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# Iraq's Transhistorical and National collective Trauma: Unveiling the Overwhelming History in "The Corpse Washer" by Sinan Antoon

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**A B S T R A C T**

This research explores the intersection of Iraq's transhistorical trauma and its literary heritage following the 2003 invasion. It examines the impact of war on Iraqi society and the prevalent theme of war in Iraqi literature. It marked a turning point for Iraqi writers, allowing freedom of expression through opulent texts that established the foundations of the Iraqi postcolonial narrative. The collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime brought hope and opportunities, leading to the emergence of publishing firms and online platforms for open expression. The postcolonial novel authentically portrayed the invasion's actions and the country's political, economic, and social collapse. Authors aim to confront societal fractures and expose wounds, appreciating the divine amidst the turmoil. Examining Sinan Antoon's novel *"The Corpse Washer"*, we delve into the trauma experienced by Iraqis due to prolonged conflicts. Antoon skillfully tackles the transhistorical horror of war and its lasting impact, embodying the cathartic consequences of pity and terror. The novel goes beyond historiographic metafiction, utilizing elements of modernism and postmodernism to portray Iraq's historical trauma through narrative techniques like memories, reflection, foreshadowing, and flashbacks.

This research aims to deepen our understanding of Iraq's transhistorical trauma and its representation in post-2003 Iraqi novels. It sheds light on literature's power to challenge dominant narratives and give voice to silenced experiences. Exploring the intersection of historiographic metafiction and trauma fiction reveals how these narratives shape our understanding of the past and present. The study emphasizes the significance of bearing witness to Iraq's traumatic past, the complexities of memory in collective trauma's aftermath, and the lasting consequences of war trauma as depicted in *"The Corpse Washer"*.



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## الصدمة الجماعية الوطنية والتاريخية للعراق: كشف التاريخ الساحق في "*مغسلة الجثث*" للكاتب سنان انطون

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**الخلاصة:**

يناقش هذا البحث التقاطع بين صدمة العراق التاريخية وتراثه الأدبي بعد غزو العراق عام 2003.

ويتناول تأثير الحرب على المجتمع العراقي وموضوع الحرب في الأدب العراقي. لقد شكلت هذه الثيمة نقطة تحول بالنسبة للكتاب العراقيين، حيث سمحت بحرية التعبير من خلال النصوص الادبية التي أرست أسس السرد العراقي ما بعد 2003 . جسدت رواية ما بعد الاستعمار و بشكل واقعي أعمال الغزو والانهيار السياسي والاقتصادي والاجتماعي للبلاد وبهذا عمد المؤلفون إلى مواجهة الانقسامات المجتمعية وكشف الجراح. من خلال دراسة رواية سنان أنطون "غاسل الجثث"، نتعمق في الصدمة التي يعيشها العراقيون بسبب الصراعات الطويلة. يعالج أنطون بمهارة رعب الحرب العابر للتاريخ وتأثيره الدائم، مجسدًا العواقب للحرب والإرهاب. تتجاوز الرواية ما وراء القص التاريخي، مستخدمة عناصر الحداثة وما بعد الحداثة لتصوير الصدمة التاريخية في العراق من خلال تقنيات السرد مثل الذكريات، والتأمل، والتنبؤ، وذكريات الماضي.

يهدف هذا البحث إلى تعميق فهمنا لصدمة العراق العابرة للتاريخ وتمثيلها في الروايات العراقية ما بعد عام 2003. إنه يسلط الضوء على قدرة الأدب على تحدي الروايات السائدة وإعطاء صوت للتجارب الصامتة. إن استكشاف التقاطع بين ما وراء القص التاريخي وخيال الصدمة يكشف كيف تشكل هذه الروايات فهمنا للماضي والحاضر. تؤكد الدراسة على أهمية الشهادة على ماضي العراق المؤلم، وتعقيدات الذاكرة في أعقاب الصدمة الجماعية، والعواقب الدائمة لصدمة الحرب كما هو موضح في "غاسل الجثث".

الكلمات المفتاحية: الذاكرة الجمعية العابرة للتأريخ، غاسل الجثث، نظرية الصدمة، الذاكرة الجمعية

## INTRODUCTION

Trauma refers to the psychological harm inflicted on the mind due to a distressing accident and an overwhelming amount of pressure that surpasses one's ability to cope with or comprehend. In her book "Unclaimed Experiences", Cathy Caruth characterizes trauma as an overpowering encounter with sudden or catastrophic events, resulting in the delayed and uncontrollable recurrence of hallucinations and intrusive phenomena (Caruth,1996,4). In essence, trauma involves a painful experience that manifests itself in various ways, such as dreams, nightmares, hallucinations, and similar occurrences. Dealing with immediate circumstances becomes a struggle, potentially leading to significant and long-lasting negative consequences. However, people's responses to trauma vary based on the intensity of their personal experiences and individual traits. While some individuals face the traumatic moment and assimilate it without experiencing psychological consequences, others may develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In World Wars I and II, traumatic neurosis was commonly termed "shell shock" and "combat fatigue." Freud identified traumatic hysteria as a manifestation of post-traumatic stress disorder, especially

in cases of repression and sexual assault. Freud and Brewer's studies on hysteria emphasize the storage and repression of traumatic events, with abreaction therapy seen as essential for understanding the past's lingering effects. A latency period can trigger resurfacing of suppressed events (Freud,1955, 192).

