

عالم العنف: قراءة نقدية في شخصيات رواية "هاجس الرجل الكسيح" لحامد ناصر

م.م. نور نعمة حذيه

كلية الامام الكاظم (ع)

### THE WORLD OF VIOLENCE:

### A Critical Reading of the Characters in Hamid Nasser's Novel (*The Crippled Man's Obsession*)

Assistant Lecturer: Noor Neamah Hutheah

Imam AlKadhim University College (I.K.U) Department of English Language

**Abstract:** This paper is an attempt to analyze the novel *The Crippled Man's Obsession* by Hamid Nasser from a psychological perspective, it seeks to understand how violence managed to leave its marks on the unconscious structure of the characters' inner feelings. The question arises of the internal Fragmentation of identities affected by Violence, causing political and social transformation, which is what Iraq experienced after 2003. This revived the collective feeling of the characters amidst their suffering from the ravages of war and oppression. They were faced with two bitter choices: either to adapt to the hostile environment or to resist and reject everything around them. Here, the research intended to closely explore this society and its scattered identities in Hamid Nasser's novel *Hāgis al-Rajul al-Kasīh (The Crippled Man's Obsession)*. The main question here is: *How does Violence in its various forms shaped the characters' consciousness, scattered identities & influence the narrative elements in the novel?* To answer this, the research applies René Girard's theory of mimetic desire, rivalry and fragmented identity, alongside Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence. The expected finding refers that, violence was dominant force permeating every detail in daily lives, transforming space and time into instruments of oppression, causing deep fractures in identity. In addition to the mechanisms of Symbolic Violence & the Normalization Of Repression as well as the psychological defense strategies employed to endure terror. Finally, it recommended to expand Academic studies on Iraqi fiction



#### Article history

Received: 27 /1 / 2026

Accepted: 24/ 3/ 2026

Published : 31 /3/2026

#### تواريخ البحث

تاريخ الاستلام : 2026/ 1/ 27

تاريخ القبول: 2026/3/ 24

تاريخ النشر: 2026/3/ 31

الكلمات المفتاحية : العنف، الهوية، السرد، الرواية العراقية، جيرار، بورديو.

**Keywords :** Bourdieu, Girard, Identity, Iraqi Novel, Narrative, Violence.

© 2023 THIS IS AN OPEN ACCESS ARTICLE UNDER THE CC BY LICENSE



<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Corresponding author:  
Noor Neamah Hutheah  
[noor.niema@iku.edu.iq](mailto:noor.niema@iku.edu.iq)

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.61710/n50j6716>

to help in deep understanding of identity fragmentation, mechanisms of symbolic violence and employ literary narrative as a tool of resistance and healing from trauma.

### الملخص:

استهدف البحث تحليل رواية " هاجس الرجل الكسيح " لحامد عبيد ناصر، من منظور نفسي وأدبي، للكشف عن تأثير العنف على تشكيل وعي الشخصيات وتفتت هويتها وتعلقها بالتحويلات السياسية والاجتماعية العراقية بعد عام 2003، تدور الرواية حول مجموعة من الأفراد الذين يعيشون ظروفاً قاسية من الصراع العسكري والقمع، وتبرز معاناتهم ومحاولاتهم للتكيف أو المقاومة، يدور البحث حول سؤال رئيسي هو: " كيف ظهر أثر العنف بأشكاله المختلفة على تشكيل وعي الشخصيات وتفتت الهوية وعناصر السرد في رواية هاجس الرجل الكسيح؟"، مطبقاً نظريتي رينيه جيرار حول الصراع الداخلي وتفتت الهوية، وبيير بورديو حول العنف الرمزي، توصل البحث إلى نتائج أهمها أن العنف ليس ظاهرة عابرة بل قوة مهيمنة تتداخل في كل تفاصيل الحياة اليومية للشخصيات، محولةً المكان والزمان إلى أدوات للقمع، ومسببةً تفتتاً في الهوية، كما كشف البحث عن آليات العنف الرمزي وتطبيع القمع، وكيف استعانت الشخصيات بآليات دفاع نفسية لمواجهة الرعب، كما أوصى البحث بدعم الدراسات البينية في مزيد من الروايات العراقية، لفهم تفتت الهوية، وتفكيك آليات العنف الرمزي، وتوظيف السرد الأدبي كأداة للمقاومة والشفاء من الصدمات.

### Introduction

The objective of this research is to analyze *The Crippled Man's Obsession* by Hamid Obeid Nasser through the visions of psycho- Analytical theory, namely René Girard's internal conflict & Fragmentation theory of identity and Narrative and Symbolic violence theory. The aim of the paper is to examine the use of violence among the characters in the novel against the backdrop of the political and social convulsions that have shaken Iraqi society. *The Violence* here does not remain an occasional phenomenon but instead becomes an overarching power whose presence deeply felt in one's daily existence, reorienting individual self and determining society's fate. According to (Literary and creative vision) the research will focus on **Space** and **Time** as narrative concepts. **The Spatial** as a homeland where violence occurs and **Time** is a frame of psychological suffering and human pains in haunting the Memories of past and facing the Fear of the future.

By Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Symbolic Violence this article explores the cultural and social oppression in contemporary Iraqi literature and its impact on novel characters. Through an analysis of the narrative strategies employed by Hamid Obeid Nasser, this paper uncovers the psychological and social content in the constructor of the text and the violence impacts not only the body but also consciousness, memory, identity and fate, Considering to An Iraqi postcolonial literature Novel of *The Crippled Man's Obsession*

Literature has long served as a critical arena for articulating the fractured experiences of identity, memory and power in societies emerging from the shadows of colonial domination (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002), In Iraqi decades of political turmoil, foreign occupation and internal conflicts have left deep psychological wounds, which are explored in Iraqi novels. One such novel, *The Crippled Man's Obsession* by Hamid Obeid Nasser is a poignant example of this, even the title itself reflects the tragedy and suffering it embodies, highlighting the legacy of violence and conflict in post-colonial Iraqi society and the resulting fragmentation of identity and profound existential crises experienced by its characters.

This research analyzes the novel from a psychological perspective, applying René Girard's theories of internal conflict and identity fragmentation (Girard, 1987) and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of narrative and symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2001).

The aim is to demonstrate that violence was not a fleeting event but a systematic force that permeated daily life, impacting the individual self and its destiny & fracturing collective identity. These identities affected by various forms of violence, including Physical and Psychological violence, forms of Oppression, Silencing & Dehumanization, ultimately impacting memory and fundamental human values such as belonging and patriotism.

The research also explores the use of **Space & Time** as narrative constructs that frame the story's traumatic landscape. Space is rendered not just as a physical location but as a symbolic **Homeland** corrupted by brutality while **Time** becomes a vessel for psychological suffering—haunted by the **Trauma of The Past** and the **Insecurity Future** (Bakhtin, M. M., 1981)

These narrative dimensions of time and space are used as the means of the tracing of the internal disintegration of the characters and their efforts to build meaning in the middle of the chaos.

Based on the notion of "Symbolic Violence" introduced by Bourdieu (2001), the research examines the nuanced powers of cultural and social oppression that affect the Iraqi society and determine the lives of the characters

in the novel by Nasser. Symbolic violence, which remains unnoticed by the victims, adds to domination by supporting norms, ideologies and institutional frameworks, further deepening a postcolonial trauma that is described in the novel. This paper identifies the psychological and sociopolitical aspects that are present in the text of the novel by analyzing the narrative strategies used that *The Crippled Man's Obsession* reveals this book to be representative of the postcolonial literature of Iraq, literature of fragmentation, resistance and voice-seeking (Bourdieu, 2001).

### **Problem Statement:**

The paper will provide analytic analysis of this novel *The Crippled Man's Obsession* by the Iraqi novelist Hamed Obeid Nasser concerning the application of psychological theories, especially the theory of internal conflict and fragmented identity as suggested by René Girard and literary theories in respect to the structure of narrative and symbolic violence. This is aimed at discovering how violence has influenced the characters of the novel in the backdrop of the political and social wars that have rocked the Iraqi society.

