Cross, sir), from *Mawlūd Ākhar* (Another Baby, 1959) (qtd. in al-ʿĀnī: 143), Khaīrīyah is a blind young woman who cannot find love because she is poor and disabled. Indeed, Farmān's works are crowded with 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 Maʿrūf* (The Pains of Mr Maʿrūf, 1980). Mr Maʿrūf 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, ʿAbd al-Malik Nūrī, Fuʾād al-Takarlī and Mahdī ʿĪssa 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, marked by social and cultural renewal in literature and thought after World War II (Bahoora, 2015a: 42). Male sexuality is a representation of man's struggle in life and nature and adds a burden to existential anxieties in postcolonial 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.

Shujāʿ al-ʿĀnī's study offers numerous examples of short stories and novels that depict female sexual deviance. Much like other authors of the period, al-ʿĀnī defines female sexual deviance as any sexual practice that is not between heterosexual married couples (al-ʿĀnī: 40-44). He dedicates a chapter to "Women and Illegal Relationships" (127140), 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 "Ṣirāʿ" (Struggle, 1947) by Shākir Khaṣbāk, a sexually depraved female babysitter who takes sexual advantage of a little boy ends up becoming a prostitute (al-ʿĀnī: 40). In *Ramād* (Ashes, 1950) by ʿAbd al-Razāq al-Shaykh, ʿAlī, Ḥalīmah engages in homosexual intercourse to take revenge on her cheating husband (al-ʿĀnī: 43). Mahdī ʿīssa al-Ṣaqr's story "ʿUāʾ al-Kalb" (Barking, 1953) is a critique of the 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-ʿĀnī: 43-45).

Male anxiety around intercourse has been a recurrent theme in Iraqi fiction since the 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. Fuʾād 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 *Baṣqah 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 earlier (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 dramatised 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 Baʿth party defeated the communist government.[53] It exposes how male sexual anxieties and political power reify the female body and instrumentalise male sexuality to mark ideological difference. Most im-

53 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 into 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.

portantly, 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 & 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: ʿAdnān represents the strong emergent power; Midḥat represents the defeated intellectual modern left; and Karīm is the passive, uninvolved youth. Yet among these three young men, Munīrah's fate is tragic: the first, ʿAdnān, rapes her; the second, Midḥat, marries her and then 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-Takarlī, 2015: 262).[54] 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 dishonoured and unmarriageable, bringing 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

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

penetrating her body, he realises she is not virgin, but he continues. It is then that his existential nausea and moral dilemmas begin:

> 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).[55]

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.[56] And when she pulled him to her, as if she did not want him to learn more about the secrets of the body, he felt her opening her thighs again to contain him... (318, emphasis added).[57]

The curious aspect of this possessive passion is that it never existed between the two during their courtship. She became his when she was "squeezed" na-

55 "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 وصدره تفور. لم يرد أن يرى بشراً. دهمه هذا الإحساس لحظتئذٍ ولم يفارقه. لم يرد أن يرى بشراً. كان مشمئزاً، مهاناً، يريد أن يخلد إلى صمت أبدي. آنذاك، وهو يتطلع إلى ضوء غرفتهم الخافت، هاجمه غثيان مزيف."

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

57 "كانت معتصرة بين ذراعيه، متلاينة تحته، تتلاحق أنفاسها ذات النكهة الغريبة. ابتعد عنها قليلًا، رفع صدره عن صدرها العالي، أخذ يتملى من رؤيتها هكذا. منيرته، زوجته، حبيبته. كانت رقيقة الجلد، ممتلئة النهدين والبطن. جذبت نظره لحظة عظمتا حوضها ورآها تغلق ببطء فخذيها. 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 فخذيها لتحتويه..."

ked 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).[58]

Such lines synthesise the complexity surrounding the body in Iraqi society on two levels: firstly, the fossilised 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 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 patronee's genitals.

Al-Takarlī is not the only author to link sexuality to existential dilemmas. ʿAbd al-Malik Nūrī in "Ghathayān" (Nausea, 1952) also addresses this theme.[59] 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 Jumuʿah" (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 (qtd. in al-ʿĀnī: 62, and Aḥmad, 1977, II: 262-264). Mahdī ʿĪssā al-Ṣaqr also

58 "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 جذوره، تعد قد فقدت دلالتها كامرأة في هذا المجتمع وكزوجة وكأم."

59 For futher discussion on the works of ʿAbd al-Malik Nūrī, see Aḥmad, 1977, II: 243-248.

linked sexuality to existential dilemmas in stories such as "Bukāʾ 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" 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" (al-Ṣaqr, 1955: 7).[60] 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).[61]

In all three stories, part of the protagonists' distress and boredom, which leads them to feel imprisoned, is their unsatisfying emotional lives. The protagonist in "Ghathayān" is abandoned by the young woman he adores; in "al-Ghil" the protagonist hates and pities his wife; and in "Bukāʾ al-ʾAṭfāl" the protagonist is sick of his wife, whose breasts are too dry to feed their newborn, 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 Khiṣbāk's "Ḥayātun Qāsīyah" (Hard Life, 1959) (qtd. in al-ʿĀnī: 46), 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 Khiḍir's story, "Fatātu al-Maktabah wa al-Qiṭṭah al-ʿĀshiqah" (The Librarian and the Cat in Love, 1967) (Al-ʿĀnī: 49), is a woman

60 "أريد أن أتحرر من كل شيء"

61 "أحس كأن تلك الأقذار 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؟"

whose "tragedy is embodied in her ugliness and her crisis is her desperate need for love" (49).[62] Khadījah realises 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).[63] 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 (Bahoora, 2015a: 42-43).

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 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

62 "فمأساتها تتجسد أيضا في قبحها وأزمتها ماثلة في حاجتها القصوى الى الحب"
63 "ذلك ان المرأة في المدينة ليست سوى جسد شبق يتضور من الشهوة، ليست سوى مومس"

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 Khiḍaīyr 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 (Khiḍaīyr, 2013).[64]

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.

A few exceptions appeared sporadically, however, among Iraqi women poets and fiction writers who were politically involved and reflected their feminist concerns in their literary productions, such as the poet Nāzik al-Malāʾikah, the storyteller Sāfira Jamīl Ḥāfiẓ, and the lawyer Ṣabīḥah al-Shaykh Dawūd. Such works experimented with new representations of the female body. Ḥūriyyah Hāshim Nūrī's story "Bāʾiʿat al-Damm" (Blood seller, 1951) narrates the story of a young woman who sells her blood to save her brother's life (qtd. in al-Ṭālib: 84-85). 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, "Bāʾiʿat al-Dam" offers a symbolic image of the damage patriarchal values cause in society. Sāfirah Jamīl Hafiẓ's story "Dumā wa Aṭfāl" (Toys and Children, 1952) is an introspective journey of a young woman (qtd. in al-ʿĀnī: 18-19), who realises that society sees her as a body/toy which serves for sex and procreation.

64 "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، قبل 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."

Women writers including Salmah Sāliḥ, Maīyādah al-Rubayʿī, Suhaylah al-Ḥusaynī, Safīyah al-Dabūni, May Muẓafar and Luṭfīyah al-Dulaymī, among others, wrote about women's endurance in the trials of family and marital lives. These 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 (qtd. in al-Dādīsī: 227), was only preceded by some short stories by Sāfira Jamīl Hafiẓ 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).

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

Her body, our land: fiction of the Baʿth period

With the emergence of the Baʿth government in the late 1960s, many political, legal, and social reforms concerning gender took place. The Baʿth government intended to change the situation of women, but its political propaganda and fluctuating attitude confused the issue of gender reform. The Baʿth 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 the 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 (Al-Khayyat: 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 Baʿth 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.[65] War propaganda accentuated masculinity

65 For detailed figures of literary war propaganda, see Al-Hassan: 7-10.

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).[66]

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 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-Ṣāʾigh uses an extraordinary metaphor that shows how war, masculinity and the feminisation of the land are connected in a love triangle:

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

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-Ṣāʾigh: 246-247)[67] [68]

This three-dimensional voice – soldier, father and lover – portrays the war rhetoric around the figure of the 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

67 "فرصةٌ، للرجولة والحب..\ يا أم مريمَ... خلي الصغيرة، نائمةً، في فراش طفولتها...\ سأحبك أكثر، حين أعودُ، من الحرب منتصراً، وتحبينني ...\ أنني ... ما أزال أسمّي الرصاصَ، بناتِ محلّتنا\ وأسمّي المدافعَ أبناء عمي ...\ وما بين إطلاقة، وإطلاقة، أحبك أكثر ....\ يا أم مريم .. \ خلي الصغيرة، نائمةً، في سرير طفولتها ...\ واغسلي عتبةَ الباب، واغتسلي، واستريحي ..."

68 I use a poem as an example instead of fiction owing to the difficulty of finding sources published during the 1980s and 1990s. There is an unofficial censorship of literary texts produced during that period, as they are accused of being war propaganda praising the Baʿth regime. The texts published during that period and cited in this research were borrowed from private personal libraries belonging to friends and family.

distinction between solid manhood on display in the front-line, and tender motherhood displayed in taking care of children and household, became a motif in the press and literary productions.[69] 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.

ʿAzīz al-Sayyid Jāsim's work is an example of how the human body is a materialisation of party politics and patriarchal values.[70] Jāsim's three novels, *al-Munāḍil* (The Militant, 1972), *al-Zahru al-Shaqī* (Suffering Primrose, 1988), and *al-Maftūn* (Bewitched, 2004),[71] 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 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 ani-

69 Examples of Iraqi press in Rohde: 190-197.

70 ʿAziz al-Sayyid Jāsim (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 Baʿthists. He disappeared in 1990 and his family believes the Baʿthist government executed him.

71 The introduction to this novel by the author's brother, the 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.

mal 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 Driss: 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 as 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 that 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" (Amer-

ican Writing, 1981), "Ḥāʾṭ al-Banādiq" (Shotgun Wall, 1982), "al-Khayyāl" (The Cavalier, 1983), and "ʿIsh al-Waqwāq" (Cuckoo's Nest, 1983), for instance, focus on the emotional shortcomings that war causes to the soldiers and their families. ʿAbd al-Satār Nāṣir's book of short-stories *Nisāʾ 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" (Sjoberg: 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 authorised by the government, created a hermetically sealed semiotic space in which the notions of corporality explained above were constantly reproduced and consolidated.

The Baʿth 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, disappeared, and permanently disabled soldiers were astonishing; 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 (Bourque: 455).

On the other hand, the very nature of the military attacks was just as devastating, destroying the 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 of 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.[72]

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

72 On the mental and psychological impact of the war and sanctions on the Iraqi people, see Younis and Aswad: 54-58.

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 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 by 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" (Foucault, 1990, 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 de-

stroyed 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 Baʿth 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" (Lotman, 1990: 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 way bodies interact and signify; the way they are seen, perceived and lived.

II. 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 their 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 Riley, Mohanty, and Pratt 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" (Riley, et al., 2008: 2). The semiosis of corporality in this sphere 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" that delimit a discourse of corporeality which can interact with the discourse of corporeality in the first bloc.

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 patriar-

chal 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" (Foucault, 1995: 138). 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. 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 2003–2004 (Gupta, 2011: 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.

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 camaras 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 corposphere to the world-wide televised spectacle of coercion. 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 (Butler, 2009: 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. In *Watching War* (2012), Jan Mieszkowski explains that the operation of cameras and visual technology are openly linked to the White House and Pentagon performances (Mieszkowski, 2012: 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" (Luckhurst: 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 im-

posed 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 (Van Dijk: 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 Baʿth 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 Baʿth party leadership. ʿUday 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 that emerged in the 1990s. Satellite TV reception and broadcasting were banned. Internet access was only legal in 1999 exclusively within the use of government institutions (fanack.com: 2017).[1] 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 and/or to not raise suspicions.

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

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), all in the name of freedom of speech and 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 Baʿth 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 Iraqi society (Naẓmī, 2012: 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.[2] 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 Excessive, that is, in comparison to the previous decades of censorship.

Bodies and narrative strategies: sexual terrorism, the orientalist gaze, necropolitics and cognitive marginalisation

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:[3] sexual terrorism; orientalist, colonial gaze, and necropolitics and cognitive marginalisation. Before discussing these strategies in detail, it is important to point out that 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'" (Rosenbaum: 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 white-

3 The term "strategies" is inspired by Ella Shohat's term "Textual/Sexual Strategies". See Shohat, "Gender and Culture of Empire", p. 679.

> ness 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 US Census [...] The US 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 (Rosenbaum: 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.

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 the 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 soci-

> ety rests on the power of men to intimidate and to punish women sexually (Sheffield: 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" (Spencer: 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" (Barjola: 30).[4] 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. The 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 femi-

4 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".

nisation 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 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.

The discourse of the war on terror 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-Ṣabāḥ 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 an inappropriate way to redress such a grievance (Sjoberg: 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-Iraq 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.[5] 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.[6] 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 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 US terms: when courting Satan, he dances surrounded by veiled Arabian beauties, but he also breakdances in African American style (Gardiner: 55).

Moreover, the film *South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut* was repeatedly shown to Saddam Hussein during his captivity (Irvine 2009), presumably as a

5 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.

6 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.

method of torture. Beyond ridiculing an enemy and a dictator like Hussein, the joke is offensive on every possible level: firstly, he is made homosexual, which *to him* is the greatest attack on his masculinity; secondly, it shows that colour and homosexuality are objects of ridicule, mockery and evil; and 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 [...] (Sjoberg: 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 ma-

nipulating figures, exaggerating the threat from Iraq.[7] "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 phallocentric "statements" articulated within the discourse of the war on terror.[8] These statements are especially offensive to the strict 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, 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 that 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), directed by ʿAbbās Fāḍil, is a documentary that shows in detail the life of an Iraqi family a few weeks before and after the invasion. 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 there were twenty-five credible cases of sexual violence and abduction just between 27 May and 20 June 2003, that is, a few weeks after the invasion. I myself recall that the frequency of female abduction news lasted

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

8 "Statements" in the Foucauldian sense, that is.

until October of the same year. The report also 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 within three different frameworks: firstly, 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. Secondly, investigative journalism and academic scholarship saw it as a regular military procedure 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 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, 2008: 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".[9] This detachment increased the distance between the spectator 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" (Nusair: 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" (Arendt, 2006: 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

9 This is discussed further in Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, p. 80; and in Žižek, "What Rumsfeld Doesn't Know that He Knows About Abu Ghraib".

> 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, 2004).

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 the 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,[10] which were intended as documents and incidentally performed abuses as a by-product of their representation (Caton & Zacka: 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" (Sontag, 2003: 97).

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" (Brothers: 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

10 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.

> the main complication is the contrast between the "standard" way prisoners were tortured in Saddam's regime and how they were tortured under US 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 (Žižek, 2004b).

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 were the US soldiers posing for? Possible Spectators could include the soldiers' superiors, soldiers' fam-

ilies 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 form 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 (Sontag, 2004).