Cathy Caruth's "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma Narrative, History" (1996) and Kali Tal's "Worlds of Hurt in Reading the Literatures of Trauma" contributed significantly to trauma analysis. Caruth argues that trauma is a narrative representation of a wound and is best understood through narration. Trauma is a repeated confrontation with the paradox of comprehending a life-threatening event. Trauma theory suggests that trauma is an unrepresentable event, challenging language's limits. Anne Whitehead's "Trauma Fiction" examines trauma representation and its relationship with fiction, highlighting how trauma theory has provided authors with new tools for representing traumatic experiences within narrative forms.

In trauma theory, there are two main types of memory: traumatic memory and narrative memory. Traumatic memory is characterized by symptoms such as nightmares, anger, hallucinations, aggression, disassociation, depression, and insomnia, which arise when the wounds are suppressed and silenced. Traumatic memory is fragmented and disrupted, conflating the past with the present. On the other hand, narrative memory involves working through trauma and healing it. It follows a thread of causality and coherence, aiming to recreate and change the past. According to Janet (1928, 156), narrative memory plays a crucial role in organizing the mind, combining experiences and creating larger, more flexible meaning systems. It is an intentional and conscious component that integrates both familiar and challenging experiences.

Collective memory is a widely used term that holds significance in the examination of contemporary society. However, its understanding in modern academic discourse remains limited. Maurice Halbwachs, a French sociologist, introduced the concept in 1920, primarily using it as a tool to study subjects like the Holocaust, rather than recognizing it as a standalone creation deserving attention. Over time, collective memory has gained attention in the fields of social sciences and humanities, becoming a crucial aspect of "memory studies" (Roediger & Wertsch, 2007). The sole widely accepted perspective is that collective memory refers to "a type of memory that surpasses individuals and is shared by a group" (Roediger & Wertsch, 2008, 318).

This study delves into our current traumatic era, marked by historical wounds and contemporary global distress, with a focus on collective trauma. Alexander (2016) emphasizes collective healing through acknowledgment, solidarity, recollection, community therapy, and collaboration. Iraqi novels, written within or outside Iraq, document the history of trauma during ongoing wars. The study explores trauma theory's framework, with a keen interest in collective memory and identity influenced by trauma. It examines literature's role in transforming trauma from an individual to a collective memory.

Sinan Antoon's "The Corpse Washer" portrays war as a transhistorical trauma, inheriting suffering across generations, influenced by Caruth's and LaCapra's insights. The narrative symbolically represents all Iraqis trapped in the unending cycle of trauma. Antoon vividly depicts Iraq's history marked by death, bloodshed, and trauma since the Iran-Iraq war in 1980, using literary techniques to embody transhistorical national and global trauma.

## 1-Iraq’s Transhistorical and National Trauma
## Iraq’s Literary Heritage in the Aftermath of 2003

Traumatic experiences have the potential to pose significant threats to individuals' psychological well-being, leading to lasting effects. The nature of these experiences is not solely determined by the external circumstances but rather by an individual's subjective emotional response to the entire event. The level of fear and helplessness experienced during the ordeal increases the likelihood of trauma. Moreover, overwhelming experiences can extend beyond the individual level and impact groups, races, or even entire nations. It is crucial to differentiate between individual traumatic experiences and collective ones, as they require distinct approaches. While the psychological framework of trauma theory provides insights into individual experiences, the social perspective is essential for understanding and addressing collective traumas. In both cases, traumatic experiences have a profound impact on memory and consciousness, be it at the individual or collective level. To delve deeper into the interdisciplinary nature of trauma theory, this research will reflect on its key terminologies, concepts, and influential pioneers, establishing the foundation for this study.

The twentieth century witnessed the rise of extremist groups and conflicts rooted in ethnicity and religion, creating global instability. Iraq's history of

conflict has deeply impacted its society, a theme frequently explored in its literature. Iraqi writers vividly depict the destructive and traumatic nature of war. The year 2003 marked a pivotal moment, and the emergence of ISIS in Mosul in 2014 further complicated Iraq's situation. These events have inspired Iraqi authors to focus on post-war violence, corruption, and death.Iraqi postcolonial novelists have adapted their narratives to reflect the new reality. According to Shayma Hamedawi's article "The Postcolonial Iraqi Novel," this genre explores themes with elements of authenticity, fantasy, and sorrow, gaining recognition globally. Ahmed Alsaadaw's "Frankenstein in Baghdad" won awards for its tale of a vengeful creature made from victims' remains. Inaam Kachach's "The American Granddaughter" explores the consequences of cultural hybridization through an Iraqi woman raised in America who returns as an American soldier, grappling with her identities and loyalties.