**Violence** is not depicted in the present story as a transitory event but as an overwhelming force that dominates everyday life and alters the identity of a person and the destiny of the whole group. The modern Iraqi literature the novel has gone through significant changes in its structure and content after the invasion of Iraq by the U.S. forces in 2003. Violence in its various forms and manifestations has become a primary part of narrative texts, not as an incident in its background but as a prevailing influence that shapes individual and group identity.

The lack of knowledge that ensues is due to the dilemma that is critical in post-occupation Iraqi novels where violence is no longer an incidental or partial phenomenon, but at the same time a systemic phenomenon that permeates the everyday experience and inner self making it a key determinant in the formation and guidance of narrative discourse. This calls on a critical stance which needs a literary, psychological and sociological approach to understand nature and extent of this shift of narratives and its interaction with "The Self, Space and Time".

### **As such the main research question is as follows:**

What role have the expressions and different types of violence played in shaping the character consciousness and fragmenting the identity of *The Crippled Man's Obsession* by Hamed Obeid Nasser, as one of the Iraqi novels which reflect the postcolonial literature?

### **Research Sub-questions:**

What is the appearance of symbolic and political violence in the novel *The Crippled Man's Obsession* on psychological identity and what role of time and place play in the disclosing inner fragmentation and existential conflict?

In what way does the novel use narrative devices to describe, according to theories of violence and identity dissolution, the psychological disorder and fragmentation of memory and consciousness?

### **Research Methodology**

A qualitative and interpretive approach in the form of textual analysis is followed in this study to understand the complex forms of violence and effects of violence on identity in a novel by Hamid Nasser. The study takes an interdisciplinary approach thus combining literary criticism with the sociological and psychological paradigm to give a holistic analysis of the text. The analysis process implies the close examination of the story to isolate spatial, temporal, and symbolic indicators of violence and interpret them with references to the theory of mimetic by René Girard to comprehend the fragmentation of identity and the theory of symbolic violence by Pierre Bourdieu to deconstruct the systematic oppression. The study also shows how all aspects of violence are rife in the minds of the characters, making it difficult to distinguish the characters by classifying these data into thematic chapters where the world they should know has turned into a violent device of dehumanization.

### **The importance of the research:**

**Literary and Narrative:** The paper puts emphasis on the manner through which the author employs the aspects of time and space to shape a narrative space filled with symbolic and existential violence. Space also becomes an unfamiliar place brutal like the reality surrounding whereas time becomes one that helps to track the disintegration of memory, torn between the past that is full of fears, a present that is troubled and a future that is unpredictable.

**Critical and Theoretical:** The paper uses Pierre Bourdieu theory of symbolic violence and René Girard theory of internal conflict and identity fragmentation to analyze how violence is materialized in the body, consciousness and memory and the application of the mechanism of cultural and social repression and influence it has in the formation of character and behavior.

**Cultural and Social:** The study will add to the research body of knowledge on the role played by the contemporary Iraqi novels in the historical record of the political and social changes in the Iraqi society. It also reveals the nature of the relationship between authority and violence and between the self and identity—thereby enriching postcolonial studies with a new analytical perspective.

### **Research Objectives**

*This study seeks to achieve the following objectives:*

- 1) To analyze *The Crippled Man's Obsession* from a psycho-social perspective, in order to uncover the effects of violence and conflict on individual and collective identity.
- 2) To study the manifestations of violence in the novel across its temporal, spatial, symbolic and political dimensions and explore its impact on the narrative consciousness.
- 3) To apply Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence and René Girard's theory of identity fragmentation to the narrative text to better understand the psychological depth of the characters.
- 4) To examine the role of narrative in documenting and analyzing Iraqi reality during the American invasion and to explore the impact of literature in resisting oppression.

### **THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK:**

#### **I. Literature Review:**

The writer is the cartographer, he is the one who draws the map of the world and the presence of the characters of the novel, which is related to the identity of the place, they draw a vivid picture of cities, rooms and streets, either real or from their imagination (Tally, 2013). Many novels have been based on the fictional identity of places. In the novel "One Hundred Years of Solitude" by Gabriel García Márquez, when you browse (the map of the world) you find that the names of those cities are from the imagination until they became a stage that contains the events of his novel (Padrón, 2007)

Can we say that texts themselves constitute a kind of map, even if they are not accompanied by an illustration? Ultimately, these texts provide us with vivid mental images of the places described, even in the absence of actual illustrations. They not only allow us to visualize these places and spaces, but also add life and real meaning to them through the events that take place within them and the creation of characters connected to their presence within them. This is something that iconic maps of worlds containing narrative elements cannot achieve. They may even miss the point, as they adhere to the stability of the cartographic image while reducing the richness of their interactions with place and space (Padrón, 2007)

Understanding how people interact with places does not only reveal how the environment influence's identity, but its influence extends to defining fields of social sciences and environmental psychology, which are sciences related to the built environment. This influences research methodology and the development of theories. Although theories may differ in their diversity, the choice of the appropriate theory for the type of research is often relied upon (Bell et al., 2001)

"**IDENTITY**" refers to an individual's personality and unique characteristics, while the term "self" is used in a broader and more abstract sense. Identity is related to a person's definition of himself (Deaux K. , 1992). However, some may consider "personality" and "self" to be synonymous, as the unity of personality is not acquired by nature, but rather interacts and develops through interaction with others and it is formed through the person's tendencies and character. This unity must be psychologically achieved (through identification) and sustained (as identity) in a continuous, often challenging socialization process (Graumann, 1983). Identification is seen as a process, while identity is a state (Lalli, 1992). The scope of identity depends on the theoretical perspective. This concept is further examined through the discussion of three identity theories in subsequent sections. These theories are not mutually exclusive and can be selected based on the focus of a particular research study. The focus of this article is place. According to Casey (2001), identity is formed both internally in the mind and through the body's interaction with the external world—there is no self without place and no place without self. The question arises: Can existing psychological identity theories adequately address the role of place in identity, or do we need new theories specifically to explain the place-related aspects of identity? (Casey, E. S., 2001).

**PLACE-IDENTITY** :The term has been in existence since late 1970 (Proshansky, 1978) and it refers to the process by which individuals incorporate their sense of place to their sense of self. This notion includes a set of memories, notions and feelings that relate to specific physical locations (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983). Although place attachment can be considered as a part of place-identity, the concept is not just limited. It is a sub-category in self-identity just like gender or social status.

Such perceptions can be classified into two broad categories one of them consists of memories, thoughts, values and the other is the association of various environments, home, school and neighborhood (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983). Formation of place-identity starts in childhood when children learn to give themselves in comparison with others to refer to their physical environment. The early identity development is shaped by the interaction with toys, clothes and personal spaces. Home is important and then comes the

neighborhood and school where the social and environmental skills would be built. These experiences created in which the child will subsequently feel, judge and construct spaces, then it keeps on developing as long as the person lives (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983)

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) was formed at the same period and his invention of psychoanalysis which was originally a curing therapy termed the talking cure evolved into a total system of psychology mapping the human mind in spatial metaphors and came up with the concept that psychological issues are usually due to the repressed early traumas that caused by subsequent similar occurrences. This interest in the ego and the unconscious activities became the focus of modernist literature, which focused on psychological interiority and the inner world of the person (Freud A. , 2018)

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

Can be defined as the arrangement of time, as represented and experienced in a literary text. It involves the time and recurrence of events as related and how the factors are reflected or distorted in regard to chronological time (Genette, 1980)The time of narration enables an author to play around with the past, present and future in the narrative to express psychological conditions build suspense or depth in the character (Fludernik M. , 2009)It tends to slip out of real time to favor inner temporalities of memory trauma or anticipation had a role in postcolonial literature of historical displacement (Toolan, 2001).