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, 2008: 111). To an Iraqi eye, that outlived the Baʿth era, the pictures reiterate the shock of a broken totem: the pride invested in manhood. The circulation of these photographs disseminates a new corporeality 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, 1971: 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 massage 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* (Butler, 2009: 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 (Puar, 2007: 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. Feminising 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 (Mulvey, 1989: 140-141).

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 also threatens es-

tablished values, reduces mobility and dismounts the structures of national identity.

The orientalist gaze

It is no news that the discourse surrounding the 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 sergeant MP 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 has been changing in the past few years, dogs are considered impure animals in Islam.[11] Therefore, by giving equal prominence to the prison dog's opinion as well as to that of the sergeant MP him or herself on Iraqis and Iraqi culture, smell, sound, skin tone and hair colour, the

11 For more about dogs and other animals in Islam, see Waldau and Patton: 149-179.

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.

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 (Khamas: 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" (Mirzoeff: 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 representation, 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.[12] 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

12 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. Riley, Mohanty, and Pratt (p. 4) also use the same term. Lila Abu-Lughod thoroughly challenges this narrative of rescue in her book *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (Abu-Lughod, 2013).

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.

Necropolitics and 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" (Mbembé: 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 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 of how even non-propagandistic literature justifies the war on terror by cognitively marginalising the good Other.

The following 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 audiovisual examples in 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 (Stahl, 2010: 3).

By "citizen", 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.[13] 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'" (Nguyen: 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" (Stahl, 2010: 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, 2010: 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 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:

13 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.

"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, 2019: 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" (Stahl, 2010: 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.

Homeland: the sex-freaks show

The television series *Homeland* (2011–2020) is a show that 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, respectively. 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".[14] *Homeland*, which is an adaptation of the 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" (Shaheen: 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 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.[15] 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.

James Castonguay explains that "*Homeland* opens up the theoretical possibility for subversive meanings through its brief explicit criticisms of US pol-

14 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.

15 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" (Duxbury, Frizzell, & Lindsay: 791).

itics and policies, yet these meanings are outweighed by these contexts of reception and *Homeland*'s representation of the ubiquitous Muslim enemy" (Castonguay: 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 he might 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 Season 1, episode 1, at 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?"[16] 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 lying 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 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

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

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",[17] 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 stigmatised 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 organising 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 prince; Abu Nazir, the 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 domains 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 jeopardise *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

17 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".

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 US. Brody confesses to Carrie: "I loved that man" (S1–E7, min.: 48:48). In Season 2, episode 10, Abu Nazir refers to this homoerotic insinuation, speaking to Carrie, who is now his hostage, as follows: "so *you* love him *too*?" (S2–E10, 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*" (S1–E7, min.: 27:21, emphasis added).[18] 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

18 Nicholas is Nicholas Brody.

> faces. The result is an overcompensation familiar in warrior societies, where the combined fear 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 (Braudy: 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 on 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 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 (Boone: xx).

Consequently, no Arab or Muslim male character in the series presents a sexuality that is not stigmatised. One is either a homosexual,[19] 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 and E3), 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 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 6, 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, hypersexualised, 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 the journalist and Oxford graduate, Roya Hammad, a descendant from a wealthy

19 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.

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 2. 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 4 poster expresses its tone strikingly as it 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 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" (Yeğenoğlu: 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" (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)"[20] (D. Evans: 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 (Yeğenoğlu: 63).

20 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 information retrieved from www.statista.com in 2019, 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 they are 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 alienates and dehumanises its speakers, as it shadows and confuses their identity and the geography of their existence.

War relics: mainstream and veterans' 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" (Gupta, 2011: 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 oc-

cupation 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 metafictions 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, Henry Perowne, 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. 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.[21] 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.

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" (McEwan: 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

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

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 a 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, well-being 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'" (Wallace: 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).[22]

Wallace sustains her argument on the observation that, through Henry's lifestyle 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 ([McEwan:]148), and the women as victims of oppression ([McEwan:]124)" (Wallace: 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 (McEwan: 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 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" (McEwan: 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

22 Kowaleski cites Gilroy in her articulation of the definition of "postcolonial melancholia".

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 well-being: 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" (Ryle: 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); "[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'" (Hartnell: 142).[23] 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

23 Hartnell cites Updike's interview with Tom Ashbrook.

this lack in finding refuge in the presence of God, in whom he finds "an invisible but palpable companion" (Updike: 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 teenager about to float away in the morass of the world" (Updike: 40), according to Jack Levy, the school's councillor. 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 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" (168-169).

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" (Updike: 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 (Herman: 692). Herman argues that *Terrorist* is more of a critique of American culture rather than 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 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 materi-

alistic 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 also he speaks of it as if it were a given that an "Islamic believer" hates and expresses animosity towards 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' (Updike: 32) Christianity practiced by the Secretary of Homeland Security" (Herman: 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 (Updike: 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 "cleanness" 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'" (Hartnell: 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 (Updike: 96-98). Ahmed had in fact experienced sexual urges towards Joryleen, but repressed them (280), and his anger towards Joryleen's boyfriend prompts rage at society, people who have sex, and 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 Tylenol'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),[24] *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 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

24 A female soldier's diaries, not fiction.

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 & 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 that 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.[25] 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' writ-

25 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 US Army is a victim of Abu Ghraib (297).

ings 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 & 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 US military seemed more concerned about its own well-being than about Iraqis" (Ricks: 200); then, on the level of the writing about the invasion, the suffering of the Iraqis becomes invisible, hence the cognitive marginalisation.

Redeployment by Phil Klay, a National Book 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, western 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 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" (Klay: 148, emphasis added), and that even a small Iraqi child around five of 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" (Lucas Thompson: 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.[26] 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 bowl. *It wasn't American blood, but still*, there's that dog, lapping it up" (Klay: 1, emphasis 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 Operating 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 2014–2016. The image, then, is a manipulation by which to frame Iraqis particularly 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 mem-

26 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.

ory 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 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, western Iraq. Soon the soldier tells the Vietnam whores story to Old Man, the one soldier in his team to whom one could talk about whores (121). Old Man is so called 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" (Klay: 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 of 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 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" (Holstun: 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" (Powers: 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, psychopathic 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 Tafar, Nineveh, in northern 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 form 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* (Powers: 205-206, 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" through 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' 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" (Williams & Staub: 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' nar-

rative 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? (Williams & Staub: 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" (Peebles: 49).

Although it may seem ironic – since the war propaganda, as I have shown earlier, used a hypersexualised 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" (Klay: 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 & Staub: 2), or they castrate beautiful innocent boys (Powers: 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 "ungrievable" 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 that 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" (Mirzoeff: 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 (MacNair: 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" (Pettitt: 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 (Alosman: 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.[27] To him, these texts, among similar others, share a characteristic that distinguishes certain veteran writings form 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).

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 narratives, 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 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

27 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 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.

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 a life improvement plan is yet a bigger question that perpetrators' fiction needs to answer.

Video games: kill for your life

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, 2006: 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, 2006: 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, 2006: 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".[28] 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

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

> 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, 2010: 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 consolidating the idea that Muslim or Arab people are basically armed, violent male fanatics who must be defeated. Contemporary Iraqi fiction will find a counter-process to the cognitive marginalisation of the discourse of the 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 where the 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 abovementioned 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 a 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 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, 2010: 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 the US Army in detention 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 of Iraq and the Levant, known as ISIL, 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 torturing of 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 be-

tween 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 & Maron: 40-42) – 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: 233-235). 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 firstly 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*"[29] (Cheever, emphasis added). Thus the imitated part of the game is the reality as lived and as wanted-to-be-told by the

29 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 7 September 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.

Marines, that is, as one part of a more complex reality. Secondly, 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 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 (Stahl, 2010: 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 terror-

ism, 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 of 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 (Shaheen: 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, 1991: 5). This is the symbolic order that Iraqi postmodern traits attempt to question and contest in contemporary art and literature.

III. Irakaustos. 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. This chapter outlines and interprets two phenomena that distinguish contemporary Iraqi fiction from the other periods mentioned in chapter I. 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, firstly, scepticism towards the representation of the Iraqi subject in the confronted symbolic orders; secondly, 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.

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 ID 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 1940s 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 bananas" 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 well-being 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.[1] 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.

1 See Oliver Wright for further details on the invasion of fruit and the turning of Iraq into a banana republic.

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 rather than being exclusive to the rich, as previously perceived from television during the years of deprivation caused by the genocidal sanctions. It also hints at the possibility of turning Iraq into a banana republic.[2] 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.[3] 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, 2013a) and postcolonial 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, 2015b: 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 postcolonial 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

2 About Iraq becoming a banana republic, see also Russell Pompea.

3 See Bahoora, "Writing the Dismembered Nation", 2015b; and Hanoosh, "Beyond the trauma of war", 2013a.

the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed. Therefore, all that is bodily becomes grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable" (Bakhtin, 1984: 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 (24-25).

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 (Bozal: 418-422; Fingesten: 426). 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 (Bobrow; Crawford). Additionally, Kafka's *Metamorphosis* (1915) and his animal stories employ grotesque representation of the body as an expression of existential anxiety towards modernity and war.[4] This relation between socio-political transformation and the grotesque representation 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 pre-

4 On the use of animal stories as an expression of existential anxiety towards modernity and war, see Dagamseh, and Powell.

sent a contradictory and double-faced fullness of life" (Bakhtin, 1984: 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, 1990: 142), the grotesque body is a sign of the merger and translatability between the old conceptualization of the body, and 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, 1984: 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",[5] Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer*, Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, and ʿĀliah Mamdūḥ'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, 1984: 317).

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 day 6, 2006 – thereby evoking sanctity and religious rituality[6] – 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 Bahoora calls "narratives that stage spectacles of horror" (Bahoora, 2015b: 188); and it also relates to the Bakhtinian carnivalesque element of grotesque representation (Bakhtin, 1984: 149); the sanctity of

5 From *The Madman of Freedom Square*.

6 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 called *Tarawīḥ* begin. Ramaḍān 2006 is significant in the history of contemporary Iraq, being the bloodiest month in the sectarian killings after the 2003 invasion.

death and the horrors of deformation, beheading and mutilations are being brought down to earth by laughter, parody and caricature.

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 1984: 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 1984: 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 suffers. 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).[7]

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

Although Bernstein is discussing the work of James Nachtwey,[8] 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 qurʾānic 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 *ʿĀshūrāʾ* – 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 *ʿĀshūrāʾ* 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.[9]

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 qurʾānic 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).[10]

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

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

9 Some of these sayings would include expressions such as *sūdah ʿalaīyah*,' "سودة عليّا", which literally means "'darkness upon me"'; or '*imshī wara ilī yibakīk, lā timshī wara ilī yiḍaḥkak,*' (أمشِ ورا إلي يبكيك، لا تمشِ ورا إلي 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.

10 See also Agamben (1999: 45), where he refers to the same idea in his description of the "Muselmann" of Auschwitz.

> 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 (Bakhtin 1984: 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 day 6 is a hint at the profane element in the grotesque representation of the body.[11] Blasim's fiction could be considered the most representative example of the use of abusive, violent, and profane language. In his story "A Wolf",[12] 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" (Blasim, 2013: 44). 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" (42).

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 repre-

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

12 "عادة التعري السيئة" من كتاب معرض الجثث.

sented. The notion of a "body without dignity" is related to the lower stratum of the body:

> 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 1984: 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.[13] The surreal circumstances in which the fantasy is narrated and the fact that it is a fantasy narrated 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".

13 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.

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.[14] 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 linguistic violence reflects the horrors and violence that Iraqi people underwent during years of wars, dictatorship, sanctions, and humiliation.[15]

Blasphemy and sexual language in Blasim's writings are intended to deliver a humanising message: to 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,[16] Chewgum Christ goes home and spends his days reading and taking care of his elderly mother, who is blind, deaf and

14 "كُسها وكُس أُمها"

15 See Abdellah; Bahoora "Writing the Dismembered Nation"; and Genadi.

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

who has lost her memory and the control of her bowel movements. Christ looks after her because "his mother's death would sever the thread that tied him to the place" (Blasim, 2013: 31). One day, after Sunday Mass, Chewgum Christ takes his mother to a kebab restaurant.[17] 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 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 (33).

The parallelism between Jesus Christ and Chewgum Christ crystallises both the grotesque body and the prophane 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

17 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.

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 (Bakhtin, 1984: 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 that 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).[18] 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*, qtd. in Williams, Jay: 96)

In contemporary criticism the term is used to describe a popular genre characterised by an excess off 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).[19] 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.

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 (Bakhtin, 1984: 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

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

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

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 (Bakhtin, 1984: 34). In a similar manner, Iraqi authors use grotesque images of the body that 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 Bahoora mention: all of them engage with narrative of strangeness and – except for *al-Tashahhī* – the postcolonial gothic. And 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 texts that do not present such a complete example as the selected ones do to avoid length and repletion. For instance, the stories of Ḍīyāʾ Jubaīlī, *Mādhā Nafʿal Bidūn Calvino* (What we do without Calvino), can give us a case of the grotesque body similar to that in Hassan Blasim, 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,[20] yet contains a treatment of

20 On this topic in *Absent*, see Hamdar, pp. 106-124.

the question of gender which still perpetuates the phallocentric 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.

Four fictional grotesqueries

1. "The Truck to Berlin"

Blasim's story "The Truck to Berlin", from *Majnūn Sāḥat al-Ḥurriyah* (The madman of freedom square, 2009), 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 young Iraqi 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 (Blasim, 2009: 62).

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" (62).

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" (10):

> 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 (8-9).[21]

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" (Bakhtin, 1984: 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 sanctity of horror: motherhood being violated by "the worst" creature's genitalia,[22] 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" (Bakhtin, 1984: 163) between the lower and upper stratum, laughter and horror, and pain with amusement.

21 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.

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

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 (Blasim, 2009: 64).

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 (65).

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 a 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 (65).

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 qurʾānic verses constitutes this blasphemous representation of the grotesque: it brings the sanctity of the holy verses to the level of defecation. In Lawton's words, "[b] blasphemy extends not only to the name and nature of God, but to the repre-

sentation of the divine" (Lawton, 1993: 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 (Agamben, 2007: 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 ... (Blasim, 2009: 66).

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 (66-67).

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 (Bakhtin,

1984: 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" (Edwards & Graulund: 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" (Bakhtin, 1984: 279). The scene also provokes the effect of that which is "ambivalently abnormal", which Philip Thomson describes as a definition of the grotesque (Thomson: 27). As for the uncanny, although major theorists of the grotesque agree that it might not be a "necessary element of the grotesque" (5),[23] 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 a tragic conundrum, which he got himself into in search of a better, more 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

23 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, p. 5; Bakhtin, 1984, p. 49; and Kayser, pp. 135-136.

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.

2. *The Corpse Washer*

Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer* (Waḥdahā shajaratu 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.[24] 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 preparing it for burial. The tradition might vary in some details between *Sunnī* and *Shīʿī* doctrines, but here the author chooses for his protagonist to be a *Shīʿī* 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 (Antoon, 2013: 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*,[25] a washhouse or house-like building where corpses are washed, are central. The novel opens with the first nightmare, where Jawad

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

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

sees his sweetheart Reem 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 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 (23).