In 1979, Iraq fell under Saddam Hussein's dictatorship, leading to a virtual absence of fiction production within the country. Intellectuals and artists faced persecution, writing fiction only in exile due to the oppressive regime. Symbolism replaced direct expression, avoiding criticism of the government while focusing on battles and death, pretending loyalty. Mohamed Khediar's works like "Qadisiyah Saddam" (1983) and "Basriaytha" (1996), as well as Mahmoud Jindari's "The Edges" (1989), illustrate this approach with elements of myth and history.Despite the Iran-Iraq war and the global response to Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in the early 1990s, UN sanctions hindered intellectual pursuits, focusing on survival. In 2003, Iraq underwent a pivotal change as the fall of the Al-Ba'ath Party liberated writers, leading to the establishment of publishing firms, increased book production, and the rise of online platforms for unrestricted expression.

The post-2003 era saw a surge in creative output, with works authentically depicting the invasion's effects. Iraqi literature often delved into themes of political, economic, and social collapse. The postcolonial novel in Iraq addressed a wide range of topics, including war, rape, death threats, discrimination, ethnic violence, corruption, kidnapping, constitutional manipulation, inequality, economic hardships, social decay, ethical dilemmas, decline of ideologies, racial discrimination, identity crises, destruction of historical monuments, oil theft, and migration. These themes have shaped the identity of the Iraqi novel after 2003 (Al Shebeby, 2014, 28).

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**2-Sinan Antoon as a Wounded Writer**

Individuals in Iraq are currently experiencing a variety of personal and societal traumas. Despite confronting daily agony and violence, they persist in their acts of protest and their pursuit of dreams. Sinan Antoon, an Iraqi-American writer, undertakes the task of representing Iraq's turbulent past, capturing what Caruth (1996, 9) describes as the "silent recurrence of sorrow". Antoon himself has experienced the pain of exile, having been forced to leave his homeland for over 25 years, and possesses a deep understanding of the anguish and grief endured by others.

In a fractured Iraqi society, Sinan Antoon takes on the role of a writer compelled to break the silence surrounding traumatic experiences. His novel, "The Corpse Washer," initially written in Arabic and later self-translated into English, explores personal trials like death, bereavement, and rape, as well as communal traumas such as war and invasion. The narrative elicits a range of emotions, intertwining elements of sadness, happiness, and sensuality. It focuses on two pivotal moments in Iraqi history—the Gulf War of 1990 and the American intervention in 2003. It serves as a chilling reminder of the chaos, bloodshed, and sectarian divisions that followed the American liberation of Iraq. Ultimately, the novel is a plea for assistance, shedding light on decades of discrimination, brutality, oppressive control, and the culture of death in Iraq.

A central theme in the novel is Jawad, a young man from a family involved in funeral preparation and laundry. It delves into the profound impact of war, occupation, and civil strife on Jawad's family, friends, and their nation. The novel's overall tone mirrors the somber nature of the atrocities endured by Iraq over three decades. However, amidst the backdrop of violence and horror, it offers a glimpse into the calmer and more human aspects through its depiction of corpse washing procedures and Jawad's conflicted emotions about his profession and his once-dreamed-of world.

Within the conceptual framework of transhistorical trauma, chronic wars are identified as unresolved legacies that persistently haunt traumatized individuals, perpetuating a cycle of generational trauma on both national and global scales. This enduring ghost of war's legacy is transmitted across generations through biological, psychological, and social processes, undermining the subjective experiences of those affected and situating the trauma within a social context that resists its complete understanding. Sinan Antoon tackles the theme of war's transhistorical horror within this context. In

Antoon's The Corpse Washer and similar stories, a national trauma emerges from the prolonged years of conflict experienced by Iraq. These narratives align with Cathy Caruth's description of trauma: "...a rethinking of reference, [which] is aimed at not eliminating history but at resituating it in our understanding, that is at precisely permitting history to arise where immediate understanding may not" (Caruth, 1996, 11).The intergenerational cycle of trauma reactions emerges from a framework that encompasses conflict within the broader context of collective transhistorical trauma. To qualify as transhistorical, war trauma must extend beyond a single catastrophic conflict and instead be perpetuated over time in relation to historical events.

The concept of "transhistorical trauma" was coined in 1960 in response to the profound consequences experienced by Holocaust survivors and their descendants in the aftermath of World War II. Many scholars of that era observed that the children of Holocaust survivors exhibited a collective matrix of traumatic reactions, as their traumatized consciousness was shaped by the painful legacy inherited from their parent's experiences. Despite their efforts to suppress and bury the traumatic event deep within their implicit memory, many of them developed symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Dominick LaCapra explores this topic in his book "Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma," where he examines the intersection of historical events and trauma theory. LaCapra argues that comprehending the Holocaust requires a process of "working through" the collective traumatic experience to attain a more comprehensive understanding of its significance. Additionally, working with trauma becomes an act of survival, transforming painful, immobilizing memories into active and normalized narratives (Herman, 2014, 141).