### **Setting and Point of View**

see the spatial dimension within which the story is set, both in real space and symbolic space or psycho space. The concept of chronotype which is defined by Bakhtin (1981) is used to explain the relationship between time and space in literature as it is used to describe the historical and cultural backgrounds. Space can be used in the postcolonial stories as a metaphor of displacement occupation and cultural fragmentation (Tally, 2013)

### **Identity Fragmentation**

It is the fragmentation of self-perception under pressure of psychology social or cultural forces. (Gergen, 1991) holds that in the modern world, people are so bombarded with conflicting roles and stories create fragmented and unsteadfast self. Identity fragmentation in postcolonial and traumatic literature is frequently represented by depicting the characters who carry within themselves the historical violence exile or alienation of culture (Bauman, 2000).

The analysis of violence in *The Crippled Man's Obsession* examines it as a force shaping character consciousness through Girard's Mimetic Desire theory, where imitation of impulses triggers internal conflicts (Girard, 1977) and a "crisis of undifferentiation" dissolving individuality (Girard, 1987),

transforming characters into anonymous victims stripped of human traits (Nasser, 2021) and forcing identity redefinition amid fragmentation (Proshansky, 1978).

**Violence** in literature has not only physical aspects but also symbolic, psychological and cultural ones. According to Žižek (2008) there are subjective violence (overt and physical) and a symbolic violence (found within language, ideology and cultural practices). Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004) highlight that violence in most cases is concealed within normal practices and social order, so violence has a more lasting impact on the consciousness and memory than on the body. Violence is a literary effect that brings to the fore structural inequality, trauma and loss of moral or social order (Thapar-Björkert, S.; Karlsson, P., 2016).

Such fragmentation of the identity works with Symbolic Violence without any coercive force (Bourdieu, 1991), normalization of oppression in everyday awareness (Bourdieu, 2001) and the creation of a Habitus due to repressive conditions (Bourdieu, 1977). The homeland therefore turns into a great prison of organized terrorism (Nasser, 2021), time and space are turned into a tool of psychological torture (Tally, 2013).

#### **Overview Of the Novel:**

The novel is centered on the journey of a collective group forced to endure extreme conditions defined by military conflict, social unrest, and political oppression in Iraq. The narrative is structured around the lives of soldiers and citizens, depicting their suffering and the struggle to adapt to a reality of fear and repression. Particular emphasis is placed on the portrayal of women, such as Al-Sitt Sayyida and Hayat, who are shown to suffer profound psychological consequences, including identity fragmentation and the loss of loved ones (Mankhi & Mashab, 2024). Major historical events, including the invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent rebellion, are integrated into the plot to demonstrate the impact of state cruelty on the lives of the populace.

In the current research, the literary narrative is examined as a medium for intellectual resistance and the processing of war trauma. Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence is applied to deconstruct latent power structures and their influence on social normalization (Bourdieu, 2001). Furthermore, René Girard's framework of fragmented identity is utilized to analyze the psychological collapse and internal conflict resulting from prolonged oppression (Girard, 1987). Additionally, Freudian defense mechanisms are investigated to understand the survival strategies employed by the aggrieved in response to extreme trauma (Freud A. , 2018). Through this investigative lens, the necessity of interdisciplinary approaches to historical trauma in postcolonial literature is emphasized (Thapar-Björkert & Karlsson, 2016),

specifically in exploring the connection between identity fragmentation and spatial transformation within the post-2003 Iraqi context.

***Main and Secondary Characters:***

➤ **Qasim:** A young soldier who experiences radical changes under the influence of the horrors of war and imprisonment and torture which follow finally turns paralyzed. He stands out of his immense ability to be resilient and reflective even in the most difficult situations although there are profound psychological traumas of his past.

"Just as Qasim was settling beside him as he was about to doze off, he said: Be on your guard of the intelligence patrols do the best you can not to fall asleep. He was aware that his friend was feeble in the overwhelming of sleepiness" (Nasser, 2021, p. 18).

➤ **Yasir:** the best friend and companion of Qasim whose life is distinctive with both innocence and misery with a tragic destiny. He isn't only his best friend but a half-brother to Qasim and the both were hardly separated.

"Qasim and Yasir were not similar to the other soldiers. Yasir was a tender youth and rare in fair of complexion and elegant of skin. He had a father who was a lawyer and a mother was a principal in an elementary school. His parents pampered him and applied to pursue a course at the Institute of Petroleum and they informed him that he would get his certificate after a period of two years. However, he and his friends were surprised to receive success certificates. They had then been taken off to the recruitment camps where he said his goodbyes with the tears of his mother and father. It is by this trickery that he got into the military" (p. 28).

➤ **Nadim:** He is a good friend and companion to Qasim in most of his adventures and one of them is the life in refugee camps. He seems like an intellectual and introspective personality, who tries to comprehend the intentions of the human soul and struggles with despair and hopelessness, yet dies a tragic death.

"Why did we survive? His tears made him whisper quietly, why did we survive time and again miraculously, in prisons and in torturers, only to die in the hands of those who had prayed so long a day when they would never hear the name Saddam and the Ba'ath Party" (p. 414).

**Salah:** Qasim old friend and to be involved with armed opposition groups later and is influential in Baghdad. He mirrors the twists and turns of loyalties and fluctuating political situation, and he also shows us the plight of humanity which follows such changes. Salah even questioned Qasim to assist him to escape the infernal circumstances in the country: "In these days of misery... I wish to have the end of them. Can you help me with that? Never mind, man, I am not bargaining with you."

Qasim: What do you say get rid of them forever? Salah responded: I am talking about pulling out of Iraq. It is turned into a hellish worldly torment that is intolerable" ( p. 396).

➤ **Intelligence Officer (*Muzahim al-Nasir*)**: He is the evil and oppressive personalities of the previous regime. He is also in charge of torturing and killing innocent people, as well as a friend of Qasim, Yasir. He is characterized as arrogant and savage and is viewed as an icon of the injustice that many have to face.

"He shot one of the fugitives... the man begged him not to do that, he had a wife and eight children, but he paid no attention to what the man said but put the pistol muzzle close to his head and pulled the trigger. The terror of death was reflected on the stony countenances of the soldiers who behold the occurrences and they were coming back quietly to the trenches" (Nasser, 2021, p. 31).

➤ **Hayat**: A powerful and resilient woman who goes through the challenges in life following the loss of her brother and the illness of her mother. She is a regular teacher but turns out to be a focal point and later marries Qasim and reveals her tremendous resilience and courage in face of injustices. "Hayat had long mastered the art of dreams; thus, she would hasten to detach herself from her lived world toward a world free of the burdens of this one and filled with all that it lacked." (Nasser, 2021, p. 136).

➤ **Al-Sitt Sa 'diyya**: is characterized by an influential social network utilized to assist the populace in locating missing relatives. This defiance results in her arrest and execution on charges of political opposition. Her physical collapse and ultimate fate are witnessed by *Hayat* in a harrowing prison encounter: "*Hayat* heard a list of names recited including *Al-Sitt Sa 'diyya*. Looking toward the cage, *Hayat* saw *Sa 'diyya* in a state of extreme emaciation; a sight that forced a painful comparison with the image *Hayat* remembered from their first meeting. The judge was heard sentencing them all to death charges of plotting a coup against the regime, sending information about Iraqi prisons and about the burial of the living in mass graves. As they were led outside, *Sa 'diyya* was escorted to her fate, immediately before *Hayat* heard her own name being called" (Nasser, 2021, p. 327).

#### **Secondary Characters:**

▪ **Lieutenant Khalid**: Described as a very harsh officer in the battalion, known by the title "The Battalion's Executioner" for his cruelty toward soldiers. He found pleasure in torturing them until they bled, even holding a "party" for the prisoners of the unit before going on leave in Diyala. (Nasser, 2021, p. 194).