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 *Shīʿah* 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 realised 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, 2012: 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" (Kristeva, 2012: 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: 65-66). 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 the perpetrator's narrative or, as Judith Butler writes, "political resistance relies fundamentally on the mobilization of vulnerability" (Butler, 2016: 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 of 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" (Antoon, 2013: 184). It is a crucial metaphor for the whole story. The pomegranate is the only tree in the small garden of the *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 Qurʾān describing heaven: "In both gardens are fruit, palm trees, and pomegranates" (The Qurʾān 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 (Antoon, 2013: 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 (Bakhtin, 1984: 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" (Khanna: 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). Khanna 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" (Fromm:

9), rather than as sexual arousal by the dead or death-related matters, which is the clinical condition for the classification of necrophilia.[26] 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 put the bowl aside and try to pick up the pieces and repair the damage, but everything disintegrates in my hands (Antoon, 2013: 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.[27] 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.[28] 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,

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

27 These sculptures are examined in Giacometti (2000).

28 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.

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" (Motyl & Arghavan: 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 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 (Antoon, 2013: 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.[29] 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

29 "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.

torment is this purgatorial state, in which he cannot live like the dead since images 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's 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.

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,*[30] a creature made of a restless spirit looking for its body, and a body assembled 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.

30 *Shismah* is the central character's name in Arabic, and it is the Iraqi dialectal word to say "what's-its-name", 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 as "Whatsitsname" in this format to express this 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.

Nahem owned a horse-drawn cart. He and Handi used to take it around the city centre to collect unwanted domestic objects (Saadawi: 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 becomes complicated 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 (Saadawi: 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 (Bakhtin,1984: 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" (Saadawi: 85). Such a comment evokes the qurʾānic discourse on the creation of the human body. According to the Qurʾān, the human body is a miracle and a testimony of the creator's godhood (Jasim, 2012: 44). The ugliness of the *Shismah*, on the other hand, proves nothing but the accumulated flesh of ungrievable lives, to use Butler's term (Butler, 2009: 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" (Bakhtin, 1984: 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 9 April 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, 1984: 317).

The body of the *Shismah* and the way in which it is assembled establishes the central ideas around which the novel develops: firstly, the appalling atrocities of the invasion and sectarian killing that transgress the limits of reality; secondly, the body – being sewn of different dismembered cadavers – repre-

sents the plurality of the Iraqi national identity and its economic, social, ethnic and religious diversity; thirdly, it expresses the obvious belief that violence can only produce violence. Fourthly, 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 in 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 *waḥsh* is used.[31] Throughout the translation the *Shismah* is referred to by different words. Occasionally it is referred to as a "criminal" (Saadawi: 78, 82, 85, 112, 122, 125, 132, 211, and 216) or as "Criminal X", with a capital C (209, 250, 258, 262, 270, and 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 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

31 The Arabic word literally means "monster" in English.

> be? As far as Brigadier Majid was concerned, the monster itself was their project. It was the Americans who were behind this monster (Saadawi: 267-268).

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" (Juhi Jani: 324, emphasis added). On the other hand, Sinéad Murphy refers to it as an adaptation of Shelley's creature (Murphy: 4, 12), and Ola Abdalkafor calls it a "Frankenstein-like monster" (Abdalkafor: 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 (Bahoora, 2015b:188).[32]

However, Bahoora 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.[33] To define rewriting, I build on Cristian Moraru's description of the concept as "both a symptom and an active instrument" (Moraru: 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

32 Transliteration as appears in Bahoora's article.

33 As discussed in the introduction, many Iraqi authors establish a dialectical correspondence between their texts and canonical literature. For instance, ʿAbd al-Hādī Saʿdoun'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*; Ḍiyāʾ Jubaīlī'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.

> 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 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 (Bahoora, 2015b: 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 (Saadawi: 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 the 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.[34]

34 This is to echo the title, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literature* (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, eds.), 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 (Webster: 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 (Agamben, 1998: 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 (Agamben, 1998: 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 Abject 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" (Kristeva, 1982: 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 Qurʾān. 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.[35] 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".

35 More analysis on the qur'anic description of talking body parts, see Jasim (2012).

4. *Al-Tashahhī*

ʿĀliah Mamdūḥ'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 ʿĀliah Mamdūḥ'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; al-Bayḍāwīyah, his Moroccan lover, and Alif, the Iraqi love-of-his-life. There is one single event that triggers all these voices which narrate the memories that 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.[36] However, these readings expose the phallocentric 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 a personal note to the author regarding the French translation of the novel in which she writes: "It is beyond all that 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 restraint, liberated, daring, and very funny. We laugh as we read it an astonished laughter".[37]

The novel opens with Sarmad sitting at the Pakistani doctor's clinic,[38] hoping to understand his condition while the doctor laughs hysterically at it dur-

36 See Moḥamad Baradah's and Raʾūf Musʿad's reviews which support the phallocentric reading of the novel. Both reviews are cited by Abou El Naga and can be accessed through the author's website.

37 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 كلّ ما يمكن أن يقترحه الأدب الراهن. إنّه، في حدّ ذاته، لحظةٌ ثوريّة، وقتٌ للعَصف، بالمعنى الحقيقي للكلمة. نعم، إنّه بلا قيود، مُتحرِّر، جريء، وطريف للغاية. نضحك أثناء قراءته ضحكةً مندهشة."

38 It is 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.

ing 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 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" (McEwan: 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 (Mamdūḥ, 2007: 5).[39] Iraqi men under examination, ridiculed by "foreign" medical discourse requires 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 traumatic exposure to sexual abuse, repression, wars, exile, and a poor capacity for administrating one's emotions.

From the very first page in the novel, Bakhtin's recipe for the grotesque element is methodically fulfilled: the face, and particularly the nose, Bakhtin suggests are classic grotesque elements (Bakhtin, 1984: 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 & Sollner: 36). As Bakhtin confirms, the relation between the nose and the penis is historically universal in almost all languages, and it basically suggests that the nose symbolises the phallus (Bakhtin, 1984: 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. More-

39 "تعالت ضحكته على شكل تموّجات البحر تعلو ثم سرعان ما تنخفض ممّا جعل منخريه ينتفخان الى آخرهما، فضاقت عيناه وتبع ذلك بعض الشهقات الغريبة."

over, 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 (Mamdūḥ, 2007: 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 the 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 (Mamdūḥ, 2007: 6).[40]

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 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 Tashrīb trays full of thighs and shanks and thick fatty broth which sticks

40 "أنّه يقوم بكل هذه التصرّفات كما يليق برجل لايزال عضوه في تمام الاكتمال. (...) دس يديه الاثنتين بجيبي سرواله وبدأ يسير امامي بطريقة بطيئة جدّاً وهو يدل ويشير بهما، مرة على شكل قبضة يد وتارة يستخدم الإصبعين بحركات لا تخلو من معنى مأخوذ من وضعيتي المزرية، فألاحظ شيئاً هناك كأنه قائم يزداد انتصاباً من تحت سرواله، شيئاً عبقرياً يحرك الجثة حتى. والحال، طبيبي كان يملك نوعاً من الدعابة التي لم استلطفها، كأن يمسك عضوه بيده ليغيظني ويتوعدني به، ليقول فقط، إنّه حيّ ونابض بالدم والقوّة أكثر مني."

to your glasses and clouds your sight as you scream with ecstasy so that everyone hears you ... isn't that right, dear? (Mamdūḥ, 2007: 8-9).[41] [42]

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).[43] 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 & Séra: 94). Sarmad's memories show that he undergoes a serious ordeal in his youth in Baghdad: his brother, Muhanad, who represents the Baʿthist regime in the story, threatens him and tells him to leave the country. Muhanad forcibly marries Ālif,[44] the woman Sarmad is in love with, and sexually abuses Sarmad's friend, Yūsuf. Taking refuge in London, Sarmad works 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

41 "لا أريد سماع أيّة قصّة من القصص إيّاها فأنا أعرفها. لكن، أسمع ايّ تشةٍّ لا تستطيع تجنبه، ها، قل لي أرجوك؟ أيّ إلهام، وأيّ نهمٍ للأكل يمسك بك (...) لماذا لم تمت؟ ولا حلّ كان أمامك إلّا الموت، أنت أصلاً كنت مخصّصاً للموت. (...) عضوك الكريم تخلّص منك وها أنا لا أمزح معك (...) كلْ يا صديقي لأنك لا تقوى إلاّ 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 ممدّداً في صواني التشريب المحشوة بالأفخاذ والزنود، المرق الثخين الدّسم الذي كان يلتصق بعويناتك الطبيّة من الخارج فيزوغ بصرك فلم تعد ترى ويتعالى صوتك باللّذة ليسمعه الجميع.. أليس كذلك يا عزيزي؟"

42 *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.

43 "وقف الدكتور حكيم وكأنه يستعدّ لضربي، وضع يده حول كتفي، استفزّتني تلك الحركة فاضطررت للوقوف."

44 The name of the woman Sarmad loves, which is also the first letter of the Arabic alphabet.

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.[45] 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 (Mamdūḥ, 2007: 44).[46] 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).[47] 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 mother, while she was budging between my thighs: "This is today's dish". She answered (41).[48]

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

45 According to the Iraqi Civil Code issued in 1959, the age of consent is eighteen years old. Last consulted 25 January 2020. From the Iraqi Supreme Court website: http://iraqld.hjc.iq:8080/LoadLawBook.aspx?SC=010320061162736

46 "آفة"

47 "هل تحب الفستق؟"

48 "تصوّرتُ الكلمة أكلة أسكتلنديّة لذيذة سوف تطبخها فيونا وتتكوّن من لحم الخروف المشهورة به وديان بلدها. أو من العجل أو الكبدة المنقوعة بالدارسين والأعشاب البريّة والزنجبيل الأخضر. قلت لها في أحد الأيّام ذلك كما لو كانت أمّي وهي تنود بين فخذيّ: «هذا هو صحن اليوم». هكذا أجابت."

them and smile ..." (13).[49] Sarmad describes his own body with expressions like "deformities" and "flabbiness"; he says that "my nose started to look like a thick beak" (14);[50] he refers to the "hugeness of [his] body" and its "antagonising shape" (17).[51] 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).[52] 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). [53]

Research in psychology shows that male survivors of child abuse report "high levels of self-loathing and self-blame" (Crete & Singh: 347), and other studies show the possibility that self-loathing is related to obesity, eating disorders, and migration.[54] 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" (Dajani: 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 (25-26).

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 Baʿthist

49 "بدأت كيلوغرامات اللّحم تردم جميع ما كنت أداريه من وحشة ووحشيّة، فكان جلدي في بعض الأحيان يتقشّر، تتساقط منه كما قشرة الرأس، ذرّات أزيحها وأنا أنظر إليها وأبتسم ..."

50 "أنفي، صار يشبه منقاراً غليظاً"

51 "ضخامة بدني" "شكلًا معادياً"

52 "فظهر لي أنّ عضوي المسنّ كان يجامع من أجل اللاشئ، من أجل الفراغ والتلاشي، من أجل الآخرين، لا من أجلي أنا."

53 "وحشة ووحشية"

54 See Aoun, Joundi, and El Gerges, whose study examines eating disorders among refugees; and Aruguete, Alayne, and Edman, whose study examines the links between self-loathing and eating disorders.

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 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 incrusted 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 (Mamdūḥ, 2007: 253).[55]

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).[56] Sarmad is unable to transfer knowledge

55 "أريد أن أعرف متى كنت عراقيّاً حقّاً ومتى كان ضروريّاً ألّا أكون كذلك، ولا آخذ بنظر الاعتبار إلّا أنّني لم أعد أصلح أن أكون عراقيّاً (...) فما عليّ إلا أن أشقّ البلد وأستخرج منه نفسي وأكتشف حالة انعدام وظائفه البيولوجيّة والفيزيائيّة، والكيميائيّة، والأخلاقيّة، والوجوديّة."

56 "إنّ ما كان يطال الترجمة وما نقوم به يشبه عمليّة الاقتلاع"

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"[57] and his boss comments: "Translation, Mr Burhān, is a craft with temptation, it can lead to damnation, so beware!" (15).[58] 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 that dislocated subjects undergo, and the cultural mourning that 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 "phallocentricise" the self – as did the nationalist and religious discourses.

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 joined. 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 ana-

57 "الثمرة الملعونة"
58 "الترجمة يا مستر برهان الدين حرفة بها غواية قد تقودك الى التهلكة فاحذر"

lysed 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.

Four approaches to re-gendering bodies

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. Building on Bahoora's article, and on a previous piece I wrote,[59] I established a historical foundation on which sexuality – that is, male sexuality – was the determining factor of subjectivity and which in literature reflected political anxiety in anticolonial Iraq. I compare two extracts from different Iraqi novels: *al-Rajʿ al-Baʿīd* (The Long Way Back) by Fuʾād al-Takarlī – also cited in the first chapter, and *The Corpse Washer* by Sinan Antoon – discussed above. In this section, I develop the ideas I worked on into a more comprehensive analysis and provide a readjustment to the claim made previously. This section transports the analysis of gender from the idea of equality to that of questioning the definitions of masculinities and femininities.

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 protagonist develops a romantic relationship. However, the difference is that in the first novel, *The Long Way Back*, the couple

59 See Jasim Khammas.

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 from the former, cited in the second chapter, and then 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, 2001: 318-326, emphasis added).[60]

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 Baʿth Party" (Caiani & 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, Ghaydaʾ's family is visiting because they were displaced from their home after the sectarian conflict that started in 2006. After a few

60 "كانت معتصرة بين ذراعيه، متلاينة تحته، تتلاحق أنفاسها ذات النكهة الغريبة. ابتعد عنها قليلًا، رفع صدره عن صدرها العالي، أخذ يتملى من رؤيتها هكذا. منيرته، زوجته، حبيبته. كانت رقيقة الجلد، ممتلئة النهدين والبطن. جذبت نظره لحظة عظمتا حوضها ورآها تغلق ببطء فخذيها. 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 فخذيها 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 وعرقها وعطرها ولمساتها الناعمة وعيونها وشفتاها وساقاها المنفتحان عن حب للقياه، جنوناً واضطراباً لم يعهده قبلاً. كان ينبوع حرارة مستديمة يمسك بخناقه، فسُكِبَت عليه مياه متثلجة. وفي ثوانٍ، انقلبت به حياته. لحظة دخوله فيها وهي تحته: انثاه الحبيبة التي تتحول الى سراب. لحظة ثانية: ينسحب وشهوته لا تعطي مجالاً لعقله أو شكوكه، فيعاود الطعن ويفقد في اللحظة الثالثة توازنه وتفيض روحه مع ماء الحياة الذي انبثق منه كدم القلب، كدم القلب ..."

weeks of flirtation, a romance starts between the two, in which Ghaydaʾ 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, 2013: 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. Ghaydaʾ'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 Ghaydaʾ's voice, we know how she feels about her partner, which is not the case with the way Munīrah is presented here: 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 ʿAbd 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 of transforming the Iraqi state and society, and this is reflected in Midḥat's criticism of his family and the whole social structure and behaviour (al-Takarlī, 2001: 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 the taking of Munīrah's virginity by anyone but himself is an act of savagery not against Munīrah, the actual victim, but against him and the beliefs of healthy and organised egotism (141). This what Haytham Bahoora 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 – ʿAdnān – or whether it is to be that of the progressive Left, which requires time and contemplation to be assimilated – Midḥat – and 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 ʿAdnān and Munīra" (Caiani & Cobham: 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,[61] but still fails to observe some obvious external constraints and almost distractedly makes a dramatic, foolhardy gesture at the last minute (236).