Dominick LaCapra's "Writing History, Writing Trauma" underscores the significance of narratives that encompass historical and traumatic contexts, offering invaluable insights for understanding the consequences of protracted wars. LaCapra contends that art provides valuable guidance for historians, aiding their investigations, particularly in areas like the transgenerational process of possession or haunting (LaCapra, 2014, 15). Fictional narratives serve as a means to navigate the past and the present, facilitating the recall of historically suppressed, silenced, and disregarded elements of memory, whether traumatic or narrative in nature. Within this framework, stories of trauma become a form of testimonial literary history (Vickroy, 2002, 172).

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Works like those of Sinan Antoon become avenues for remembering, recording, and interpreting a harrowing history that extends beyond mere conflicts. They allow us to comprehend the "legacy of incomprehensibility" inherent in tragic experiences, as Caruth acknowledges the paradoxical relationship between destructiveness and survival (Caruth, 1995, 58). Antoon, for example, engages with a painful heritage through historiography, seeking a deeper understanding of the collective traumatized identity that emerges in the shadows of a traumatic history. They address how prior knowledge shapes one's perception of the present through historiography, all while grappling with the challenge of "not betraying the past" (Caruth, 1995, 27).Sinan Antoon's distinct approach blends fact, fiction, and metaphors, departing from the conventional perspective. His focus is on capturing the cumulative impact of Iraq's traumatic history, marked by prolonged exposure to violent wars, rather than specific research objectives. In "The Corpse Washer," he vividly portrays Iraq's history of conflict, making it inhospitable. Over the past three decades, Antoon has been a prominent chronicler of Iraq's traumatic past, using narrative and haunting recollections to revisit his own sorrowful history.

Antoon employs self-reflection to depict his characters' damaged characteristics and uses experimental techniques like dreams, time travel, fragmentation, and symbolism to dramatize the historical narrative. In "I'jaam: An Iraqi Rhapsody," he mirrors the scars of the 1980s Iran-Iraq war with a fragmented autobiographical format. In "The Baghdad Eucharist," Antoon juxtaposes the dialectics of the past and present through various characters' discourses, expanding individual anguish to activate collective memory.

### *3- The Corpse Washer*: Bearing Witness to Iraq’s Overwhelming History

The Corpse Washer, much like Antoon's previous works, serves as a portrayal of a national trauma inflicted by war, with death serving as its prevalent theme. Death, which permeates Iraq's daily existence and characterizes its traumatic reality, shapes the individual and collective identities of the main characters. Jawad, the protagonist, remarks, "If death is a postman, then I receive his letters

every day. I am the one who opens carefully the bloody and torn envelopes. I am the one who washes them, who removes the stamps of death and dries and perfumes them" (p3).

Sinan Antoon's unique approach blends factual information, fiction, and metaphors, departing from the conventional Aristotelian perspective. Rather than adhering to specific research objectives, Antoon focuses on capturing the cumulative impact and emotional strain resulting from Iraq's traumatic history, marked by prolonged exposure to violent wars. In "The Corpse Washer," Antoon vividly portrays how Iraq's history of war with Iran, the invasion of Kuwait, the severe embargo, the Gulf War, the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the consequences of sectarian conflict have made Iraq an inhospitable place to reside.

Sinan Antoon has been a prominent figure in documenting Iraq's collective wounded identity over the past three decades. Among contemporary Iraqi authors, Antoon is the sole chronicler of the country's traumatic past. His literary works reflect the anguish inflicted by war on Iraq, using narrative and haunting recollections to revisit his sorrowful history. His role as a wounded author in diasporic isolation transforms turmoil into a verbal tale, offering deeper understanding. The narrative conveys retrospection, as it is distanced from the present, echoing with hindsight. Achieving this reflective comprehension requires emotional and physical distance, making it an essential component (Frank, 2011, 98).

Antoon employs self-reflection within the context of history and memory to effectively depict and shape the damaged characteristics of his characters. Through experimental techniques like dreams, time travel, fragmentation, and symbolism, he dramatizes the historical narrative. In "I'jaam: An Iraqi Rhapsody," he uses a fragmented autobiographical format mirroring the scars of the 1980s Iran-Iraq war. In "The Baghdad Eucharist," Antoon explores Iraq's traumatic history by juxtaposing the dialectics of the past and present through the discourses of each character. Notably, the novel was written in response to a terrorist attack on a Christian church, expanding individual anguish to encompass a larger scope that activates collective memory through coding and storytelling processes.Iraq has endured a long history of trauma and war, characterized as an "underworld" where the sun never rises, symbolically linking Iraq to Mghasil, a place where bodies are washed, both bearing the scars of historical tragedies.” and “there is nothing but night” (13). To demonstrate, the

Mghasil is a small representation of Iraq. As old as Iraq, the Mghasil “was more than six decades old, and many generations of [Jawad’s] family, including his father ”(15).