**Mohammad the Egyptian**: A young man from Egypt with prior experience in Egyptian and Syrian prisons, but he describes Iraqi prisons as the worst. He meets Qasim and tells him horrifying stories about the Iraqi army burying people alive. "The war must be very close to the prison walls... one of

them said. Surely, it's a war; it's impossible that these sounds come from construction work. The Egyptian stirred and said: they must be very close." (p. 359)

▪ **Riyadh:** Hayat's brother, who appears at the beginning of the novel suffering from extreme hunger. *Riyadh* attempts to fix the car engine to flee with his family from the horrors of war (p.34). He later disappears and his fate (along with that of Issam) remains unknown, intensifying Hayat's suffering and her motivations.

## CHAPTER ONE: POLITICAL VIOLENCE (POWER AS A SYMBOL OF VIOLENCE AND REPRESSION)

This chapter analyzes the impact of direct military and state violence on the characters' consciousness, focusing on the transformation of space and self.

### Transformations of Space between the Hostile and the Familiar

#### ➤ The Self between Space and Violence

The Shock of war and the fragmentation of identity: Direct frontline war violence brings about a radical change of the self, showing the repressive spaces to have an enormous effect on the individual and collective identity. The theory of Renne Girard is used to analyze this process in order to explain the emergence of internal conflicts due to the mimetic impulses (Girard, 1977) The result of such mimesis is a crisis of undifferentiation in which a person uniqueness is destroyed in a systematic manner (Girard, 1987). As a result, the characters are reduced to a nameless human collective of the victims whose human qualities are completely deprived as well (Nasser, 2021). This existential crisis is also reflected as people reinvent themselves as an act of compulsion to the state of fragmentation (Proshansky, 1978), a psychological entrapment that is further identified as a barrier to forming a coherent narrative of the future (Faraz, 2025).

### I. SPACE

**The State as a "Great Prison":** The restriction of freedoms and the erasure of humanity have embodied the image of the state as if it were transforming into a repressive space. The head of state is represented by the "War on Earth" spoken of in whispers His Name feared. Iraq is depicted as "The Great Prison Called Iraq" This metaphorical the physical transformation of place from Homeland to the hands of captives as tools of a repressive regime ruling in an atmosphere of terror where fear becomes a part of society and pushed people to silence & submission like an unconscious act to deal with unchangeable reality (Freud A. , 2018) This spatial containment is interpreted as a catalyst for a temporal rupture (Biano, 2024), creating "Multifaceted Identities" where a person is expected to be "**Citizen/Prisoner**" (Graumann, 1983).

➤ **PRISONS: Slaughterhouses for the Soul before the Body**

The narrative shows that "Prisons" such as *al-Radwaniyah* are not sites of punishment but "Hostile Spaces" designed to violate human dignity. *Al-Radwaniyah* is described as "a slaughterhouse for the skins of those who enter it. It was not a prison as is commonly known outside Iraq, but a place of torture, to strip man of what is called dignity and humanity outside Iraq." (Nasser, 2021, p. 114). Here, the space transforms from a mere cell into an instrument of systematic torture, forcing prisoners to confess to things they had not committed. "In the security offices, we do not accept the answer 'I don't know'... huh?" (p. 314)

Qasim sees himself stripped of his clothes and thrown into a machine called "the mixer," filled with sharp shards of glass that pierce every part of his flesh (pp. 316–317). This environment, dominated by hunger and electric shocks, transforms the cell into a site of slow death (p. 317), reducing individuals to skeletal figures. This dehumanization is evident when Hayat fails to recognize a friend: "Umm Sa'diyya? – Yes, Umm Sa'diyya, didn't you recognize me? Hayat nearly screamed: Where has that full, rosy, radiant face gone, only to be replaced by the face of the dead" (p. 312).

Ultimately, these places do not only target the body but attempt to "*Crush the Soul*" (p.312). The constant disappearance of prisoners leads to a state of total despair: "Will they execute me too? Then he answered himself: What difference does it make, it is all the same now. If only they would relieve me of this life" (p. 321). This existential collapse confirms the role of repressive spaces in dissolving the individual's will and identity (Proshansky, 1978), leading to renewed cycles of rivalry and the total loss of a unifying sense of belonging (Malkki, 2018).

➤ **THE DESERT: From a Natural Expanse to a Theater of Death and Terror**

The transformations of space are vividly embodied in the desert, which shifts from being a mere natural expanse into a horrifying battlefield. This space here serves as a metaphor for displacement existential loss (Tally, 2013)

Scenes of warplanes bombing and "black smoke" from burning oil wells obscure the sky, while "small shards of metal" from missiles spread around (pp. 6–7). The horror is further manifested through the sensory experience of soldiers inhaling "the smell of roasted human flesh filling the air" (p. 7). This experience transforms the "Open Space" into a "Deadly Trap" where life is constantly threatened. Such environmental hostility is central to representing the transhistorical and collective trauma that overwhelms the Iraqi subject (Khammas, 2023)

➤ **THE HOMELAND: From a Shelter to a Space of Chaos**

After the fall of the regime, the homeland is no longer a refuge but a site of chaos and militia ascendancy. Iraqi cities are depicted as being submerged in “Endless Tragedies” where “extremist movements reign over the streets of Baghdad” (p. 398) Daily existence is defined by widespread sectarian bombings, kidnappings, and severe shortages of basic needs (Naser, 2021, pp. 399–400). This pervasive insecurity imparts a deep feeling of “Powerlessness and Hopelessness” upon the people (Naser, 2021, p. 410). The home itself is transformed into a place devoid of peace as Qasim witnesses his own brother joining the militias (Naser, 2021, pp. 416–417). This spatial collapse aligns with Mbembe’s “death-worlds,” where populations are subjected to conditions of the living dead (Mbembe, 2019), confirming that the post-war environment functions as a continuation of a traumatic history that reshapes national identity (Khammas, 2023)

➤ **PERSONAL SPACES: From Intimacy to Threat (or vice versa)**

**The House:** The domestic sphere is transformed from a “Source of Pride” (Nasser, 2021, p. 16) into a “Source of Fear” (p. 16) due to its desolation and role as a repository for painful recollections. The house is invaded by gunmen (pp. 16-17), forcing inhabitants into a state of perpetual dread regarding strangers and officials (p. 18). Such erosion reflects the collapse of the phenomenological lifeworld and the disruption of place-making (Seamon, 2022).

**The Mosque:** The decline of social and mental existence is portrayed through the emptiness of the place of worship. Nadim is shocked to find that “very few are present” (Nasser, 2021, pp. 21-22) illustrating the disintegration of communal bonds (Tally, 2013). This sacred void highlights the displacement of peaceful narratives by the weight of collective trauma (Hassans, 2024).

**Buses and Roads:** Traveling is redefined by terror as “Comfort and Joy” are abruptly replaced by “Terror” at security checkpoints (Nasser, 2021, p. 19). The “Ruined City” scenes watched by Qasim mirror the actual destruction of Baghdad (p. 20), where traveling is conducted under a constant threat of death (p. 188). These shifts construct trauma narratives where the landscape functions as a time-image of persistent suffering (Kwan, 2020).

**The Desert as a Grave:** The conversion of the desert into “Graves” and “Piles of Flesh” is demonstrated as a reshaping of space to embody cruelty, reflecting a traumatic history that reconstructs the national self (Khammas, 2023). This creation of “death-worlds” is identified as a manifestation of necro politics (Mbembe, 2019). Similarly, the domestic sphere is transformed from a “Source of Pride” into a “Source of Fear” and a repository for painful recollections ((Nasser, 2021, p. 16). The home is invaded by gunmen (pp. 16-17), where life is lived in constant dread of strangers and officials (p. 18).

## CHAPTER TWO: SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE (CULTURAL AND SOCIAL REPRESSION)

The physiological and psychological impacts of harsh environments on individuals are profound, aligning with the principles of environmental psychology (Gergen, 1991). This is evident as soldiers endure severe famine, where rumors and hunger "perniciously" affect their morale while "ruminating over their fate in this desert" (Naser, 2021, p. 22). Extreme exhaustion, lack of sleep, and the constant fear of bombing result in physical emaciation and pallor (pp. 28–29). Such environmental factors exemplify the relationship between physical characteristics and human behavior (Moore, 1997).