61 The transliteration in Caiani and Cobham's study spells it "Munīra" without a final h.

Nevertheless, I argue that this is precisely why Midḥat had to die: because his rationalisation of 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" (al-Takarlī, 2001: 428). Moreover, not only she did not do "it", but also, she "entrusted him with her 'shame'" (Caiani & 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 be-

fore 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 Ghaydaʾ's consists in her displacement after her family takes refuge in a European country. When Jawad misses the opportunity to marry Ghaydaʾ, because he feels he is not ready, her only remark is, "why did you let me go?" (Antoon, 2013: 154), a question he himself cannot answer. This shows that both Jawad and Ghaydaʾ are aware of the happiness they mutually gave each other, 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 Ghaydaʾ 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, Ghaydaʾ 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, and emotions, and care for one another. Both understand that they are jeopardised 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 (al-Takarlī, 2001: 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 har-

mony 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 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 ʿAdanān, 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 phallocentric tendencies to unvisited bodies, voicing in this way what had been silenced. In Sinan Antoon's first novel, *I`jaam: An Iraqi Rhapsody*, for instance, one of the key issues the novel poses is the need for new hermeneutics for Iraq. The very term *I`jām* in Arabic comes from *Aʿjem*, that is, "not Arab"; the noun *Iʿjām* 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`jam...*, masculinity, disability and sexuality are presented in a peculiar way. Furat,[62] like Jawad, is a young man who dissents from the stereotyped traditional Arab masculinity, and particularly the one advocated by the Baʿth regimes in the 1980s and 1990s. 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.

Unlike the examples of functional diversity, discussed in chapter I, 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.

62 Iraqi name and Arabic word for the river Euphrates.

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. *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" (Abou El Naga: 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 (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 could equally refer to food or sex.

In her forward to ʿĀliah Mamdūḥ'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*" (Cixous: 101). This is what ʿĀliah Mamdūḥ 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, Mamdūḥ's writings often challenge 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" (Abou El Naga: 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 ʿĀliah 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 ac-

companied the invasion used phallocentric and orientalist imagery to break down a phallocentric 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 conceptualising the self; but it is necessary to wash off decades of phallocentric 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.

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 to come back, is a representation of absolute goodness.[63] 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 womaniser: 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 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 inexistent positionality regarding gender and

63 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, in *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.

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" (Saadawi: 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" (Saadawi: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" (Z. Ali: 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 representation and interaction between genders. Gender has become a "trouble", to use Butler's term, and that is a relatively positive change.

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 (Blasim, 2009: 62) 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.[64] In both cases, with 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 (62), 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 (65). Similarly, just as the Ratman is aware of how rats are ruthlessly killed by human beings (Freud, 2002: 169), the

64 I use capital letters (Wolfman and Ratman) to indicate Freud's patients, and small letters (wolfman and ratman) to indicate Blasim's characters.

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, 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 (Freud, 2002: 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 to 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" (Blasim, 2009: 62), 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 being implemented. In this period, "as if sanctions were not enough",[65] "Iraqi men and women were confronted with sexual and broader gender-based violence" (Al-Ali, 2018: 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 *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 *Little Red Riding Hood – Layla and the Wolf* in the Arabic version – and from the qurʾānic story of Yūsuf, where Yūsuf's father is made to believe that his little beloved boy was devoured by a wolf. Therefore, it is the wolf which in the collective imagination represents an evil or gothic element 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 feminised 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

65 I quote Nadje 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.

a perpetrator at the same time. The body of the wolfman-ratman in Blasim's story, then, reveals an anxiety with regard 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 indeed many attempts to critique, rewrite and to outspeak 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, takes 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).[66] In this story, 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 realises 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 maʿa al-Sharīf al-Raḍī* (Nescafé with al-Sharīf al-Raḍī) and *al-Ḥayāt min Ṯhuqb 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.[67] In both novels, the narrators constantly re-evaluate 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 realises that the

66 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 of Freedom Square", and other stories. See Blasim (2015).

67 In Iraqi fiction.

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 away Āminah who tried to be a woman all her life and never succeeded (Khalīl, 2016: 93).[68]

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)[69]. 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".[70]

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" (Al-Khayyat: 81-84).

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

68 "جلست وقتاً طويلًا على الأريكة امام التلفزيون، وفي رأسي صورة واحدة فقط. صورة تلك المرأة. نزعت ثوبي وأنا لا أزال أجلس على الأريكة، ولا يزال الشال على رأسي. نظرت للثوب، كما لو انني 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."

69 "وربما يحدث شيء مما أتخيله كل يوم."

70 From the interview with 4 News: min.: 26:33. See: Žižek (2017).

as sexual beings. The Arabic term for menopause is *sin al-yaʾs*, which literally translates as "age of despair". Menopausal women are rarely considered in the framework of romance and lovemaking; they are usually 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 is looks at herself 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 (Kristeva, 1982: 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 Ṯhuqb 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 "superpower": 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 Baʿthist 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 Baʿthist'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 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".[71] 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 normalise 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 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

71 From *The Iraqi Christ*.

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 dissembles, 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, 1982: 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 Yasmeen 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" (Hanoosh, 2013b: 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 Ghāʾib Ṭuʿmah Farmān, Mahdī ʿĪsā al-Ṣaqr, and Fuʾād al-Takarlī" (146).[72] 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 (Arkoun: 183).

72 The authors whom I discussed in chapter I.

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 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 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.

Conclusions: a report on the banality of violence

You must find the body | in another idea[1]
Maḥmūd Darwīsh

I have traced a genealogy of the body in the context of contemporary Iraq. At the beginning, 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 attributes 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 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

1 From Darwīsh's "In Praise of the High Shadow": 11.
"عليك أن تجد الجسدَ /في فكرة أخرى،" من قصيدة مديح الظل العالي: 11.

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 of creation. It is metaphysical because it disputes the ends of man and creation. [...W]e 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 recognised. 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, 2018: 110). Muhsin al-Musawi writes: "Iraqi writers have found themselves since the late 1940s more at home with Camus and Sartre" (al-Musawi: 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, 2018: 76). Existentialism among Arab intellectuals, and Iraqis in particular, suggested a decolonialised answer that resisted the nationalist and Baʿthist project of transforming the Arab self, which they considered a first step towards Arab imperialism (146). Existentialist thought, then, has taken part in the Iraqi tradition of decolonising intellectual history and with that 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 Bahoora suggests, 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 ʿAbd al-Wahāb al-Bayāti, among others (Di-Capua, 2018: 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, 1982: 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 (Žižek, 2008: 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" (Agamben, 1999: 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, 2009: 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 monstruous. The very idea, the very term "invasion" implies a breach. The Latin origin 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 embodiment 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 (Grosz: 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 a 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 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 (Masmoudi: 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 my 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.[2]

Subscribing to what Antoon implies here: there is a systematic rewarding of 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.

The distinction, which I established, 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, is now being employed in the narratives of victims. While it is obvious who the saviour is (the complex American hero), and who is to be

2 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 the University of Notre Dame. https://litofexile.nd.edu/events/2020/11/06/sinan-antoon-literature-and-surveillance-br-a-reading-and-conversation/.

doomed (the savage sex-freak terrorist), who is to be saved is not altogether clear. What happens if counter narratives insisted on the 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?

To describe the employment of corporeal suffering and violence, which responds to the attraction of the global north, without proposing a discourse of alterity as does my proposal of reading the grotesque body, I coin the term "the banality of violence". The concept of the banality of violence clearly echoes Hannah Arendt's concept of the banality of evil, yet it, nevertheless, 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" (Jelínková: 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" (Khondker: 409). More specifically, Kathleen M. Bee describes it as "[t]he culture of violence that suffuses organised racism" (Bee: 61), and finally, Dayan López Bravo simply understands it as the "rationalisation, naturalisation, or normalisation of violence" (López Bravo: 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, 2006: 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" (Arendt, 1970: 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" (Benjamin: 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 that 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" (Žižek, 2009: 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 to draw 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 consumable products. 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) (Sontag, 2003: 19). Laura Mulvey explains that "the still image can generate identification and represent enigma without recourse to narrative closure" (Mulvey, 1989: 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.

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 "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" (Bakhtin, 1981: 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 civiliza-

tion, 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 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 superiors and the 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, colonels, 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 (Benjamin: 299).

This can also be the case for the media, literature and art that 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)[3] – 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 that 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 critically

3 Nominated for nine prestigious awards, and winner of another twelve.

address 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: 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 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" (from the Žižek-Peterson debate: min.: 45:25). Before going any further in writing wars, military conflicts and invasions, authors should remember Hannah Arendt's remarks: 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 (Arendt, 1970: 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 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.

Bibliography

ʿAbd Allāh Kāẓim, Najm (ed.) (2016). "Al-Riwāyah al-ʿArabīyah fī al-ʿIrāq". ʿAbd Allāh Kāẓim, Najm (ed.). *Al-Riwāyah al-ʿArabīyah fī al-Qarn al-ʿIshrīn*. Doha: Katara: 216-286.

عبد الله كاظم، نجم. «الرواية العربية في العراق» من كتاب *الرواية العربية في القرن العشرين*. الدوحة: كتارا، 2016. 216-286.

Abdalkafor, Ola (2018). "*Frankenstein* and *Frankenstein in Baghdad*: The Sovereign, Homo Sacer and Violence". *Postcolonial Text* 13.3: 1-16.

Abdel Haleem, M.A.S. (trans.) (2004). *The Qurʾān: English Translation and Parallel Arabic Text*. E-book. Oxford New York: Oxford University Press.

Abdennur, Alexander (2008). *The Arab Mind: An Ontology of Abstraction and Concreteness*. Ottawa: Konga.

Abed al-Jabri, Mohammed (2011). *The Formation of Arab Reason*. Trans. The Centre for Arab Unity Studies. London: I.B.Tauris Publishers in Association with The Centre for Arab Unity Studies.

Abou El Naga, Shereen (2009). "Al Tashahi, Alia Mamdouh (2007)." *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 3.3: 337-339.

Abu Zayd, Nasr (2004). *Rethinking the Qurʾān: Towards a Humanistic Hermeneutics*. Amsterdam: Humanistics University Press.

Abu-Lughod, Lila (2013). *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* Harvard University Press.

Adams, Ann Marie (2012). "Mr. McEwan and Mrs. Woolf: How a Saturday in February Follows 'This Moment of June'." *Contemporary Literature* 53.3: 548-572.

Agamben, Giorgio (1998). *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

— (2007). *Profanations*. Trans. Jeff Fort. New York: Zone.

— (1999). *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. New York: Zone.

Aggrawal, Anil (2009). "A New Classification of Necrophilia." *Journal of Forensic and Legal Medicine* 16: 316-320.

Aghacy, Samira (2009). *Masculine Identity in the Fiction of the Arab East since 1967*. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press.

Ahmed Jamás, Imán (2006). Crónicas de Iraq. Madrid: Ediciones del Oriente y del Mediterráneo.

Aḥmad, ʿAbd al-Illāh (1977). *Al-Fan al-Qiṣaṣī fī al-ʿIrāq*. Baghdad: Manshūrāt Wizārat al-Iʿlām.

أحمد، عبد الاله. *الأدب القصصي في العراق، الجزء الأول والثاني*. بغداد: منشورات وزارة الإعلام، 1977.

— (1969). *Nashʾat al-Qiṣah fī al-ʿIrāq wa Taṭawūrihā*. Baghdad: Jāmiʿat Baghdad & Maṭbaʿat Shafīq.

—. *نشأة القصة في العراق وتطورها*. بغداد: جامعة بغداد – مطبعة شفيق، 1969.

Ahmed, Leila (1992). *Women and Gender in Islam*. E-book. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.

Al Shawab, Maryam (2019). "How Body Hair Has Historical Significance." *Sekka* October-December 2019. https://sekkamag.com/2019/10/01/4703/.

Al-Āghā, Wasmāʾ (2002). "From Baghdad to Baghdad." *Al-ḥafāfah*. Comp. Wasmāʾ al-Āghā. 24 March 2021. http://wassma-alagha.blogspot.com/.

Al-ʿAlawī, Hishām (2004). *Al-Jasad Bayna al-Sharq wa al-Gharb*. Casablanca: Manshūrāt al-Zamān.

العلوي، هشام. *الجسد بين الشرق والغرب*. الدار البيضاء: منشورات الزمان، 2004.

Al-Ali, Nadje (2007). *Iraqi Women*. New York: Zed.

— (2018). "Sexual Violence in Iraq: Challenges for Transnational Feminist Politics." *European Journal of Wonen's Studies* 25.1: 10-27.

Al-ʿĀnī, Shujāʿ Muslim (1972). *Al-Marʾah fī al-Qiṣah al-ʿIrāqīyah*. Baghdad: Wizārat al-Iʿlām.

العاني، شجاع مسلم. *المرأة في القصة العراقية*. بغداد: وزارة الإعلام، 1972.

Al-ʿArawī, ʿAbd Allāh (1995). *Al-Īdiyūlūgīyah al-ʿArabīyah al-Muʿāṣirah*. Casablanca and Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī.

الراوي، عبد الله. *الإيديولوجية العربية المعاصرة*. الدار البيضاء – بيروت: المركز الثقافي العربي، 1995.

Al-ʿAzm, Sadik Jalal (2009). "Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse." Macfir, A. L. *Orientalism a Reader*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Albazei, Saad A. (2008). "I'jaam: An Iraqi Rhapsody by Sinan Antoon and Rebecca C. Johnson." *World Literature Today* 82.6: 58.

Al-Dādīsī, al-Kabīr (2017). *Azmat al-Jins fī al-Riwāyah al-ʿArabīyah binūn al-Niswah*. Beirut: Muʾasasat al-Riḥāb.

الداديسي، الكبير. *أزمة الجنس في الرواية العربية بنون النسوة*. بيروت: مؤسسة الرحاب، 2017.

Al-Ghadhāmī, ʿAbd Allāh (1996). *Al-Marʾah wa al-Lughah*. 5th ed. Casablanca & Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī

الغذامي، عبد الله. *المرأة واللغة*. الطبعة الخامسة. الدار البيضاء – بيروت: المركز الثقافي العربي، 1996.