For Jawad's family, death pervades every aspect of life, even their sustenance.“Death’s traces—its scents and memories—were present in every inch of [Mghasil/Iraq]” (22). Jawad aspires to be an artist, , he thinks that art “allows the child imprisoned inside the adult to come out to play and celebrate the world and its beauty” (31). However, Iraq's fragile political climate and ongoing conflicts make this dream practically unattainable. Many Iraqi intellectuals and artists have been forced into exile, and those who remain face restrictions on expressing their beliefs.

Caruth's notion of transhistorical trauma aligns with this idea, asserting that the experience of trauma replicates itself persistently and unconsciously in the actions of survivors, against their will (1996, 2).Sinan Antoon's narrative spans from the 1980s Iraq-Iran war to the 2003 American invasion and its aftermath, revealing the transformation of Jawad's traumatic consciousness. Iraq's collective consciousness is reflected in stories like Jawad's brother Ammoury, whose designation changed from "Doctor" to "Martyr" after his death in the war. using words that evoke a sense of negativity, such as "wail," "hysterical," "silent tear," "death," and "trembling voice."Families were repeatedly informed of their missing sons during the war, living in uncertainty that blurred the distinction between life and death.

Iraqis have long questioned the purpose of their past conflicts and the legacy of death they've inherited. Saddam Hussein's acquiescence to Iran's territorial demands following the 1990 Kuwait invasion raised profound questions about the eight-year war with Iran, with many echoing Jawad's father's sentiment. Jawad's rejection of the family profession of corpse washing marks the beginning of his own anguish. He dreams of sculpting to immortalize life but faces the overwhelming challenge of death's omnipresence in war-torn Iraq.

Jawad is haunted by thoughts of death that follow him home, contrasting his father's ability to return to normalcy after each washing. His traumatic encounters result in nightmares filled with disfigured corpses, and he lives in fear of falling asleep, as death relentlessly pursues him even in his dreams.He is afraid to share these haunting dreams with his parents, and the fear of falling asleep grips him, as death seems to relentlessly pursue him even in his dreams:

“Death is not content with what it takes from me in my waking hours, it insists on haunting me even in my sleep” (The Corpse Washer, 2–3).

According to Erikson's definition of trauma (1995, 184), it involves the frequent reliving of a traumatic experience through daydreams, night terrors, flashbacks, and illusions. It also includes an obsessive tendency to seek out similar situations. Jawad experiences a distressing nightmare in which his beloved Reem lies naked on a marble bench, awaiting Jawad's cleansing, which terrifies him. He wonders why she wants to be cleaned when she is alive “not dead?” He “sees[s] two pomegranates on her chest instead of her breast” in another nightmare (The Corpse Washer, 1). In another dream, he envisions two pomegranates on her chest instead of her breasts, likely symbolizing her battle with breast cancer (The Corpse Washer, 1). Jawad is plagued by another nightmare featuring a disturbing old man. He describes him as follows: "An elderly man with long white hair and a lengthy white beard awakens me and instructs... write down all the names!... I observe his eyes, an unusual deep sky-blue shade, set deeply in his eye sockets. His face is etched with wrinkles, as though he were centuries old. I ask him straightforwardly: Who are you? What names? He smiles and replies, 'Don't you recognize me? Get a pen and paper and write down all'" (The Corpse Washer, 26).

Due to the haunting visions, he experiences, Jawad finds it impossible to maintain a stable relationship with his cousin Reem. When he attempts to propose to her, she flees to Europe, leaving Jawad infatuated with other women. However, his shattered heart, consumed by thoughts of death, “full of death” (Corpse Washer, 123) prevents him from reaching out to them. Each time he contemplates proposing to a woman, he abruptly retreats due to the wounds and trauma that plague his psyche. He is emotionally distant, unable to commit to any potential partner he encounters in his life. He articulates. “I knew that my heart was a hole one could pass through but never reside in” he adds (The Corpse Washer, 114). According to Herman (1997, 51), relationships within families and trust can be irreparably damaged under the strain of stress. Psychologists suggest that individuals affected by trauma often possess a short-term perspective on the future and anticipate an early death. This is why Jawad avoids marriage, fearing that he would become a burden to the woman he loves.

Jawad's situation has been significantly worse since the American takeover of Iraq in 2003. This armed occupation allows sectarianism and violence to flourish. The number of persons who have died is rising. Jawad believes that death has total control over his life and that his "fingers were crawling everywhere" (The Corpse Washer, 104). He is insecure, and this insecurity causes him to erupt: "I can't do it anymore." I'm suffocating. I'm not cut out for this job. I wasn't planning on doing it for two years. I can't sleep at night. Nightmares are driving me insane" (The Corpse Washer, 171). Because the causes of death are similar, the dead bodies appear to be identical. "I was startled as I uncovered the face of one of the men I washed yesterday" he wonders. He resembled an old acquaintance of mine who had died years ago. Identical rectangular features, prominent cheekbones, and long nose.… The thick eyebrows looked as if they were about to shake hands. But I said to myself, I've already seen him dead in my own arms once before" (*The Corpse washer*, 59). According to Dominick LaCapra, to some degree, you will permanently have a predisposition to relive the difficulties you are learning" (2014,142).