This aligns with the concept of "Material Determinism," where the environment's harshness reshapes human behavior and imposes strict limitations (Franck, 1984). For instance, characters become "withdrawn," losing the joy of life as "dark circles form under their eyes" (Naser, 2021, p. 37). Ultimately, these reactions are interpreted as forced responses to uncontrollable external conditions (p. 113). Following the withdrawal from Kuwait, the collapse of basic services illustrates the disintegration of urban life (pp. 17–18). This structural erosion of space confirms that war-induced trauma and memory are indissolubly connected, where the harsh environment dictates the transformation of coping mechanisms and identity formation (Faraz, 2025)

### ➤ War and Military Suffering

**Soldiers' Struggle for Survival:** The narrative highlights the physical and psychological exhaustion of soldiers enduring horrific conditions in under-supplied trenches. Their existence is marked by a "meager and insufficient diet" and a lack of basic equipment (Naser, 2021, p. 22). This suffering is compounded by a systemic neglect where officers often ignore "the mistreatment they endured" or the critical "shortage of equipment" (p. 28). Such prolonged exposure to extreme hardship illustrates how institutional indifference exacerbates the trauma of combat (Herman, 2015)

**Collapse and Fragile Frontlines:** The disintegration of military structure is depicted through the image of fleeing soldiers whose faces reflect "years of suffering" (Naser, 2021, p. 27). The frontlines are portrayed as hollow, consisting only of "a few units that would soon collapse" rather than a functional army (p. 22). This fragmentation is identified as a breakdown of institutional sovereignty within the contemporary war situation (Faraz, 2025).

**Brutality of Command:** Oppression is physically embodied in the figures of authority who exercise "symbolic and physical violence" (Bourdieu, 1991). This is exemplified by the officer who kicks a soldier "with a massive military boot in the stomach" (Naser, 2021, p. 16), and the forcing of subordinates into

"humiliating tasks" (p. 197). This structure is transformed into a tool for dehumanization through the exercise of necropolitical power (Mbembe, 2019).

➤ **Political Repression and Persecution**

**State Surveillance and Fear:** The regime is depicted as an unforgiving apparatus where civilians are viewed as "troublesome" (Naser, 2021, p. 65). Life is characterized by constant surveillance, where the mere mention of "security" provokes immediate terror (p. 172). This atmosphere of pervasive dread aligns with the psychological impact of living in "high-stress political environments," where the state functions as a source of chronic anxiety rather than protection (Baum & Fleming, 1993).

**Arrests and Torture:** The reality of political persecution is manifested through the arrests and torture of individuals like *Saadiya* and *Hayat*, often based on vague accusations of being "involved in politics" (Naser, 2021, p. 311).

**Despair, Hope and Resistance:** While fear is "wrapping itself and hiding in the darkness of the souls" (p. 128) and creating a sense of inescapable doom (p. 319).

**Spark of resistance:** This accumulated anger is metaphorically described as a "destructive horse unleashed from deep within the souls," symbolizing the potential for collective upheaval (p. 58).

➤ **Historical Power and Imagined Places**

**The Southern Uprising and its Aftermath:** The novel documents the chaotic atmosphere that swept southern Iraq following the invasion of Kuwait. This "fever" of unrest was not localized but "swept across the southern cities inhabited by the Shiite majority" (Naser, 2021, p. 68). The subsequent repression is depicted through harrowing imagery of visceral brutality, where victims were reportedly "forced to drink gasoline" and subjected to public immolation (p. 87). Such extreme violence underscores a metanarrative of cultural trauma, employing bodily torture as a mechanism for political domination (Hunter, 2021)

**The Karbala Massacre:** The sanctity of space is further violated in the description of the Karbala massacre. The narrative vividly portrays the desperate resistance near the "shrine of Imam Hussein," where the scale of death reached "immense" proportions through the use of heavy weaponry and "rockets" (p. 86). This intersection of sacred space and industrial warfare heightens the sense of tragedy and collective trauma (Hassans, 2024).

➤ **Psychological Defenses: Terror and Repression**

**Silence and Feigned Loyalty:** The pervasive fear embedded in society (Naser, 2021, p. 18) compels individuals toward silence and compliance as a survival strategy (pp. 36–37). These collective behavioral responses are best understood

through defense mechanisms (Freud, A., 2018). The phenomenon of "Loving Saddam Masked of Hatred" (p. 38) serves as a profound example of reaction formation and denial. These are unconscious strategies employed to endure an oppressive reality that remains beyond the individuals' control (Herman, 2015).

**Trauma and Hysteria:** The horrifying scenes of torture (Nasser, 2021, p. 23) frequently precipitate instances of "Collective or Individual Hysteria" (Freud & Breuer, 2004). In these cases, psychological trauma manifests as unexplainable physical symptoms, delirium, and confusion (Nasser, 2021, pp. 46–47) - a phenomenon extensively documented in trauma research demonstrating how the body retains and expresses unprocessed traumatic experiences (Van der Kolk, 2014). Furthermore, humor and incessant talking (p. 48) are identified as adaptive mechanisms used by the aggrieved for psychological survival within a repressive context (Nurfatima, 2022).

#### ➤ **Embodying Power and Producing Imagined Places**

Space is employed as a formidable tool to embody authority and domination. This aligns with the notion of spatiality, which examines the production of places in relation to human experience and social power dynamics (Tally, 2013). The regime effectively transforms the entire nation into a "Great Prison" (Naser, 2021, p. 50) where actual prisons and mass graves function as systemic mechanisms of oppression and terror (p. 51). Furthermore, border zones and crossings are redefined as more than mere geographic points; they become sites of "disempowerment" where individuals are systematically humiliated (p. 56).

In response to this rigid physical control, the characters construct "Imagined Spaces" (Padrón, 2007) as a form of mental diversion. Qasim's nostalgic accounts of a cozy family life, the soldiers' persistent longing for normalcy and the collective fantasy of immigrating to America function as "Imaginary World Maps." These mental constructs allow the subjects to navigate a world in chaos providing a cognitive escape from a brutal reality. Although these envisioned places lack physical substance, they remain essential for maintaining hope and preserving the essence of humanity; they function as a way 'to tell the story 'Of survival through a personal metanarrative that counters pervasive violence (Hunter, 2021)

### **CHAPTER THREE: TEMPORAL VIOLENCE (MEMORY BETWEEN FEAR AND DELIRIUM and THE UNKNOWN FUTURE)**

The Burden of Painful Memory and the Continuous Distortion of Consciousness.

#### **I. TEMPORAL VIOLENCE**

is fully realized through the triumph of a painful past over the present, resulting in a deformed collective consciousness that traps individuals in an

"eternal round of fear and frenzy" (Freud, 2018). Even after the regime's collapse, the image of Saddam Hussein remained "dominant" and ubiquitous, haunting the public sphere (Naser, 2021). The psychological scars were so deep that soldiers "shuddered at the sound of his name," often cursing him only in silence to avoid the persistent terror (p. 56). This mythical construction of the "Eternal Great Leader" as the "Knight of the Arab Nation" was so pervasive that even after the fall, people struggled to comprehend the sudden void, asking: "How can a whole people just vanish?" (p. 227). This enduring trauma continues to dictate the formation of national identity (Faraz, 2025).

This deformation extends beyond political rhetoric into the deepest recesses of the individual mind, where destructive memories become inextricable from selfhood (Genette, 1980). Such traumatic recollections—of torture and the "spectacles of burned bodies" (Naser, 2021, p. 114)—linger over the present, compelling individuals to inhabit a state of "unremitting delirium" (Bauman, 2000). Consequently, the weight of this torturous existence leads some characters to view death as the only viable escape from a memory that refuses to abandon them (p. 320). In historical narratives, memory and psychological trauma act as forces that reshape our perception of time, as the painful past refuses to be silenced and continues to haunt the present consciousness (Hassans, 2024).