Al-Hassan, Hawraa (2020). *Women, Writing and the Iraqi Ba'thist State*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Ali, Rozina (2015). "How *Homeland* Helps Justify the War on Terror." *The New Yorker* 20 December 2015. 5 September 2018. https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/how-homeland-helps-justify-the-war-on-terror.

Ali, Zahra (2018). *Women and Gender in Iraq*. Cambridge University Press.

Al-Khayyat, Sana (1990). *Honour & Shame: Women in Modern Iraq*. London: Saqi.

Allen, Roger (1995). *The Arabic Novel: An Historical and Critical Introduction*. 2nd ed. New York: Syracuse University.

Almaany. n.d. 11 May 2020. https://www.almaany.com/.

Al-Musawi, Muhsin J. (2006). *Reading Iraq: Culture and Power in Conflict*. London & New York: I. B. Tauris.

Al-Muṣbāḥī, Muḥammad (2017). *Al-Dhāt fī al-Fikr al-ʿArabī al-Islāmī*. Beirut: Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies.

المصباحي، محمد. *الذات في الفكر العربي الإسلامي*. بيروت: المركز العربي للأبحاث والدراسات، 2017.

Al-Nāshīʾ, Usāmah (2018). *Tamathulāt al-Iḥtilāl al-Amrīkī fī al-Riwāyah al-ʿIrāqīyah 2004-2014*. Baghdad: Dar Stoor.

الناشئ، أسامة. *تمثلات الاحتلال الأمريكي في الرواية العراقية 2004–2014*. بغداد: دار سطور، 2018.

Alosman, M. I. M. (2021). "Grievable and Un-Grievable Lives: Phil Klay's Redeployment." *Humanitas* 9.17: 30-44.

Al-Ramli, Muhsin (2017). *The President's Gardens*. Trans. Luke Leafgren. London: Maclehose Press Editions.

Al-Rawi, Ahmed (2008). "Iraqi Stereotypes in American Culture: The Case of Video Games and Films." *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 2.2: 225-247.

Al-Ricābī, Falīḥ, and Ṭuʿmah Muṭaīyr Ḥusaīn (2017). "Sulṭat al-Jasad fī al-Riwāyah al-ʿArabīyah al-Muʿāṣirah." *Al-Ādāb Journal* 122: 69-82.

الركابي، فالح وطعمة مطير حسين. "سلطة الجسد في الرواية العربية المعاصرة". *مجلة الآداب* 122 (2017): 69-82.

Al-Ṣāʾigh, Yūsuf (1992). *Al-Qaṣāʾid*. Baghdad: Dār al-Shuʾūn al-Thaqāfīyah.

الصائغ، يوسف. *القصائد*. بغداد: دار الشؤون الثقافية، 1992.

Al-Ṣaqr, Mahdī ʿĪssā (1955). "Al-Ghil". *al-Adīb* 14.12: 7-9.

الصقر، مهدي عيسى. "الغل". *الأديب* 12.14 (1955):-7-9.

— (1950). "Bukāʾ al-Aṭfāl". *Al-Adīb* 9.6: 43-45.

—. "بكاء الأطفال". *الأديب* 6.9 (1950): 34-45.

— (1953). "ʿUāʾ al-Kalb". *Al-Adīb* 12.7: 28-30.

—. "عواء الكلب". *الأديب* 7.12 (1953): 30-28.

Al-Sayyāb, Badr Shākir (2016). "Inshūdat al-Maṭar". *Al-Aʿmāl al-Kāmilah I*. Beirut: Dār al-ʿAūdah.

السياب، بدر شاكر. "أنشودة المطر". *الأعمال الكاملة* - المجلد الأول. بيروت: دار العودة، 2016.

Al-Sayyid, Maḥmūd Aḥmad (2017). *Jalāl Khālid*. 1928. Baghdad: Dār Suṭūr.

السيد، محمود أحمد. *جلال خالد*. 1928. بغداد: دار سطور، 2017.

Al-Sayyid Jāsim, ʿAzīz (2004). *Al-Maftūn*. Beirut: al-Muʾasasah al-ʿArabiyah lil-dirāsāt wa al-Nashr.

السيد جاسم، عزيز. *المفتون*. بيروت: المؤسسة العربية للدراسات والنشر، 2004.

— (1972). *Al-Munādhil*. Beirut: Dar al-Ṭalīʿal lil-Ṭibāʿah wa al-Nashr.

—. *المناضل*. بيروت: دار الطليعة للطباعة والنشر، 1972.

— (1988). *Al-Zahru al-Shaqī*. Cairo: al-Haīʾah al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿāmah lil-Kitāb.

—. *الزهر الشقي*. القاهرة: الهيئة المصرية العامة للكتاب، 1988.

Al-Takarlī, Fuʾād (2015). *al-Rajʿ al-Baʿīd*. 3rd ed. Baghdad: al-Madā.

التكرلي، فؤاد. *الرجع البعيد*. الطبعة الثالثة. بغداد: المدى، 2015.

— (1989). *Al-Wajh al-Ākhar*. 3rd ed. Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb.

—. *الوجه الآخر*. الطبعة الثالثة. بيروت: دار الآداب، 1989.

— (2000). *Baṣqah fī Wajh al-Ḥayāt*. Cologne: Al-Kamel Verlag.
—. بصقة في وجه الحياة. بيروت – بغداد. منشورات الجمل، 2000.
— (2001). *The Long Way Back*. Trans. Catherine Cobham. Cairo & New York: American University in Cairo Press.
Al-Ṭālib, ʿUmar (1975). "Katibāt al-Qiṣah fī al-ʿIrāq". *al-Aqlām* 10.11: 84-95.
الطالب، عمر. "كتابة القصة في العراق". *الأقلام* 10.11 (1975): 84-95.
Al-Tamīmī, Jinān (2012). *Mafhūm al-Marʾah bayna Naṣṣ al-Tanzīl wa Taʾwīl al-Mufassirīn*. Beirut: Dār al-Fārabī.
التميمي، جنان. *مفهوم المرأة بين نص التنزيل وتأويل المفسرين*. بيروت: دار الفارابي، 2012.
Al-Wardī, ʿAlī (2009). *Shakhṣīyat al-Fard al-ʿIrāqī*. 1951. 2nd ed. London: Alwarrak Publishing Ltd.
الوردي، علي. *شخصية الفرد العراقي*. 1951. الطبعة الثانية. لندن: الوراق للنشر، 2009.
American Sniper (2014). Dir. Clint Eastwood.
Antoon, Sinan (2007). *I'jaam: An Iraqi rhapsody*. Trans. Rebecca C. Johnson & Sinan Antoon. San Francisco: City Lights.
— (2013). *The Corpse Washer*. Trans. Sinan Antoon. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.
— (2017). *The Baghdad Eucharist*. Trans. Maya Tabet. Cairo & New York: Hoopoe.
— (2019). *The Book of Collateral Damage*. Trans. Jonathan Wright. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.
— (2020). Literature and Surveillance: A Reading and Conversation with Olivier Morel. Literatures of Annihilation, Exile, and Resistance the Research Collective. 6 November 2020. https://litofexile.nd.edu/events/2020/11/06/s.
Aoun, Antoine; Janine Joundi, and Najwa El Gerges (2019). "Prevalence and Correlates of a Positive Screen for Eating Disorders among Syrian Refugees." *Eur Eat Disorders Review* 27: 263-273.
AR15 (2018). "Investigation – Allegations of Detainee Abuse at Abu Ghraib: Psychological Assessment." n.d. 13 September 2018. www.aclu.org/torturefoia/released/11.pdf.
Archives Iraq (2021), أرشيف العراق. *شاهد انفعال صدام عندما وجه المدعي العام له تهم بان في زمنه تم إغتصاب النساء الكورديات*. 7 February 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jo-TemNgC9E.
— (2017). Prod. Uploaded by الارشيف العراقي Omar AL Kazemi. 17 April 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qq1p4771CxQ.
Arendt, Hannah (2006). *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. London: Penguin.
— (1970). *On violence*. New York: Harcourt.
Arkoun, Mohammad (2012). *Islam: To Reform or to Subvert?* Kindle edition. London: Saqi.
Aruguete, Mara S.; Alayne Yates, and Jeanne L. Edman (2006). "Further Validation of the Self-Loathing Subscale as a Screening Tool for *Eating Disorders*." Eating Disorders 15.1: 1-16.
— (2007). "Further Validation of the Self-Loathing Subscale as a Screening Tool for Eating Disorders." *Eating Disorders* 15: 55-62.

Ashcroft, Bill; Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (2002). *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature*s. London & New York: Routledge.

Atwood, Margaret (1986). *The Handmaid's Tale*. New York: Ballantine.

Ayyūb, Dhū al-Nūn (1977). *Al-Āthār al-Kāmilah li-Adab Dhū al-Nūn Ayyūb I & II – Al-Qiṣaṣ*. Baghdad: Wizārat al-Iʿlām.

أيوب، ذو النون. *الآثار الكاملة لأدب ذو النون أيوب المجلد الأول والثاني – القصص*. بغداد: وزارة الإعلام، 1977.

— (1978). *Al-Āthār al-Kāmilah li-Adab Dhū al-Nūn Ayyūb III – al-Riwāyāt* . Baghdad: Wizārat al-Iʿlām.

—. *الآثار الكاملة لأدب ذو النون أيوب المجلد الثالث – الروايات*. بغداد: وزارة الإعلام، 1978.

Baalbaki, Rohi (2002). *Al-Mawrid*. Beirut: Dar El-Ilm Lilmalayin.

Badr, ʿAlī (2006). *Bābā Sartre*. 2nd ed. Beirut: al-Muʾasasah al-ʿArabīya lil-Dirāsāt wa al-Nashr.

بدر، علي. *بابا سارتر*. الطبعة الثانية. بيروت: المؤسسة العربية للدراسات والنشر، 2006.

— (2016). *Al-Kāfirah*. Milano: Almutawassit Books.

—. *الكافرة*. ميلانو: منشورات المتوسط، 2016.

Bahoora, Haytham (2017). "Iraq". In Hassan, Waïl S. *The Oxford Handbook of Arab Novelistic Traditions*. Oxford University Press, pp. 247-264.

— (2015a). "The Figure of the Prostitute, Tajdid and Masculinity in Anti-Colonial Iraq". *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 11.1: 42-62.

— (2015b). "Writing the Dismembered Nation: The Aesthetics of Horror in Iraqi Narrative of War". *The Arab Studies Journal* 23.1: 184-208.

Bakhtin, Mikhail (1984). *Rabelais and His World*. (1965). Trans. Hélène Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

— (1981). *The dialogic imagination*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Texas: University of Texas Press.

Bakhtin, Mikhail, and Patricia Sollner (1983). "Rabelais and Gogol: The Art of Discourse and the Popular Culture of Laughter". *Mississipi Review* 11.3: 34-50.

Baradah, Muḥammad (2007). "ʿĀliah Mamdūḥ Tabḥath ʿan al-ʿIllah al-Khafīyah lil-Maraḍ al-ʿIrāqī". *Al-Ḥayāt* 21 June 2007.

برادة، محمد. "عالية ممدوح تبحث عن العلة الخفية للمرض العراقي". *الحياة* 21 حزيران 2007.

Baram, Amatzia (2011). "From Militant Secularism to Islamism: The Iraqi Ba'th Regime 1968-2003". October 2011. *Wilson Center, HAPP Occasional Paper.* 09 May 2020. https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/militant-secularism-to-islamism.

Barjola, Nerea (2018). *Microfísica sexista del poder. El caso Alcàsser y la construcción del terror sexual*. Barcelona: Virus.

Barthes, Roland (2000). *Camera lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Trans. Richard Howard. London: Vintage.

Bee, Kathleen M (2002). "The Banality of Violence". *Context* 1.4: 60-61.

Ben Driss, Hager (2004). "The Unholy Trinity: Politics, Sex and Mysticism in ʿAzīz al-Sayyid Jāsim's Narratives". *Journal of Arabic Literature* 35.1: 71-87.

Benjamin, Walter (2019). *Reflections*. Boston & New York: Mariner.

Ben-Mordechai, Galia (1992). "The Musical Culture of Iraqi Jewry: Three Countries and Two Continents". *Canadian Folk Music Journal* 20: 9-18.
Benslama, Fethi (2006). "Islam and Psychoanalysis: A tale of Mutual Ignorance". *Gabriela Keller*, 13 June 2006. http://en.qantara.de/A-Tale-of-Mutual-Ignorance/7767c7836i1p483/.
— (2009). *Psychoanalysis and The Challenge of Islam*. Trans. Robert Bononno. Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press.
Bernstein, J.M. (2004). "Bare Life, Bearing Witness: Auschwitz and the Pornography of Horror". *Parallax* 10.1: 2-16.
Bevan, Alex (2015). "The National Body, Women, and Mental Health in *Homeland*". *Cinema Journal* 54.4: 145-151.
Bhabha, Homi K (1994). *The Location of Culture*. London & New York: Routledge.
Bin Salāmah, Rajāʾ (2005). *Bunīyān al- Fuḥūlah*. Damascus: Dār Petra.
بن سلامة، رجاء. *بنيان الفحولة*. دمشق: دار بترا، 2005.
Blāsim, Ḥasan (2015). *Maʿraḍ al-Juthath*. Milano & Baghdad: Almutawassit Books.
بلاسم، حسن. *معرض الجثث*. ميلانو – بغداد: منشورات المتوسط، 2015.
Blasim, Hassan (2009). *The Madman of Freedom Square*. Trans. Jonathan Wright. Comma Press.
— (2013). *The Iraqi Christ*. Trans. Jonathan Wright. Comma Press.
— (ed.) (2016). *Iraq +100*. Great Britain: Comma Press.
Bobrow, Emily (2018). "Giacometti's Sculptures Feel Uncomfortably Timely". *The Economist*. 31 August 2020. https://www.economist.com/1843/2018/06/19/giacomettis-sculptures-feel-uncomfortably-timely.
Boda-Ujlaky, Judit, and László Séra, (2016). "The Relationship Between Gelotophobia, Shame, and Humiliation". *European Journal of Humour Research* 4.1: 39-101.
Boone, Joseph A. (2014). *The Homoerotics of Orientalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Bouhdiba, Abdelwahab (1998). *Sexuality in Islam*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. London: Saqi Books.
Bourdieu, Pierre (1992). *Language and Symbolic Power*. Ed. John B. Thomson. Cambridge: Blackwell.
— (1977). "Remarques provisoires sur la perception sociale du corps". *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 14: 51-54. 26 August 2020. https://www.persee.fr/doc/arss_0335-5322_1977_num_14_1_2554.
Bourque, Stephen A. (2002). *Jayhawk! the VII Corps in the Persian Gulf War*. Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army.
Bozal, Valeriano (2008). "Dibujos grotescos de Goya". *Anales de Historia del Arte*, Volumen Extraordinario: 407-426.
Braudy, Leo (2003). *From Chivalry to Terrorism*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
Brothers, Caroline (1997). *War and Photography: A Cultural History*. Routledge.
Brown, Ellen (1981). "Writing is Third Career for Morrison". *The Cincinnati Enquirer* 27 September 1981: F11. 08 September 2020. https://www.newspapers.com/clip/21863475/tonimorrison/.