As a result of enduring prolonged trauma, Jawad finds it increasingly difficult to distinguish between the real world and the realm of fantasy. He begins to perceive a stronger connection to death than to the living. The fear of sleep pervades his existence, mirroring the collective apprehension felt by all Iraqis. Throughout the book, war and violence loom large, illustrating the profound impact of conflict on people's minds and highlighting the diverse ways individuals respond to war. Antoon consistently emphasizes the lasting scars left by the unresolved wounds of war in Jawad's life. Reflecting on the aftermath of weeks of bombing, Jawad recounts, Jawad says: "After weeks of bombing we woke up one morning to find the sky pitch black. The smoke from the torched oil wells in Kuwait had obliterated the sky. Black rain fell afterward, coloring everything with soot as if forecasting what would befall us later" (The Corpse Washer, 61). He is deeply troubled by the staggering number of deaths within his country and the multitude of ways in which Iraqis perish. He adds: "If death is a postman, then I receive his letters every day." (The Corpse Washer, 3). He meticulously washes, cleans, dries, and perfumes the deceased, uttering words he does not truly believe in. Finally, he delicately wraps them in white for their final reading at the cemetery.

**4- Troops of Collective Memory in *the Corpse Washer***

Antoon immerses himself in an alternate reality where the boundaries between life and death become hazy, leaving no escape from the relentless nightmares. The line between delusion and reality blurs to the extent that Jawad questions whether he is awake or still trapped within a dream. This uncertainty surrounding life and death takes a toll on Jawad's mind, further isolating him from the world around him. Death assumes a new, formidable form. In the words of Herman: “It is difficult for traumatized persons to appreciate the glory in life and engage in countless things that other individuals undertake because they experience an internal gloom and alone that causes them to lose the potential to enjoy life” (2014, 49).

After the American invasion, his father's death transforms into a monstrous presence, growing larger and more terrifying with each passing day. In comparison to Jawad’s “tenfold” rise in fatalities, his father’s death was “timid and measured” (*The Corpse Washer*,3). According to Herman, wounded individuals feel utterly abandoned, profoundly lonely, and cast aside from the realms of human care and safety that sustain their existence. Consequently, a sense of disconnection and alienation permeates every relationship. Those traumatized perceive themselves as more connected to the deceased than the living, plagued by a profound lack of trust (52).

Resignation is a prevalent aspect of trauma, as individuals who have experienced profound distress often resign themselves to their circumstances. They become so deeply ensnared by their traumatic experiences that they believe they are trapped in an unchangeable and inescapable state. This sense of resignation extends to many characters in the novel, as they find themselves imprisoned in a state of passivity, awaiting their inevitable demise. Jawad reflects on this, stating, "[w]e, who are waiting in line for our turn, keep mulling over death, but the dead person just dies and is indifferent" (*The Corpse Washer*, 55). Another instance of resignation is evident when Jawad's mother questions what they should do in the face of an impending battle, and his father responds that they should do nothing. He believes that if God intended to end their lives, there is nowhere else they could go.

When Jawad's uncle, Sabri, returns to Iraq after a long absence, he witnesses the complete destruction of the city. He openly expresses his rage and

despair, exclaiming, "Look at it now. Then you have all this garbage, dust, barbed wires, and tanks... this is not the Baghdad I'd imagined" (*The Corpse Washer*, 96). This passage suggests Scarry's depiction of war as altering the physical appearance, form, and enduring essence of the entities that humans perceive as extensions of themselves. Jawad's Uncle Sabri observes that the Americans are inexperienced, reckless, rude, and biased, and their presence makes people yearn for the days of Saddam. It feels as though death is scoring goals on behalf of warring teams in an endless game.

The US invasion of Iraq has led to the rise of extremist groups and forced displacement of Iraqis. The imposition of Western ideals clashes with traditions, causing turmoil. Sabri expresses dismay over the changes in Baghdad, and a satellite dish further isolates them. Trauma symptoms affect thinking, memory, and initiative. After the invasion, the number of deceased bodies increases, trapping Jawad in a relentless cycle.

In the closing lines, Jawad compares himself to a pomegranate tree, feeling shrunken and beaten by death. He can't lead a conventional life and returns to corpse washing, eroding relationships, trust, and self. Trauma becomes a dominant aspect of the internal landscape.Her battle with breast cancer disrupts Jawad and Reem's connection, likely linked to depleted uranium. Her absence leaves a deep wound in his heart. Hammoudy takes over the washhouse, handling victims of various causes, and Sayyid al-Fartusi convinces Jawad to continue his father's role.