#### ➤ **The Erosion of Individual and Collective Identity and the Loss of Natural Temporality**

Violence exercised through temporality reveals how the sustained pressures of the regime and war lead to the disintegration of both individual and collective identity. This process creates a condition of spatial and temporal liminality, where individuals exist in a threshold state, belonging neither to a stable past nor a reachable future (Bauman, 2000). The narrative suggests that the regime had effectively "swallowed the whole country," transforming Iraq into a vast prison from which even officers sought "freedom" through escape (Naser, 2021, p. 15). This fragmented belonging confirms that Iraq's transhistorical trauma continues to blur the lines between past horrors and the present (Khammas, 2023)

The erosion of identity is most visible in the depiction of soldiers. Once envisioned as "heroes," they are reduced to "skeletons" or "damaged goods" piled onto trucks and discarded (Naser, 2021). Qasim's reflection on his incarceration, where "life was kicking him with his dignity," serves as a potent metaphor for the methodical oppression of the self (p. 17). This systematic dehumanization compels individuals to either seek a "refuge" in another homeland (p. 18) illustrates how war-induced trauma and memory are indissolubly connected, forcing a radical restructuring of the self (Faraz, 2025).

This loss of self inextricably linked to the disruption of natural temporality where the "extended waiting" (pp. 109, 327), as hours and days dissolve into "painful and never-ending cycles" (pp. 109, 342). This temporal confusion leads to a delirious state where the boundaries between past, present and future implode, trapping the subjects in a fragmented reality of transgenerational trauma (Kwan, 2020)

## II. TIME

### As An Instrument of Oppression and Psychological Torture

Time is itself weaponized as a distorting instrument of psychic repression, shaping delay and uncertainty into a torturous modality. Prisoners are made to wait for their fate in prisons whose is shrouded in terrifying names (Ricoeur, 1984). The day-to-day routine of life in the jail and its time-wasting rituals becomes a "regimen of torments" from which time itself seemed to be sanctified (Naser, 2021, p. 114). This carceral waiting is not a passive interval, but a deliberate structural tool designed to erode the prisoner's sense of reality (Moran, 2023). There is no regular time for the arrival of the torturers, nor for the interrogations, so the prisoners remain in a state of "waiting and trembling" (pp. 19-20).

Qasim got no information on what had happened to his friends Sami and Nadim and "Days went by" (p. 61). Time is a torturer in itself; destroying people's lives with anxiety throwing individuals into an endless wave of delirium (Toolan, 2001). This agonizing wait was more unbearable than any physical torment. Such savagery is highlighted in recurring images: the "unrelenting screams of torture" (pp. 114, 316) and the interminable days being bent into "excruciating positions" (p. 342), This erosion of the timeframe reflects what is known as 'critical temporality,' in which the characters live in an eternal 'end of time,' transforming their reality into a hell from which there is no escape except through death (Biano, 2024).

## III. PIERRE BOURDIEU'S THEORY OF SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE

Non-coercive power is explained through symbolic violence, where subjugation is rendered consensual. The aggrieved are identified as complicit in reproducing their own domination, as habituation to oppressive systems results in the normalization of hegemony (Bourdieu, 2001).

### ➤ Normalization of Repression and Misrecognition

The apathy of the chief corporal toward the "burning bodies" and his demand for soldiers to "bury this pit" (Naser, 2021, p. 12) signifies the devaluation of human life and dignity within the brutalities of war. Such practices, which appear natural or even necessary in a conflict zone, stabilize

the acceptance of a violent world as a "normal state," effectively criminalizing and dehumanizing the victim through institutionalized misrecognition (Bourdieu, 2001)

Furthermore, linguistic violence is perpetrated by political rulers who invoke derogatory symbols related to identity and belief, such as those targeting the "national flag" or the "Muslim woman's Hijab" (Alhousseini & Zeidan, 2024). Yasser's stifled inner cry—"Run... this is a farce, not a war!" (pp. 11-12)—is portrayed as a silent rebellion against an imposed reality. Compliance is ensured through symbolic violence, where the logic of the oppressor is embedded within the consciousness of the oppressed (Bourdieu, 1991). This forced silence is identified as an adaptive defense mechanism within the war context (Nurfatima, 2022).

Symbolic violence functions by stabilizing power structures through the habituation of the oppressed, even after the physical collapse of a regime. This is evident in the Mukhtar's (Abu Ahmed) claims to the "prestige" and "influence" of his name and his attempts to "intimidate" others (p. 61), as he seeks to reanimate the symbolic oppression of the past to reassert dominance (Bourdieu, 1991). However, this structural violence often translates into a visceral psychological burden. Qasim's persistent vision to "keep those scenes"—the soldier "burned inside one of the wrecked armored cars" (p. 12) reveals how traumatic visual memories can be buried in the unconscious and resurface to haunt the survivor (Freud & Breuer, 2004). Yasser's corpse in a "vast pool of blood" (pp. 41–42) this intrusive recall ultimately creates a "time-image episode," where the victim remains frozen within the past horror, unable to escape a stagnant and fragmented reality (Kwan, 2020).

### ➤ **Formation of Habitus in a Repressive Environment**

Life inside armored vehicles and trenches reveals how a dangerous environment and habitual exposure to violence instill persistent insecurity in the soldiers' minds. These subjects silently grumbled about the intelligence officer's threats, eventually internalizing the machinery of repression until even the loudest dissent was reduced to a "hushed, stifled whisper" (Bourdieu, 1977). This institutionalized silence is compounded by extreme exhaustion and a lack of supplies amidst constant bombardment. The soldiers "were forced to work tirelessly to rebuild a series of military positions, several of which had been destroyed by air raids" (p. 12). Such forced labor under duress confirms that the physical environment acts as a deliberate structural tool to break psychological resistance by stretching the experience of painful moments (Moran, 2023).

Furthermore, the narrative describes how these reactions do not indicate true satisfaction, but rather the result of punishments that compel behavior to align with the prevailing power structure (Bourdieu, 1977). The fact that soldiers remain "motionless and silent" (p. 42) in the face of brutality highlights the shattering of their internal world, which is critical because the war destroys the ability to arrange sensory objects into a coherent perception—a process that normally serves as an *a priori* condition of reason (Kant, 1963).

The psychological toll is further evidenced as "the soldiers are exhausted, sleep-deprived, and exhibit hysterical reactions to the sight of aircraft and the sounds of shelling" (p. 23). This behavioral deterioration aligns with the principle that the real-world environment directly dictates human behavior and mental stability (Bell, et al., 2001). A notable instance of this habituation occurs when "the soldiers laugh and feel no misery despite being slapped" (p. 18). Cognitive dissonance creates a temporal gap between the horrors of the past and the future, leaving the survivor stuck in a static present, unable to move past the impact of the past or look toward a livable future (Kwan, 2020).

#### ➤ **Reproduction of Domination and Its Impact on Consciousness**

The internal conflict reflected in Yusuf's view of Saddam as "*Love Masked as Hate*" (p. 377) illustrates the defense mechanisms that arise under the weight of dictatorial relationships. This emotional contradiction points to how the dominance of power distorts identity and separates individuals from their true feelings through symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1991). Through this manipulation of national symbols, the self is reconstructed and the loyalty are reshaped (Alhusseini & Zeidan, 2024).

The nature of this control is evident in Qasim's question: "*Does Saddam hate the people?*" (p. 377). This question reveals the "psychological erosion" caused by an environment designed to dismantle the individual's autonomy and effectively break their resistance by prolonging the experience of constant threat (Moran, 2023). *Mazahim al-Nasser*—a police officer who embodies terror and oppression—shows how facts are distorted by the dominant authority, while presenting the regime as perfect. This manipulation ensures that resistance is classified as "treason," as the impact of symbolic violence extends to consciousness and goes beyond visible physical pressures (Bourdieu, 1977).