Burkeman, Oliver (2003). "Curse Be on Your Moustache, Kuwait Warned". *The Guardian*, 6 March 2003.

Burkett, Andrew (2012). "Mediating Monstrosity: Media, Information, and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*". *Studies in Romanticism* 51.4: 579-605.

Butler, Judith (1993). *Bodies That Matter*. New York: Routlege.

— (2006). *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. New York: Verso.

— (2009). *Frames of War*. New York: Verso.

— (2016). "Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance". 29 July 2016. 7 January 2020. http://bibacc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Rethinking-Vulnerability-and-Resistance-Judith-Butler.pdf.

Caiani, Fabio, and Catherine Cobham (2013). *The Iraqi Novel: Key Writers, Key Texts*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Castonguay, James (2015). "Fictions of Terror: Complexity, Complicity and Insecurity in *Homeland*". *Cinema Journal* 45.4: 139-145.

Caton, Steven C., and Bernardo Zacka (2010). "Abu Ghraib, the Security Apparatus, and the Performativity of Power". *American Ethnologist* 37.2: 203-211.

Chandler, Daniel (1994). "Semiotics for Beginners". 31 July 2020. http://visual-memory.co.uk/daniel/Documents/S4B/?LMCL=Xtzvi9.

— (2002). *Semiotics: The Basics*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.

Chebel, Malek (2004). *Le Corps en Islam*. Paris: Quadrige/PUF.

Cheever, Nathan (2013). *Six Days in Fallujah Pitch.* 7 September 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=40-wT1IXeGU. 27 May 2019.

Chejne, Anwar G. (1960). "The Use of History by Modern Arab Writers". *Middle East Journal* 14.4: 382-396. 27 May 2019.

Cixous, Hélène (2006). "Forward". In Mamdouh, Alia. *Naphthalene: A novel of Baghdad*. Kindle edition. New York: The Feminist Press.

Cooter, Roger (2010). "The Turn of the Body: History and the Politics of the Corporeal." *Arbor: Ciencia, Pensamiento y Cultura* 186.743: 393-405. 28 August 2020.

Crawford, Joanne (2017). "How Alberto Giacometti's Fragile World View Still Resonates". 20 September 2017. *The Conversation*. 31 August 2020. https://theconversation.com/how-alberto-giacomettis-fragile-world-view-still-resonates-83839.

Crete, Gerald K., and Anneliese A Singh (2015). "Resilience Strategies of Male Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse and their Female Partners: A Phenomenological Inquiry". *Journal of Mental Health Counseling* 37.4: 341-354.

Dagamseh, Abdullah M. and Faisal Rawashdeh (2018). "The Grotesque and Physical Degeneration in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*". *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* 10.3: 169-178.

Dajani, Karim G. (2018). "Cultural Dislocation and Ego Functions: Some Considerations in the Analysis of Bi-cultural Patients". *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies* 15: 16-28.

Daoud, Hassan (2000). "Those Two Heavy Wings of Manhood: On Moustaches". In Ghoussoub, Mai and Emma Sinclair-Webb (ed.). *Imagined Masculinities: Male Identity and Culture in the Modern Middle East*. London: Saqi: 273-280.

Darwīsh, Maḥmūd (2014). "Madīḥ al-Ẓil al-ʿĀlī". In *Madīḥ al-Ẓil al-ʿĀlī*. Ramallah: Maḥmūd Darwīsh Foundation.

درويش، محمود. «مديح الظل العالي» من مجموعة *مديح الظل العالي*. رام الله: مؤسسة محمود درويش، 2014.

Democracy Now (2004). "Red Cross Estimates 800 Iraqi Civilians Killed in Fallujah". November 17, 2004. 6 May 2019.

Dewachi, Omar (2019). *The Wounds of Baghdad's Frankenstein*. 26 May 2015, online article. 29 December 2019. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opensecurity/wounds-of-baghdads-frankenstein/.

Dialmy, Abdessamad (2005). "Sexuality in Contemporary Arab Society". *Social Analysis* 49.2: 16-33.

Di-Capua, Yoav (2012). "Arab Existentialism: An Invisible Chapter in the Intellectual History of Decolonization". *The American Historical Review* 117.4: 1061-1091.

— (2018). *No Exit: Arab Existentialism, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Decolonization*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Docx, Edward (2014). "*Redeployment* by Phil Klay review – 'Incendiary stories of war'". *The Guardian* 26 March 2014. 18 May 2019.

Dost, Jān (2019). *Bāṣ Akhdhar Yughādir Ḥalab*. Milano: Almutawassit.

دوست، جان. *باص اخضر يغادر حلب*. ميلانو: منشورات المتوسط، 2019.

Duxbury, Scott W.; Laura C. Frizzell, and Sade L. Lindsay (2018). "Mental Illness, The Media, and The Moral Politics of Mass Violence: The Role of Race in Mass Shootings Coverage". *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 55.6: 766-797.

Edman, Jeanne L.; Alayne Yates; Mara Aruguete, and John Draeger (2011). "The Impact of Self Loathing on Disordered Eating Attitudes among Obese Females". *North American Journal of Psychology* 13.3: 539-458.

Edwards, Justin D., and Rune Graulund (2013). *Grotesque*. Kindle edition. London & New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Efrati, Noga (2008). "Competing Narratives: Histories of the Women's Movement in Iraq, 1919-58'". *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 40: 445-466.

— (2011). "The Effendiyya: Where Have All The Women Gone?". *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 43.2: 375-737.

El Shakry, Omnia (2017). *The Arabic Freud: Psychoanalysis and Islam in Modern Egypt*. Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press.

El-Azma, Nazeer (1968). "The Tammūzī Movement and the Influence of T. S. Eliot on Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb". *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. Oct. 88.4: 671-678.

Enloe, Cynthia (2010). *Nimo's War, Emma's War: Making Feminist Sense of the Iraq War*. E-Book. Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press. ProQuest Ebook Central. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/UAB/detail.action?docID=547586.

Ephron, Dan and Dina Maron (2009). "The Battle over the *Battle of Fallujah*". *Newsweek* 15 June 2009: 40-42.

Eppel, Michael (2011). "The Elite, the Effendiyya and the Growth of Nationalism and Pan-Arabism in Hashemite Iraq, 1921-1958". *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 30: 227-250.

Esposito, John L. (ed.) (2019). *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*. n.d. 30 August 2019. http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e637.

Evans, Dylan (1996). *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. Routledge.

Evans, Robert C. (2009). "Elements of the Grotesque in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*." In Bloom, Harold and Blake Hobby eds.). *The Grotesque*. New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 65-74.

Evers, Stuart (2012). "*The Yellow Birds*, By Kevin Powers". *The Independent* 22 September 2012. 18 May 2019.

Exum, J. Cheryl (2005). *Song of Songs: A Commentary*. ProQuest Ebook Central. Presbyterian Publishing Corporation.

Fāḍil, ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq (1979). *al-Aʿmāl al-Qiṣaṣīyah al-Kāmilah*. Baghdad: Dār al-Rashīd lil-Nashr.

فاضل، عبد الحق. *الأعمال القصصية الكاملة*. بغداد: دار الرشيد للنشر، 1979.

Fanack.com (2017). "Iraq's Media Landscape: An Overview". 28 March 2017. *Fanack.com.* 18 June 2018. https://fanack.com/iraq/society-media-culture/iraq-media/?highlight=media+landscape+iraq.

Fanon, Frantz (2008). *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans. Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, 2008.

Farmān, Ghāʾib Tuʿmah (1982). *Ālām al-Sayyid Maʿrūf*. Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī.

فرمان، غائب طعمة. *آلام السيد معروف*. بيروت: دار الفارابي، 1982.

— (1988). *Al-Nakhlah wa al-Jīrān. Al-Aʿmāl al-Kāmilah I*. Dār al-Fārābī/Dār Bābil.

—. *النخلة والجيران*. الأعمال الكاملة - المجلد الأول. بيروت: دار الفارابي – دار بابل، 1988.

— (1954). *Ḥaṣīd al-Raḥā*. Baghdad: Maṭbaʿat al-Rābiṭah.

—. حصيد *الرحى*. بغداد: مطبعة الرابطة، 1954.

Federn, Paul (1953). "Depersonalization". In Federn, Paul. *Ego Psychology and the Psychoses*. New York: Basic Books: 241-260.

Filkins, Dexter (2014). "The Long Road Home". *The New York Times* 6 March 2014. 18 May 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/09/books/review/redeployment-by-phil-klay.html.

Fingesten, Peter (1984). "Delimitating the Concept of the Grotesque". *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 42.4: 419-426.

Fink, Bruce (1995). *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*. Kindle edition. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Finol, José Enrique (2015). *La Corposfera: Antropo-semiótica de las cartografías del cuerpo*. Quito: Ciespal.

For Sama (2019). Dirs. Watts Edward and Waad al-Kateab. ITN Productions, Channel 4.

Foucault, Michel (1995). *Descipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. 2nd ed. New York: Vintage.
— (1990). *History of sexuality*. Trans. Robert Hurley. Vol. II. New York: Vintage.
— (2010). *The Archeology of Knowledge*. Trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Vintage.
— (2005). *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*. Trans. Tavistock Publications. London & New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis e-Library.
Freud, Sigmund (2002). *The "Wolfman" and Other Cases*. Trans. Louise Adey Huish. Kindle edition. Penguin Modern Classics.
Freud, Sigmund, et al. (1976). "Fiction and its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's *Das Unheimliche* (The 'Uncanny')". *New Literary History* 7.3 Spring, 1976: 525-548 and 619-645.
Friedman, Thomas (2002). "Sodom Hussein's Iraq". *The New York Times* 1 December 2002. 28 May 2018.
Fromm, Erich (1963). "War Within Man: A Psychological Enquiry Into The Roots of Destructiveness. A Study and Commentary in the Beyond Deterrence Series". *Institute of Education and Science (ERIC)*. 7 February 2022. https://eric.ed.gov/?q=MORGENTHAU&id=ED073981.
Fuentes, Carlos (1994). *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*. Madrid: Anaya-Muchnik.
Gardiner, Judith Kegan (2005). "Why Saddam Is Gay: Masculinity Politics in *South Park: Bigger, Longer, and Uncut*". *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 22.1: 51-62.
Ghalayini, Basma (2019). *Palastine +100*. Great Britain: Comma Press.
Ghanādī, ʿUmar Muḥammad (2017). "Ḥasan Blāsim: Jawhar al-Ruʿb al-Insānī (Hassan Blasim: The Essence of Human Terror)". *al-Akhbār* 13 May 2017. 1 August 2019. https://al-akhbar.com/Kalimat/230517.
غنادي، عمر محمد. "حسن بلاسم: جوهر الرعب الإنساني". الأخبار 13 آيار 2017. تم الاطلاع عليه في الأول من آب 2019. https://al-akhbar.com/Kalimat/230517.
Ghoussoub, Mai, and Emma Sinclair-Webb (2000). *Imagined Masculinities: Male Identity and Culture in the Modern Middle East*. London: Saqi.
Giacometti, Alberto (2000). *Giacometti*. Exhibition catalogue. Barcelona: Fundació Caixa Catalunya.
Gibbons-Neff, Thomas (2016). "U.S. Forces Are Using White Phosphorus Munitions in Iraq but It's Unclear Exactly How". *The Washington Post* 23 September 2016. 6 May 2019.
Gilligan, Andrew (2003). "Full text: Gilligan's *Today* reports". 24 July 2003. *BBC News.* 23 April 2021.
— (2004). "Gilligan Statement in Full". 30 January 2004. *BBC News.* 23 April 2021.
Gilmore, David (1990). *Manhood in the Making*. London: Yale University Press.
Golden, Audrey J. (2021). "Human Rights and the Limits of Literary Critique After Abu Ghraib: Reading Hassan Blasim's *The Corpse Exhibition*". *College Literature* 48.2 (Spring 2021): 259-291.
Goodreads. (n.d.). Goodreads. 1 August 2019. https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/18114111-the-corpse-exhibition-and-other-stories-of-iraq.

Greene, Graham (2004). *The End of the Affair*. New York: Penguin.
Griffin, Gabriele (2017). *Oxford Dictionary of Gender Studies*. E-book. Oxford University Press.
Grosz, Elizabeth (1994). *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
Gupta, Suman (2011). *Imagining Iraq: Literature in English and the Iraq Invasion*. Palgrave Macmillan.
Gutting, Gary, and Oksala, Johanna (2019). *Michel Foucault*. Ed. Edward N. Zalta. Spring 2019 edition. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/foucault/.
Hamdar, Abir (2014). *The Female Suffering Body*. New York: Syracuse University Press.
Hanoosh, Yasmeen (2013a). "Beyond the Trauma of War: Iraqi Literature Today". *Words Without Borders*. 1 August 2019. https://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/beyond-the-trauma-of-war-iraqi-literature-today.
— (2013b). "Unnatural Narratives and Transgressing the Normative Discourses of Iraqi History: Translating Murtaḍā Gzār's Al-Sayyid Asghar Akbar." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 44: 145-180.
Haraway, Donna J. (1991). *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge.
Harker, C. Marie (2016). "Fat Male Sexuality: The Monster in the Maze". *Sexualities* 19.8: 980-996.
Hartnell, Anna (2012). "Writing Islam in Post-9/11 America John Updike's *Terrorist*." In Ahmed, Rehana, et al. *Culture, Diaspora, and Modernity in Muslim Writing*. Taylor & Francis Group: 135-148.
Hassan, Waïl S. (2002). "Postcolonial Theory and Modern Arabic Literature: Horizons of Application". *Journal of Arabic Literature* 33.1: 45-64.
Havez, Sabry (1994). "The Transformation of Reality and the Arabic Novel's Aesthetic Response". *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 57.1: 93-112.
Hawley, Erin (2015). "The Bride and Her Afterlife: Female Frankenstein Monsters on Page and Screen". *Literature Film Quarterly* 43.3: 218-231.
Herman, Peter C. (2015). "Terrorism and the Critique of American Culture: John Updike's *Terrorist*". *Modern Philology* 112.4: 691-712.
Hersh, Seymour M. (2004). "The Gray Zone". *The New Yorker* 24 May 2004.
Highwire Games (n.d.). *Six Days in Fallujah*. https://www.sixdays.com/faq. 15 July 2021.
Hirota, Sonoko (2013). "On Being Ill: Woolf, Darwin, and the Diseased Mind in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*." *Virginia Woolf Review* 30: 61-78.
Hohl, Reinhold D. (n.d.). *Britannica*. 02 September 2020. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Alberto-Giacometti.
Holstun, Jim (2019). "Shoot and Cry: Modernism, Realism, and the Iraq War Fiction of Kevin Powers and Justin Sirois". *Cultural Critique* 104: 1-38.
Homeland (2011). Dirs. Howard Gordon and Alex Gansa. Showtime.
Homeland: Iraq Year Zero (2015). Dir. ʿAbbās Fāḍil.