As described by the author, bodies are scattered throughout the streets and stored in refrigerators. Reem's presence intensifies Jawad's trauma, causing him to withdraw into a protective cocoon. Erikson describes this as a realm of silent, agonizing loneliness, where the traumatic event becomes an overwhelming weight that triggers denial and resistance (186). For years, Jawad resists following in his father's footsteps. But after his father's death, he eventually succumbs to the desperate need for financial stability. Though he approaches the task differently, the bodies he washes are often nameless or severely disfigured due to the war zone. The war shatters his surroundings, forever altering his identity. It is through his work as a corpse washer that Jawad gains a unique perspective on the Iraqi conflict. Unlike the pomegranate tree, he thrives on death alone, devoid of companionship.

The pomegranate tree holds significant symbolism in *The Corpse Washer*, representing Iraq's suffering and reflecting Jawad's anguish. The water used to cleanse the bodies is not simply discarded; instead, it is directed to nourish a pomegranate tree in the courtyard of Jawad's washhouse. This tree, much like Jawad himself, carries the weight of pain and death. As Jawad describes, "I am like the pomegranate tree, but all my branches have been cut, broken, and buried... my heart beating with death. But no one knows. No one. The pomegranate alone knows" (Antoon, 2014, 184). The pomegranate tree, nurtured by the runoff of washed bodies, becomes a symbol for Iraq, while Jawad finds his livelihood among the deceased. In a metaphorical sense, death gives him a purpose. Similar to the solitary and resilient pomegranate tree, Jawad cannot exist outside the realm of death, as guilt overtakes him whenever he attempts to abandon his destined path.

In her essay "Historiographic Metafiction: Parody and the Intertextuality of History," Linda Hutcheon posits that history and postmodern fiction share a complex and interconnected relationship. “Trauma fiction overlaps with and borrows from both postmodern and postcolonial fiction in its self-conscious deployment of stylistic devices as modes of reflection or critique” (Whitehead, 2004, 3).

The novel *"The Corpse Washer"* by Antoon stands out for its non-chronological narrative style, featuring unique characteristics. Antoon presents the story in fragments, interweaving dreams, recollections of specific events, and factual information, resulting in abrupt shifts from the past to the present. Laurie Vickroy explores this aspect in his book "Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction. “Such fragment represents a re-creation of the uncertainties and gaps in traumatic memory,” (Vickroy, 2002, 142).

Antoon skillfully fills in these gaps using vivid visual and sensory imagery, effectively connecting the narrative fragments. This fragmentation not only reflects the lingering haunted memories of war trauma but also relates to the concept of "latency" derived from Caruth, which deals with the temporal structure of traumatic events “may be recognized in the fractured or fragmented nature of testimonies that necessitate a new interpretation or reception framework” (Ibid, 7). Due to Antoon's dynamic narrative approach, readers must pause and organize the events chronologically, recalling the statuses of particular characters as either living or deceased. The persistent presence of the

past in traumatic memory is accentuated by how the characters come to life through the seamless shifts between the past and the present. For example, in the opening chapter, the reader is introduced to Jawad, who works as a body cleaner following his father's death in 2003.

In the early 1980s, Jawad spent his days at his father's workplace, the Mghasil, guided by his mother as a child. However, in 1988, when his brother is declared a martyr, the narrator shifts back and forth in time, revisiting moments when Jawad's brother was alive, the invasion of 2003, and the present. The grim reality of the new Iraq profoundly affects its social fabric, dividing Iraqis along sectarian lines, such as Shiites, Sunnis, Christians, Mandaeans, and Yazidis, due to ongoing conflicts. However, Jawad perceives Shiites and Sunnis as indistinguishable, harbouring equal disdain for both. The sectarian differences suffocate him, as he believes “no heart in this country isn’t crushed” (133). Shiites and Sunnis’ bodies are “scattered all over the streets and stuffed fridges” (122) , and possessing a whole body with intact eyes and heads are considered fortunate (108). Iraq’s historical trauma is a “never-ending game” with top wreckage because of its catastrophic effects. “Sunni, Shia, Christian ... were not accustomed to [any sectarian division]” (92) until 2003. There was no customary sectarian division among Sunni, Shia, and Christian communities (92). Binary oppositions and power dynamics characterize the new Iraq. When referring to the "other side," individuals use the pronoun "they," and the identity of "they" depends on the speaker's perspective. For instance, for two Shiite women, Um Jawad, and Um Ghayda, "they" represents the Sunnis, and the possibility of changing their opinions and judgments about the Sunnis seems futile (106). Jawad, driven by his deep emotions, criticizes sectarian political parties for fueling divisions among different segments of society. He believes that secularism should prevail over sectarianism and this new form of pain results from political manipulation orchestrated by specific parties rather than a genuine reflection of Iraqi society's essence.