#### **IV. RENÉ GIRARD'S THEORY OF FRAGMENTED IDENTITY**

Mimetic desire is mediated by a "model" or "other" rather than being generated autonomously, leading to a state of inequity where social unity collapses and identity is destroyed (Girard, 1977).

#### ➤ **Mimetic Desire and Conflict**

At the beginning of the novel, Yasser's fear of leaving the armored vehicle while Qasim "shouts at him" and pushes him harshly to disembark (Nasser,2021, p. 11) reflects a clash between two competing drives. This interaction reveals how the desire for survival overlaps with the urge to impose that same desire on the other, resulting in unpredictable and violent actions (Girard, 1987).Such moments of high-tension displacement demonstrate how the physical environment acts as a structural tool to break psychological resistance by stretching the experience of painful moments (Moran, 2023).

Scenes of soldiers fleeing and regrouping, followed by the mass gatherings of civilians in Basra, reflect the contagious nature of the desire for survival. Once one person perceives an opportunity to escape, others imitate, producing chaos and the crystallization of both individual and collective identity around the shared desire to endure (Girard, 1987). These desperate "attempts at escape and the search for safety" (Nasser,2021, p. 78) reflect a state of "**displacing place-identity**," where the traditional connection between the subject and their home is severed (Dixon & Durrheim, 2000).This severance forces people to form new social identities within migrant communities as they seek belonging in the aftermath of identity loss (Hogg & Abrams, 1995).

Resorting to temporary environments such as "Rafha Camp" (Nasser, 2021, p. 9) illustrates a temporal rupture where the survivor is trapped in a stagnant present, unable to bridge the gap between past horror and a viable future (Biano, 2024).The emergence of militias and sectarian groups following the fall of the regime, which explode as a "**Volcano Of Anger & Enmity**," further illustrates how society suffers from a crisis of differentiation. The people's hopes and longing for everyday life have disappeared with the loss of the symbol of power (**Saddam**).

This collapse of order reveals a crisis of differentiation where the shared longing for everyday life disappears along with the central symbol of power (Girard, 1987).

The people's longing for everyday life have disappeared with the loss of the symbol of power (Saddam). This disappearance of a unifying social structure leads to a disintegration of the self, further compounded by the constant temporal disruption inherent in contemporary war situations (Faraz, 2025).As these social groups battle among themselves, their "identities become shattered" ( Nasser, 2021, p. 115) and their social unity breaks down, leading to civil wars where competing leaders attempt to force their own identities on others. Finally, the resulting chaos is maintained through the "manipulation of new political symbols" (p. 312) and semiotic tools that redefine the subject's

loyalty in the absence of a singular, unifying power (Alhusseini & Zeidan, 2024).

➤ **Crisis of Undifferentiation and Fragmented Identity**

The transformation of military camps into spaces where "**the educated**" and "**the butcher**" coexist indiscriminately illustrates a profound crisis of undifferentiation. This collapse of social hierarchies leads to a state where social order becomes unstable, paving the way for reciprocal violence (Girard, 1977).

Qasim listened to one of the prisoners, who was said to have once been a torturer in the Fifth Division and had now become a prisoner himself. As he began to speak, the rest of the cell listened in solemn silence. He admits: "We change our body color like chameleons... we only feign weakness, while in fact, we are the makers of tyrants" (Nasser, 2021, p. 352). This reality illustrates how the oppressed internalize the logic of the oppressor, transforming dreams of liberation into a desire for domination where self and other become interchangeable (Girard, 1977).

Furthermore, social identities dissolve into a shared condition of suffering that renders individuals as human reflections of one another rather than distinct selves. This loss of human dignity is evidenced in the "hateful condescending gazes of the jailers who perceived them as mere '**Moving Piles of Flesh**' rather than human beings" (Nasser, 2021, p. 181). The reduction of the body to a biological object confirms that the physical environment of the prison acts as a site of dehumanization "where the places we inhabit eventually inhabit us" (Seamon, 2022).

In **Death Row** cells, where prisoners are piled up like "**Damaged Goods**," individuality is completely erased and the person is reduced to an "**Anonymous Mass of Victims**" (Girard, 1977). This forced displacement into alienating spaces disrupts the psychological bond between the self and its environment, compelling people to negotiate their sense of belonging under extreme pressure (Scannell & Gifford, 2010).

Finally, the paradoxical claim that people "**hate Saddam**" while their emotions reflect a "**love disguised as hate**" (Nasser, 2021, p. 352) underscores his role as a scapegoat figure. He becomes a pharmakos who embodies the collective desires and contradictions of society, appearing simultaneously revered and reviled (Girard, 1977). The fall of such a figure reveals the fragility of identity, as former authorities persist as ambiguous symbols in the collective psyche of a post-conflict society (Malkki, 2018). Consequently, people oscillate between identification and re-identification before a figure who once represented their collective aspirations (Girard, 1977).

➤ **Psychological Defense Mechanisms in the Face of Repression:**

The novel demonstrates how state terror forces the oppressed into silence and conformity as a collective defense mechanism (Freud, 2018). This environment creates a "feigned unity," seen in the phrase Saddam as "*Love Masked as Hate*" where original personalities are replaced by manufactured personas. This is evident when the populace is compelled to append "may God preserve and protect him" to the president's name (p. 55). Such forced allegiance acts as "reaction formation"—an unconscious process allowing the aggrieved to survive extreme political pressure (Freud, 2018).

Within these conditions, human agents often oscillate between multiple defense mechanisms depending on the intensity of external threats (Nurfatima, 2022). The gruesome scenes of torture (Nasser, 2021, pp. 243, 245) induce "hysterical states," where mental trauma is expressed through bodily symptoms (Freud & Breuer, 2004). This somatization of horror reflects how a contemporary war situation disrupts a survivor's ability to maintain a coherent sense of self (Faraz, 2025). Furthermore, prolonged state violence produces collective traumatic responses, where entire populations exhibit dissociative symptoms due to sustained terror (Herman, 2015). Likewise, the fact that some characters take refuge in humor or empty talk (Nasser, 2021, p. 159) illustrates a strategy for psychological survival. Humor functions here as a sublimation mechanism, allowing the sufferers to channel overwhelming anxiety into a socially acceptable outlet (Herman, 2015). By preserving a fragile sense of agency, those forced to endure tyranny attempt to maintain their humanity. Ultimately, these mechanisms show how deeply repression reshapes the internal world of the victims far beyond visible physical pressure.

➤ **Societal Collapse and the Emergence of New Forms of Violence:**

The novel reflects Iraqi society's sudden collapse in the wake of the occupation, as chaos reigned, public services broke down and criminal gangs brought the streets to a standstill. It also led to an outburst of anger that drove people to topple symbols of authority and statues of *SADDAM HUSSEIN*. This phase of transformation was embodied in the moment when a soldier fired a shot at Saddam's portrait:

"Among the crowds, a soldier, overcome by rage, fired at a picture of the president, shocking everyone nearby. This unbridled anger was an expression of the pent-up frustration of years of oppression. It ignited a fire that shattered the walls of repression, allowing the cities to breathe a sigh of relief after holding their breath" (Nasser, 2021, pp. 57-58).

Such an explosion of suppressed emotion illustrates how the physical destruction of a regime's symbols acts as a catalyst for a temporal rupture,

where the aggrieved are suddenly forced to navigate a world without a defined center of power (Biano, 2024).

However, this release of anger did not lead to reconstruction; instead, it created a vacuum quickly filled by sectarian forces. The text observes: "The situation worsened when a new leadership began to emerge in the streets from among the Sunnis, while the situation was similarly dominated by Shiite leaders" (Nasser, 2021, p. 385).

This shift from state-led oppression to militia-led chaos confirms that the loss of a unifying symbol often destabilizes both national and personal identity. Within this fragmented reality, the aggrieved are forced to construct new, defensive social identities as they seek belonging in the aftermath of total institutional loss (Malkki, 2018). "The emergence of 'Saddam-like' figures indicates that prolonged violence does more than alter reality; it traps the survivors in tragic, unpredictable reactions. This psychological state suggests that past trauma continues to shape the present, preventing those in the ruins of the state from forming a coherent narrative of the future (Faraz, 2025). In essence, these patterns highlight how the manipulation of local power structures redefines the sense of belonging in an environment of permanent insecurity.