Horsley, Carter B. (n.d.). "Alberto Giacometti." *The City Review*. New York. Online magazine. 02 September 2020. https://www.thecityreview.com/giacom.html.

HTDeco (n.d.). "Sculptures en Bronze de Giacometti". *HTDeco*. 2 September 2020. https://htdeco.fr/en/blog/sculpture/sculptures-en-bronze-de-giacometti.

Human Rights Watch (2003). "Climate of Fear: Sexual Violence and Abduction of Women and Girls in Baghdad". July 2003. 16 May 2017. https://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/iraq0703/iraq0703.pdf.

Hume, Tim (2012). *Mideast Men Go Under Knife for Manly Mustaches*. 29 November 2012. 03 April 2021. https://edition.cnn.com/2012/11/29/world/meast/mustache-transplants-middle-east/index.html.

Ḥusayn, Ṭāha (1962). *Fī al-Shiʿr al-Jāhilī*. 1927. Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif.

حسين، طه. *في شعر الجاهلية*. 1927. القاهرة: دار المعارف، 1962.

Ibrāhīm, ʿAbd Allāh (2008). *Mawsūʿat al-Sard al-ʿArabī vol. I & II*. Beirut: al-Muʾasasah al-ʿArabīyah lil-Dirāsāt wa al-Nashr.

إبراهيم، عبد الله. *موسوعة السرد العربي ١ و٢*. بيروت المؤسسة العربية للدراسات والنشر، 2008.

Idrīs, Suhaīl (1953). "al-Qiṣah al-ʿIrāqīyah al- Ḥadīthah". *Al-Ādāb* 1.1: 22-25.

إدريس، سهيل. « القصة العراقية الحديثة». *الآداب* ١.١ (1953): 25-22 .

Irvine, Chris (2009). "*South Park* Creators Given Signed Photo of Saddam Hussein". *The Telegraph* 8 April 2009. 3 June 2018. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/celebritynews/5122031/South-Park-creators-given-signed-photo-of-Saddam-Hussein.html.

Jasim Khammas, Hanan (2018). "Overcoming Sexuality: Ideology & Masculinity in Iraqi Fiction before and after 2003". *TRANS- Revue de littérature générale et comparée* 23: 1-10. http://journals.openedition.org/trans/2037.

Jasim, Hanan (2012). *Representation Politics of Human Body in the Qurʾan*. Masters dissertation. Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

Jelínková, Ema (2020). "The Banality of Violence in A. L. Kennedy's Early Short Stories." *Acta Neophilologica* 53.1-2: 49-59.

Johnston, Adrian (2018). *Jacques Lacan*. Ed. Edward N. Zalta. Fall 2018. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/lacan/.

Jubaīlī, Ḍiyāʾ (2007). *Laʿnat Marquez*. Basra: Itiḥad al-Udabāʾ fi al-Baṣrah.

جبيلي، ضياء. *لعنة ماركيز*. البصرة: اتحاد الأدباء في البصرة، 2007.

— (2017). *Mādhā Naf al Bidūn Calvino*. Basra: Shahrayār Books.

ـــ. *ماذا نفعل بدون كالفينو*. البصرة: دار شهريار – دار الرافدين، 2017.

Jubaīlī, Ḍiyāʾ, and Chip Rossetti (trans.) (2021). "The Night Girl". *Vestal Review.* 11 June 2021. https://www.vestalreview.net/the-night-girl/.

Juhi Jani, Bushra (2015). "Violence as the Abject in Iraqi Literature: Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*." *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies* 1.4: 321-336.

Kakutani, Michiko (2006). "John Updike's *Terrorist* Imagines a Homegrown Threat to Homeland Security". *The New York Times* 6 June 2006. 15 May 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/06/books/06kaku.html.

Karim, Miriam (2014). "Framing Muslim Women: The Problem with *Homeland*'s Season 4 Campaign." *The Postcolonialist* 30 October 2014. 5 September 2018. http://www.postcolonialist.com.

Kayser, Wolfgang. *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1981.

Kelly, Hillary (2019). "Let's Celebrate Stinky Heroines of Repulsive Realist Fiction." *Vulture* 19 March 2019. https://www.vulture.com/2019/03/halle-butlers-the-new-me-and-the-trend-of-repulsive-realism.html.

Khalīl, Maīyādah (2018). *Al-Ḥayāt min Thuqb al-Bāb*. al-Kutub Khān.
خليل، ميادة. *الحياة من ثقب الباب*. القاهرة: الكتب خان، 2018.

— (2016). *Nescafé maʿa al-Sharīf al-Raḍī*. Almutawassit.
—. *نسكافيه مع الشريف الرضي*. ميلانو – بغداد: منشورات المتوسط، 2016.

Khamas, Eman Ahmed (2013). *New Colonial Rescue, Appropriating a Feminist Discourse in the War on Terror*. Doctoral thesis. Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona.

Khanna, Ranjana (2020). "Touching the Corpse: Reading Sinan Antoon." *New Literary History* 51: 401-418.

Khedairi, Betool (2007). *Absent*. Trans. Muhayman Jamil. Ebook. New York: Random House.

Khiṣbāk, Shākīr (1953). "Al-Kesīḥ." *Al-Ādāb* 1.1: 30-55.
خصباك، شاكر. «الكسيح». *الآداب* 1.1 (1953): 30-55.

Khondker, Habibul Haque (n.d.). "Bangladesh and the Banality of Violence: Civility, Culture, and Crime". In Shahidullah, Shahid M. *Crime, Criminal Justice, and the Evolving Science of Criminology in South Asia*. Palgrave Macmillan: 409-432.

Khuḍaīyr, Muḥammad (2013). "Riwāyat al-Taghīyr fī al-ʿIrāq: al-Riwāyah al-Niswīyah". *al-Ṣabāḥ* 8 July 2013. 17 October 2017. www.alsabaah.iq/ArticleShow.aspx?ID=49777.
خضير، محمد. "روايات التغيير في العراق: الرواية النسوية". *الصباح* 8 تموز 2013. تم الاطلاع عليه في 17 تشرين الأول 2017. www.alsabaah.iq/ArticleShow.aspx?ID=49777

Klay, Phil (2017). *Redeployment*. New York: Penguin.

Klemm, Verena (2010). "Beyond Autobiography: Under the Sign of Destruction: the First-Person Narrator in Alia Mamdouh's Novel *Naphtalene*." In Neuwirth, Angelika; Andreas Pflitsch, and Barbara Winckler (eds.). *Arabic Literature, Postmodern Perspectives*. London: Saqi: 484-494.

Knights, Ben (2019). "Masculinities". In Head, Dominic (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Ian McEwan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 120-134.

Kristeva, Julia (1982). *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press.

— (2012). *The Severed Head: Capital Visions*. Trans. Jody Gladding. New York: Columbia University Press.

Lacan, Jacques (1991). *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book II*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. Sylvana Tomaselli. New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company.

— (2006). *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*. Trans. Bruce Fink. New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006.
— (2016). *Anxiety: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. A.R. Price. Cambridge: Polity Press.
— (2019). *Desire and Its Interpretation: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VI*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. Bruce Fink. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Lawton, David (1993). *Blasphemy*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
Lee, Nicole (2016). "Shooting the Arabs: How Video Games Perpetuate Muslim Stereotypes". *Engadget* 24 March 2016. 5 May 2019. https://www.engadget.com/2016/03/24/shooting-the-arabs-how-video-games-perpetuate-muslim-stereotype/.
Lee, Seung (2016). "'Just Shoot the Arab': How Muslim Representation in Video Games Perpetuate the Terrorist Stereotypes". *Newsweek* 18 March 2016. 17 September 2018. https://www.newsweek.com/how-muslim-stereotypes-video-games-perpetuate-terrorist-stereotype-438593.
Little Palestine (2021). Dir. Abdallah Al-Khatib. Bidayyat for Audiovisual Arts, Films de Force Majeure.
López Bravo, Dayan (2017). "De la naturalización de la violencia a la banalidad del mal". *Ratio Juris* 12.24: 111-126.
Lotman, Juri (2005). "On the Semiosphere." *Sign Systems Studies* 33.1: 205-229.
— (1977). *The Structure of the Artistic Text*. Trans. Ronald Vroon. Michigan Slavic Contributions No. 7. Ann Arbor: Michigan University.
— (1990). *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*. Trans. Ann Shukman. Bloomington and Indianapolis: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd (2000).
Luckhurst, Roger (2017). "Iraq War Body Counts: Reportage, Photography, and Fiction". *Modern Fiction Studies* 63.2: 355-372.
MacNair, Rachel M. (2002). *Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress: The Psychological Consequences of Killing*. ProQuest Ebook Central. Greenwood Publishing Group, Incorporated. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uab/detail.action?docID=3000906.
Majaj, Lisa Suhair, Paula W. Sunderman, and Therese Saliba (2002). *Intersections: Gender, Nation, and Community in Arab Women's Novels*. Nerw York: Syracuse University Press.
Mamdūḥ, ʿĀliyah (2000). *al- Ghulāmah*. Dar al-Sāqī.
ممدوح، عالية. *الغلامة*. بيروت – لندن: دار الساقي، 2000.
— (2007). *Al-Tashahhī*. Beirut: Dār Al-ādāb.
—. *التشهي*. بيروت: دار الآداب، 2007.
— (n.d.). *ʿĀliyah Mamdūḥ's Website*. December 2019. http://www.alghulama.com/.
—. موقع عالية ممدوح على الانترنت<http://www.alghulama.com>.
Mann, Joelle (2017). "Mapping Memory: Moving Between Trauma and Terror in *The Yellow Birds*." *Critique: Studies in Contemporay Fiction* 58.4: 340-350.

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1994). Dir. Kenneth Branagh. Francis Ford Coppola.
Masmoudi, Ikram (2015). *War and Occupation in Iraqi Fiction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
Massad, Joseph (2012). "*Homeland*, Obama's Show". 25 October 2012. *Aljazeera*. 11 June 2021. https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2012/10/25/homeland-obamas-show/?utm_content=automate&utm_campaign=Trial6&utm_source=NewSocialFlow&utm_term=plustweets&utm_medium=MasterAccount.
Mbembé, Achille (2003). "Necropolitics". *Public Culture* 15.1: 11-40.
McAuliffe, Jane Dammen (ed.) (2001). *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*. 6 vols. Leiden: Brill.
McEwan, Ian (2005). *Saturday*. New York: Anchor.
Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). *Phenomenology of Perception*. Trans. Colin Smith. London: Routledge.
Mernissi, Fatema (2011). *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Muslim Society*. Kindle edition. London: Saqi.
Mieszkowski, Jan (2012). *Watching War*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
Mirzoeff, Nicholas (2005). *Watching Babylon: The War in Iraq and Global Visual Culture*. New York: Routledge.
Mohammed, Sadek R. (2018). "The Return of Scheherazade, or the Rise of the Iraqi Novel after 2003". *World Literature Today* March-April 2018: 32-36.
Moraru, Christian (2001). *Rewriting: Postmodern Narrative and Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning*. New York: State University of New York Press.
Motyl, Katharina, and Mahmoud Arghavan (2018). "Writing Against Neocolonial Necropolitics: Literary Responses by Iraqi/Arab Writers to the US 'War on Terror'." *European Journal of English Studies* 22.2: 128-141.
Muhsin Khan, Muhammad, and Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hil (1983). *The Nobel Qur'an, English Translation of the Meaning and Commentary*. Madinah: King Fahad Complex for the Printing of the Holly Qur'an (1404 AH).
Mulvey, Laura (1989). *Visual and Other Pleasures*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
— (1975). "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". *Screen* 16.3: 6-18.
Murphy, Sinéad (2018). "*Frankenstein in Baghdad*: Human Conditions, or Conditions of Beaing Human". *Science Fiction Studies* 45 (2018): 273-288.
Musʿad, Raʾūf (2007). "ʿĀliah Mamdūḥ Tatashafā bi *al-Tashahhī* Muʿālijatan al-Qadar al-Dhukūrī bi-Mtiāzat al-Unthā". *al-Zamān* 24 November 2007.
مسعد، رؤوف. «عالية ممدوح تتشفى بالتشهي معالجة القدر الذكوري بامتياز الانثى» *الزمان* 24 تشرين الثاني 2007.
Nancy, Jean-Luc (2008). *Corpus*. Trans. Richard A. Rand. New York: Fordham University Press.
Nāṣir, ʿAbd al-Sattār (1987). *Nisāʾ min Maṭar*. Baghdad: Menshūrāt Maktabat al-Nahḍah al-ʿArabīyah.
ناصر، عبد الستار. نساء من مطر. بغداد: منشورات مكتبة النهضة العربية، 1987.
Nāīyf al-Fāīyz, Fāris (2017). *Tamathulāt al-Mawt fī al-Riwāyah al-ʿIrāqiyyah 2003–2013*. Beirut: Dār al-Rāfidayn.

نايف الفايز، فارس. *تمثلات الموت في الرواية العراقية 2003–2013*. بيروت: دار الرافدين، 2017.

Naẓmī, Fāris Kamāl (2012). *al-Aslamah al-Siyāsīyah fī al-ʿIrāq, Ruʾyah Nafsīyah*. Baghdad: ICRD & Maktabat ʿAdnān.

نظمي، فارس كمال. *الأسلمة السياسية في العراق، رؤية نفسية*. بغداد: مركز المعلومة للبحث والتطوير – مكتبة عدنان، 2012.

—(2010). *Maqālāt wa Dirāsāt fī al-Shakhṣīyah al-ʿIrāqīyah*. Baghdad & Beirut: Iraqi Scientific Centre and Dār al-Baṣāʾir.

—. *مقالات ودراسات في الشخصية العراقية*. بغداد – بيروت: المركز العلمي العراقي – دار البشائر، 2010.

Nguyen, Viet Thanh (2016). *Nothing Ever Dies*. Harvard University Press.

Nūrī, ʿAbd al-Malik (1952). "Ghathayān." *Al-Adīb* 11.5: 17-20.

نوري، عبد الملك. «الغثيان». *الأديب* 11.5 (1952): 17–20.

Nusair, Isis (2008). "Gendered, Racialized, and Sexualized Torture at Abu Ghraib". In Robin L. Riley, Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Minnie Bruce Pratt (eds.). *Feminism and War: Confronting U.S. Imperialism*. London & New York: Zed: 179-193.

Ouedghiri Ben Ottmane, Meryem (2001). "The Plimpsestic Body in Arab Women's Writings". *Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A: The Humanities and Social Sciences*. Vol. 61. 7. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, January 2001.

Ozernoy, Ilana (2003). "Mustache Mania". *U.S. News & World Report* 19 May 2003.