*The Corpse Washer* stands out for its narrative style, which skillfully portrays psychological realism, delving into the profound sense of alienation experienced by modern individuals trapped within themselves. Jawad, the protagonist, finds himself alienated from various aspects of his life: conflicts, the inability to find true love, and the abandonment of his hobbies. His disconnection from society is deeply rooted in his experiences in war-torn

Baghdad, a city that has been likened to a prison during the ravages of wars and regimes.

The Doctor and Shiromoto both agree that traumatized individuals perceive their inner and exterior environments as unsafe and frightening, leading to a profound sense of loneliness in their existence (Doctor and Shiromoto, 2012, 8). According to Jawad, Baghdad, once a "prison of mythic dimensions" under Saddam's rule, has now become "fragmented into many cells of sectarian dimensions, separated by high concrete walls and bloodied by barbed wires" (ibid). Growing up in this city, Jawad is filled with a sense of desolation and unpleasant emotions of loss and exile. For Jawad, investigating a stranger's feelings does not require transcending boundaries; one can feel like a stranger "in his shroud and grave" within the city itself (ibid.). This notion encapsulates his deep-rooted alienation and detachment within the place he once called home.

Jawad's poignant words, "The Pomegranate alone knows," prompt us to contemplate the act of bearing witness to suffering, both in general and within the context of historical trauma. To bear witness means to be “in the face of a history that seems constantly about to disappear” (Caruth, 2013, xi). For Jawad, his notebook becomes a vessel of historical declarative memory, standing resilient in the face of the eroding impact of traumatic history. According to Peter A. Levine, “a reconstructive process that is continuously adding, rearranging, and updating information—all to serve the ongoing adaptive process of survival and living” (Levine, 2015,3). Jawad's notebook becomes a comprehensive catalog that allows him to consciously remember and accurately recount the stories of the deceased, revealing the chain of causation that shaped their destinies.

In contrast, Jawad's father relies on his memory, “were all in his head, written down by years” (24). The father's trauma is deeply intertwined with his inherited profession, Iraq's harrowing history, and the martyrdom of Ammoury. Antoon often characterizes the father's trauma as "silent," subtly displaying itself on his face during quiet conversations with the images of Ammoury that occupy a significant space in his heart. On the other hand, Jawad's trauma manifests more overtly, reflected in his dreams, the pale hues in his paintings, and his difficulty in forming emotional connections with others, rendering him unable to fully embrace love and life. His father's silent trauma, however, is evident through his reticence and unpredictable temperament.

Narratives from South Asia and Iraq explore trauma in the aftermath of "9/11" and the "War on Terror," offering diverse perspectives. Antoon's tales help reimagine the collective traumatic history, making history a means of witnessing pain and surviving.Antoon, working as a corpse washer, gains a unique perspective on Baghdad's conflict. He seeks solace in sculpting, envisioning a city adorned with his work, but reality contrasts with bodies scattered on streets and in refrigerators. His descriptions of war's aftermath reveal the destruction. Jawad's dreams are triggered by violence and the mounting corpses in the washhouse, portraying war atrocities as a defiant performance. Iraqis face ongoing violence, personal and social trauma, but they resist, dream, and create art as an act of healing and hope amidst death and devastation.

**Conclusion**

The research underscores the notion of "collective trauma," a horrific tragedy that deeply impacts society's foundations. It explores how trauma survivors' memories contribute to the formation of a transgenerational collective self, binding them together in the face of threats to their existence. Violators may attempt to protect their collective identity by distorting history, evading responsibility, or altering memories of the event.

The study highlights the never-ending process of reconstructing identity for both victims and perpetrators after trauma. It acknowledges the conflict surrounding memory debates but also recognizes the potential for cross-cultural understanding. Trauma fiction exhibits two types of memory - traumatic memory marked by fragmentation and narrative memory with a clear cause-and-effect line. Despite the differences, both types intertwine the past and present, reflecting the enduring impact of traumatic experiences.

This research focuses on Antoon's "The Corpse Washer," revealing Iraq's history under Saddam Hussein. It emphasizes the collective aspect of individual experiences and delves into war trauma through cultural memory, senses, and dreams. The novel presents Iraq as a battleground and the people's struggles, using surrealism to depict trauma as a form of resistance against transhistorical anguish caused by death.In conclusion, *"The Corpse Washer"* stands as a compelling portrayal of a multifaceted human story of war and hostility. It presents a collective narrative intertwined with individual experiences, shedding light on the enduring effects of collective trauma on a nation and its people. Through powerful storytelling, Antoon urges readers to understand the profound

impact of historical trauma and its significance in shaping collective identity. Antoon artfully employs the pomegranate tree as a symbol representing the transhistorical anguish caused by death. Throughout the novel, human bodies are depicted as carriers of pain, each uniquely portraying the harrowing circumstances they endure. At the core of this portrayal lies trauma, characterized by both physical and spiritual damage to the body and soul, perpetually echoing through time.

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