## CONCLUSION

The final findings of the research are summarized through the following points:

### **I. Comprehensive Violence and Identity Fragmentation (Girard's Framework):**

- It is demonstrated how systemic violence forces a recalibration of the self, leading to permanent insecurity.
- Society is portrayed as a collective of shattered identities born from trauma and psychological suffering.
- Continuous conflict is identified as the primary cause for the collapse of self-awareness among the aggrieved.

### **II. The Transformation of Space and Time into Instruments of Oppression:**

- Homelands and prisons are revealed as hostile territories through the lens of symbolic violence.
- Time is analyzed as a tool of psychological torture used to distort the awareness of the populace.
- Narrative is utilized to reflect how space and time are converted into mechanisms of oppression.

### **III. Symbolic Violence and the Normalization of Subjugation (Bourdieu's Theory):**

- The normalization of oppression is shown to be a direct result of cultural and social repression.
- Subjugation is unconsciously accepted by the oppressed, leading to the erosion of human dignity.
- Hegemony is extended through non-material means, as explained in Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence.

### **IV. Psychological Defense Mechanisms against Terror:**

- Defense strategies, such as silence and denial, are employed by human agents to adapt to a terrifying reality.
- These responses are interpreted as direct consequences of identity fragmentation and inner conflict.
- The depth of psychological trauma is highlighted as a fate for those facing extreme repression.

### **V. The Role of Literature in Documentation and Resistance:**

- The painful reality of Iraq is documented through literary narrative, giving voice to fractured experiences.
- Literature is positioned as a tool of resistance that exposes various forms of symbolic violence.
- Storytelling is used to resist the erasure of history and the mechanisms of total domination.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Supporting literary and psychological studies to understand **Identity Fragmentation**, specifically in those countries that suffered the Ravages of War, approaching theories such as Girard's.

Uncovering the **Instruments of Violence** and their impact on narrative **Space** and its elements of Time and Place based on theories such as Pierre Bourdieu's to explore the meanings of Symbolic Violence and the forms of *normalization of oppression* as tools for imposing Hegemony and Exercising Power.

Recommending studies that combine the application of literary theories, particularly related to Postcolonial Literature (*Edward Said*) with Psychological Theories linking them to the suffering of individuals and societies in an effort to lay the groundwork for recovery from the **Scars & Pain of Violence** that left their marks even after the wars have ended.

## References

- Alhousseini & Zeidan. (2024, 10 11). The Concept of Hijab in Selected Political Speeches: A Critical Discourse Analysis. *Wasit Journal for Human Sciences*, 20(4 / Pt1), 634-610.
- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (2002). *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. (2nd, Ed.) London: Routledge.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bauman, Z. (2000). *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bell et al. (2001). *Environmental Psychology*. (5th, Ed.) Harcourt College Publishers.
- Biano. (2024). De Cristofaro, D. (2019). The Contemporary Post-Apocalyptic Novel: Critical Temporalities and the End Times. *Journal of Ecohumanism*, 3(1), 93–96.
- Bourdieu. (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu. (1991). *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu. (2001). *Masculine Domination*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Casey, E. S. (2001). *Spirit and Place: Essays in the Phenomenology of Place*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Deaux, K. (1992). *Social Identity*. London: Blackwell.
- Dixon, J.; Durrheim, K. (2000). Displacing Place-Identity: A Discursive Approach to the Study of Place and Identity. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 39(1), 27-44.
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Faraz. (2025). Memory and Trauma in The Contemporary War Situation. *IJOES*, 7(12 (December)), 213-222.
- Fludernik, M. (2009). *An Introduction to Narratology*. London: Routledge.
- Franck, K. (1984). *The Social Construction of Space*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- Freud & Breuer. (2004). *Studies on Hysteria*. London: Penguin Classics.
- Freud. (2018). *The Interpretation of Dreams*. New York: Dover Publications.
- Freud. (2018). *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense*. London: Hogarth Press.
- Genette, G. (1980). *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Gergen, K. J. (1991). *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*. New York: Basic Books.
- Girard, R. (1977). *Violence and the Sacred*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Girard, R. (1987). *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Graumann, C. F. (1983). *Psychology and the Social Sciences*. Berlin / New York: Springer.
- Hassans. (2024). Memory and trauma in historical narratives. *Kampala International University Journal of Humanities*, 6(1), 11-16.
- Herman. (2015). *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence—from domestic abuse to political terror*. Hachette UK: Basic Books.
- Hogg, M. A., & Abrams, D. (1995). *Social Identifications: A Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations and Group Processes*. London: Routledge.
- Hunter. (2021). 'To tell the story': Cultural trauma and holocaust metanarrative. In *Trauma & Memory*. Routledge.
- Kant, I. (1963). *Critique of Pure Reason*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

- Khammas. (2023). Iraq's Transhistorical and National collective Trauma: Unveiling the Overwhelming History in "The Corpse Washer" by Sinan Antoon. *Journal of Tikrit University for Humanities.*, 30(12), 346-366.
- Kwan. (2020). Time-image episodes and the construction of transgenerational trauma narratives. *Journal of Asian American Studies*, 23(1), 29–59.
- Lalli, M. (1992). Urban-related identity: Theory, measurement, and empirical findings. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 12(4), 285-303.
- Malkki. (2018). *The need to help: The domestic arts of international humanitarianism*. Duke University Press.
- Mankhi, A., & Mashab, R. (2024). Female Voices in the Aftermath of the Iraqi War in Helen Benedict's *Wolf Season*. *Wasit Journal for Human Sciences*, 20(3), 636-649.
- Mbembe. (2019). *Necropolitics (S. Corcoran, Trans.)*. Duke University Press. From <https://www.dukeupress.edu/necropolitics>
- McMartin, J. (1995). *Personality and the Self*. London: Routledge.
- Moore, G. T. (1997). *Environmental Psychology: A New Perspective*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Moran. (2023). *The Palgrave Handbook of Prison Design*. (1st, Ed.) Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.
- Nasser. (2021). *The Crippled Man's Obsession. (Hāgis al-Rajul al-Kasīh)*. Germany: Darwish Publishing and Translation, in cooperation with Sumerian Book House.
- Nurfatima. (2022). *Psychological problem and defense mechanism of Arthur Fleck character in Joker film (2019)*. Jakarta: Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University. From
- Padrón, R. (2007). *The Textualization of the Strait of Magellan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Proshansky. (1978). The City and the Self. *Environment and Behavior*, 10(2), 147-169.
- Proshansky, H. M., Fabian, A. K., & Kaminoff, R. (1983). Place-Identity: Physical World Socialization of the Self. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 3(1), 57-83.
- Ricoeur, P. (1984). *Time and Narrative, Vol. 1*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ryan, M. (2009). *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Scannell & Gifford. (2010). Defining place attachment: A tripartite organizing framework. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 30(1), 1–10., 30(1), 1–10.
- Scheper-Hughes, N., & Bourgois, P. (2004). *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Seamon. (2022). *Life takes place: Phenomenology, lifeworlds, and place making*. Routledge. doi:<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003156888>
- Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the Subaltern Speak? In C. Nelson, & L. Grossberg, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (pp. 271-313). University of Illinois Press.
- Tally, R. T. (2013). *Spatiality*. London: Routledge.
- Thapar-Björkert, S., & Karlsson, P. (2016). *Violence and the Everyday: The Social and Political Dimensions of Violence*. London: Routledge.
- Toolan, M. (2001). *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Van der Kolk. (2014). *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. Viking. From <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/313183/the-body-keeps-the-score-by-bessel-van-der-kolk-md/>
- Žižek, S. (2008). *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*. New York: Picador.