Packer, George (2006). *The Assassins' Gate: America in Iraq*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Parkin, Simon (2013). "The Video-Game Invasion of Iraq". *The New Yorker* 13 November 2013. 12 September 2018. https://www.newyorker.com/tech/annals-of-technology/the-video-game-invasion-of-iraq.

Peebles, Stacey (2011). *Welcome to the Suck: Narrating the American Soldier's Experience in Iraq*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press.

Percy, Benjamin (2019). "On the Ground." *The New York Times* 4 October 2012. 18 May 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/07/books/review/the-yellow-birds-by-kevin-powers.html.

Pettitt, Joanne (2020). "What is Holocaust Perpetrator Fiction?" *Journal of European Studies* 50.4: 360-372.

Phipps, Claire (2015). "'*Homeland* Is Racist': Artists Sneak Subversive Graffiti on to TV Show." *The Guardian* 15 October 2015. 15 July 2019. https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2015/oct/15/homeland-is-racist-artists-subversive-graffiti-tv-show.

Pompea, Russell (2015). "Medium". 10 January 2015. 02 August 2020. https://medium.com/@GeorgeAndFyodor/afghanistan-and-iraq-expensive-banana-republics-59f164b21a5f.

Poster, Jem (2006). "Paradise Lost". *The Guardian* 5 August 2006. 17 September 2018. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/aug/05/shopping.fiction.

Powell, Matthew T. (2008) "Bestial Representations of Otherness: Kafka's Animal Stories." *Journal of Modern Literature* 32.1: 129-142.

Powers, Kevin (2012). *The Yellow Birds*. New York: Black Bay.

Puar, Jasbir (2007). *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. London & Durham: Duke University Press.

— (2008). "Feminists and Queers in the Service of Empire". In Robin L. Riley, Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Minnie Bruce Pratt (eds.). *Feminism and War: Confronting US Imperialism*. London & New York: Zed, 47-55.

Restuccia, Frances L. (2018). "Kristeva's Severed Head in Iraq: Antoon's *The Corpse Washer*". *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy – Revue de la philosophie française et de langue française* XXVI.2: 56-86.

Ricchiardi, Sherry (2011). "Iraq's News Media after Saddam: Liberation, Repression, and Future Prospects. A Report to the Center for International Media Assistance". 10 March 2011. 18 June 2018. https://www.cima.ned.org/publication/iraqs-news-media-after-saddam-liberation-re.

Ricks, Thomas E. (2007). *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*. Penguin.

Riley, Robin L.; Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Minnie Bruce Pratt (2008). *Feminism and War: Confronting U.S. Imperialism*. London & New York: Zed.

Roas, David (2011). *Tras los limites de lo real. Una definición de lo fantastico*. Madrid: Páginas de Espuma.

Rohde, Achim (2006). "Opportunities for Masculinity and Love: Cultural Production in Ba'athist Iraq during the 1980s". In Ouzgame, Lahoucine. *Islamic Masculinities*. Zed, pp. 184-201.

Rosenbaum, Rachel (2017). "Can the Subaltern Body Speak? Deconstructing the Racial Figures and Discourses of 'Terrorism'". *Arizona Anthropologist* 28: 37-50.

Rushdie, Salman (1982). "The Empire Writes Back With a Vengeance". *Times* 8 July 1982.

Ryle, Martin (2010). "Anosognosia, or the Political Unconscious: Limits of Vision in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*". *Criticism* 25.1 (Winter 2010): 25-40.

Saadawi, Ahmed (2018). *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. Trans. Jonathan Wright. Kindle edition. London: Oneworld.

Saʿdūn, ʿAbd al-Hādī (2012). *Mudhakarāt Kalb ʿIrāqī*. Beirut: Thaqafa Publishing & Distribution LLC.

سعدون، عبد الهادي. مذكرات كلب عراقي. بيروت: ثقافة للنشر والتوزيع، 2012.

Said, Edward (1979). *Orientalism*. Twenty-fifth anniversary Kindle edition. New York: Vintage.

— (1997). *Covering Islam*. London: Vintage.

— (2005). *From Oslo to Iraq and the Road Map*. Kindle edition. New York: Vintage.

Salama, Mohammad (2018). *The Qur'ān and Modern Arabic Literary Criticism: From Ṭāhā to Naṣr*. London & New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Saleh, Waleed (2010). *Amor, sexualidad y matrimonio en el Islam*. Madrid: Ediciones del Oriente y del Mediterráneo.

Sample, Mark L. (2008). "Virtual Torture: Videogames and the War on Terror". *The International Journal of Computer Game Research* 8.2. September 2018. http://gamestudies.org/0802/articles/sample.

Scahill, Jeremy (2008). *Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army*. New York: Nation Books.

Scranton, Roy (2015). "The Trauma Hero: From Wilfred Owen to *Redeployment* and *American Sniper*". *Los Angeles Review of Books* 25 January 2015. 12 April 2022. https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/trauma-hero-wilfred-owen-redeployment-american-sniper/.

Shaaban, Bouthaina (2009). *Voices Revealed*. Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Shaheen, Jack G. (2009). *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*. Updated edition. Massachusetts: Olive Branch.

Sheffield, Carole J. (1987). "Sexual Terrorism: The Social Control of Women". In Beth B. Hess, and Myra Marx Ferree. *Analyzing Gender. A Handbook of Social Science Research*. Sage: 171-189.

Shelley, Mary (1994). *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*. Penguin Popular Classics.

Shimon, Samuel (ed.) (2018). *Baghdad Noir*. New York: Akashic.

Shohat, Ella (2000). "Gender and Culture of Empire: Toward a Feminist Ethnography of the Cinema." In Stam Robert, and Toby Miller (eds.). *Film and theory: An Anthology*. Blackwell: 669-696.

Sjoberg, Laura (2006). *Gender, Justice, and the Wars in Iraq. A Feminist Reformulation of Just War Theory*. Oxford: Lexington.

Smucker, Mervin R.; Constance Dancu; Edna B. Foa, and Jan L. Niederee (1995). "Imagery Rescripting: A New Treatment for Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse Suffering From Posttraumatic Stress." *Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy* 9.1: 3-17.

Snider, Mike (2009). "Fallujah Aims for Staunch Realism." *USA Today* 4 August 2009. Accessed through data base: Academic Research complete, not newspaper web. 17 September 2018.

Soler, Colette (1995). "The Body in the Teaching of Jacques Lacan". *Journal of the Centre of Freudian Analysis & Research* 6: 6-38.

Sons of Anarchy (2008). Dir. Kurt Sutter. FOX 21.

Sontag, Susan (2008). *On photography*. London: Penguin.

— (2004). "Regarding the Torture of Others". *The New York Times* 23 May 2004. 5 September 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/23/magazine/regarding-the-torture-of-others.html.

— (2003). *Regarding the Pain of Others*. London: Penguin.

Spencer, Ayanna D. (2015). "Rape Culture, Language, and Sexual Terrorism". *Ethel Waddell Githii Honors Program Theses.* http:/digitalcommons.auctr.edu/ewghonors/5.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1994). "Can the Subaltern Speak?". In Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds.). *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory. A Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press: 66-111.

Stahl, Roger (2006). "Have You Played the War on Terror?". *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 23.2: 112-130.

— (2010). *Militainment, Inc.: War, Media, and Popular culture*. New York: Routledge.

Standard Operating Procedure (2008). Dir. Errol Morris. Sony Pictures Classics & Participant Media.

Starck, Lindsay (2016). "The Matter of Literary Memory: Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Ian McEwan's *Saturday*". *Adaptation* 9.3: 328-344.

Stone, Robert (2006). "Updike's Other America". *The New York Times* 18 June 2006. 17 September 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/18/books/review/18stone.html.

Ṣwaīliḥ, Khalīl (2006). "Al-Jasad wa al-Hawīyah: Tamathulāt al-Jasad fī al-Ṯhaqāfah al-ʿArabīyah." *Alif*. 08 April 2006. 1 August 2017. http://aleftoday.info/article.php?id=2202.

صويلح، خليل. «الجسد والهوية: تمثلات الجسد في الثقافة العربية». *ألف* 8 نيسان 2006. تم الاطلاع عليه في الأول من آب 2017. http://aleftoday.info/article.php?id=2202.

Telegraph Media Group (2009). "Xbox Game Based on Iraq Conflict Battle Angers Veterans". *The Telegraph* 7 April 2009. 12 September 2018. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/microsoft/5119042/Xbox-game-based-on-Iraq-conflict-battle-angers-veterans.html.

Terry, Jennifer (2017). *Attachments to War: Biomedical Logics and Violence in Twenty-First-Century America*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Ṯhāmir, Fāḍil (1992). *Al-Ṣawt al-Ākhar*. Baghdad: Dār al-Shuʾūn al-Ṯhaqāfīyah.

ثامر، فاضل. *الصوت الآخر*. بغداد: دار الشؤون الثقافية، 1992.

The Handmaid's Tale (2017-). Creator Bruce Miller. MGM Television. TV Series.

The Holy Bible (2014). English standard version. Ebook. Illinois: Crossway.

The Pervert's Guide to Cinema (2006). By Slavoj Žižek. Dir. Sophie Fiennes. Perf. Slavoj Žižek.

The spectator (1887). "Tolstoi's *War and Peace*". *The Spectator* 5 February 1887: 38-39. The Spectator's Archive. 3 January 2022.

The Yellow Birds (2017). Dir. Alexandre Moors.

Ṯhompson, Levi (2020). "An Iraqi Poet and the Peace Partisans: Transnational Pacifism and the Poetry of Badr Shākir Al-Sayyāb." *College Literature* 47.1: 65-88.

Ṯhompson, Lucas (2019). "PsyOps Works Best When You Mean It: Literary Manipulation in Phil Klay's Redeployment." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 60.2: 191-204.

Ṯhomson, Philip (1972). *The Grotesque*. London: Methuen & Co Ltd.

Time Magazine (2003). "'Curse Be Upon Your Mustache!'." *Time Europe* 17 March 2003: 16. 23 March 2021. http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,429197,00.html.

Turner, Colin (2006). *Islam: The Basics*. Kindle edition. London & New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Turner, Marion (2016). "Medical Discourse in Premodern Europe". *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 46.1: 1-5.

ʿUmrān, Ṭālib (ed.) (n.d.). *Al-Khayāl al-ʿIlmī* . Damascus, n.d. 17 July 2020. http://syrbook.gov.sy/index.php?ACT=1&Mid=6.

عمران، طالب (رئيس تحرير). *الخيال العلمي*. دمشق، 17 تموز 2020. http://syrbook.gov.sy/index.php?ACT=1&Mid=6

UNICEF (2019). *unicef.org*. 6 February 2019. 11 May 2020. https://www.unicef.org/iraq/press-releases/protecting-girls-iraq-female-genital-mutilation.

Updike, John (2006). *Terrorist*. New York: Ballantine.

Van Dijk, Teun A. (1988) *News as Discourse*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Waddell, Kaveh (2016). "A Video Game that Let You Torture Iraqi Prisoners". *The Atlantic* 1 August 2016. 12 September 2018. https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2016/08/a-video-game-that-lets-you-torture-iraqi-prisoners/493379/.

Wadud, Amina (1999). *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. E-book. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.

Waldau, Paul, and Kimberley Patton (eds.) (2006). *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science, and Ethics*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Wallace, Elizabeth Kowaleski (2007). "Postcolonial melancholia in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*." *Studies in the Novel* 39.4: 465-480.

Watkins, Steve (2012). "*The Yellow Birds* by Kevin Powers." *Washington Independent Review of Books* 16 October 2012. 18 May 2019. http://www.washingtonindependentreviewofbooks.com/index.php/bookreview/the-yellow-birds.

Webster, Annie (2018). "Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*: A Tale of Biomedical Salvation?" *Literature and Medicine* 36.2: 439-463.

Williams, Jay, and James Williams. *Author Under Sail: The Imagination of Jack London, 1893-1902*. Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press – Lincoln and London, 2014. ProQuest Ebook Central. 3 January 2022. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uab/detail.action?docID=1782646.

Williams, Kayla, and Michael E. Staub (2005). *Love My Rifle More Than You*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

Wright, Geoffrey A. (2019). "'A Kind of Misguided Archeology': The Iraq War and Postmodern Memory in Kevin Powers's *The Yellow Birds*." *South Atlantic Review* 84.1: 105-122.

Wright, Oliver (2020). "Fruit Invasion Turns Iraq Into a Banana Republic". *The Times* 06 February 2004. 02 August 2020. https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/fruit-invasion-turns-iraq-into-a-banana-republic-gjh803337m7.

Yassin-Kassab, Robin (2010). "Beirut 39: New Writing from the Arab World, edited by Samuel Shimon." *Review of Beirut* 39. *The Guardian* 12 June 2010.

Yeğenoğlu, Meyda (1998). *Colonial Fantasies*. Cambridge University Press.

Younis, Maha Sulaiman, and Azhar Madlom Aswad (2018). "The Impact of War and Economic Sanctions on the Mental Health System in Iraq from 1990 to 2003: A Preliminary Report." *Intervention* 16.1: 54-58.

Yūsuf al-ʿAlī, Fāṭimah (2013). *Al-Naṣṣ al-Muʾanath wa Ḥālāt al-Sāridah*. Kuwait: Maktabat āfāq.

يوسف العلي، فاطمة. *النص المؤنث وحالات الساردة*. الكويت: مكتبة آفاق، 2013.

Žižek, Slavoj (2004a). *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle*. London & New York: Verso.

— (2004b). "What Rumsfeld Doesn't Know That He Knows About Abu Ghraib". *In These Times* 21 May 2004. 5 September 2018. https://inthesetimes.com/article/what-rumsfeld-doesn-know-that-he-knows-about-abu-ghraib.
— (2006). *How to Read Lacan*. London: Granta.
— (2008). *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London. New York: Verso.
— (2009). *Violence*. London: Profile.
— (2017). *On Corbyn, the Election, Brexit and Fake News*. With Cathy Newman. 16 May 2017. 22 January 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xN2ZGSXocIE.
Žižek, Slavoj, and Jordan Peterson (2019). *Happiness: Capitalism vs. Marxism*. With Stephen J. Blackwood. Toronto's Sony Centre. Toronto. 20 April 2019. Livestream. 20 April 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gYGnd99McHM.

The 2003 Iraq invasion provoked an unprecedented phenomenon in the Iraqi literary scene: fiction exceeds poetry in production, critical reception, and market figures. New narrative genres, concerned with stories of wars and trauma, depict corporality and sexuality in their most material sense. *Writing Through the Body* argues that interest in the physical indicates a new perception of corporeality and, to show this, it traces a genealogy of the Iraqi body to uncover the complexity of its historical and socio-political discourses.

Considering religious, social, and political factors, the body is examined in three semiospheres: Iraqi society and culture before 2003, the discourse of the war on terror as a semiotic interference, and contemporary Iraqi fiction as the result of the encounter between the two. This structure shows how corporeality was interrupted by and instrumentalised in war propaganda, and how new representations in fiction respond to the two spheres in conflict.

UNIVERSITAT DE BARCELONA
Edicions