Sinan Antoon's Literary Odyssey between Iraq and the U.S.:

Exile, Dissent, Narrative, and Translation

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ABSTRACT

For researchers and scholars interested in literary interactions between the Middle East and the West, Sinan Antoon's major works—*I'jaam, The Corpse Washer, The Baghdad Eucharist,* and *The Book of Collateral Damage*—provide possibilities for fruitful exploration. Antoon's fiction depicts three aspects of expatriate and diasporic literature: resistance to dictatorship and critical views of war, the influential factors in translation, and the fragmented condition of longing in exile. These issues are discussed in the four chapters of this thesis: "Sinan Antoon as an Idealist Writer," "Antoon's Critique of the War and Authoritarianism," "The Target Language and Translation Proficiency," and "Exile, Memory, and the Sense of Loss."

Antoon's experience as a writer under Saddam Hussein's regime, whose brutality compares to that of Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler, serves as an example of the fragile and dangerous tensions between the writer and authoritarianism. Antoon criticizes, documents, and highlights many tragic and melancholic instances of the injustice, coercion, and brutality of those in power, in this case events that occurred before, during, and after the first and second Gulf wars. Writers often encourage resistance to despotism by presenting tragic images to their audiences. Their duty is to expose and challenge false ideologies promoted and disseminated through government-sanctioned news and

propaganda. Through the act of translation, Antoon's narratives are transferred from one language and culture to another language and culture. This process of translation is especially interesting in the case of Antoon since he himself is a translator—of some of his own works as well as works by other Arab writers such as the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish. This project tracks some of the nuances in Antoon's and other translators' translations of Antoon's works. Antoon, like many expatriate and transnational writers such as Joseph Conrad, Vladimir Nabokov and Paul Bowles, lives in an exilic condition in which the past, called up by memory, consumes and often obscures the present. Nostalgia, oblivion, and time are the main elements in Antoon's diasporic literature. Three fundamental issues arise in this discussion of Antoon's work and life in exile: the difference between physical and mental diaspora, the influence of the past on the writer in exile, and the dual identity of the refugee.

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Sinan Antoon's Literary Odyssey between Iraq and the U.S.: Exile, Dissent, Narrative, and Translation

Introduction

Three main topics for exploration emerge from my reading of Sinan Antoon's literary works. First, Antoon's biography certainly is connected to my literary interests. Born in Iraq in 1967, he moved to the U.S. in 1991, after graduating from the University of Baghdad, to pursue his studies. Currently a professor at New York University, Antoon is considered one of the most prominent Iraqi-American political activists, with many followers who trust his sophisticated political experience and commentary on social media. Antoon's writing career began in 2002, when he wrote some articles and published them in exile. His major works are four novels: *I'jaam*, *The Corpse Washer*, *The Baghdad Eucharist*, and *The Book of Collateral Damage.* All these works deal with social, political, and religious issues in Iraq. Most of his novels are set in Iraq, where he lived for twenty-three years, however *The Book of Collateral Damage*, takes place in two countries: United States and Iraq. He is currently writing a novel about two young people who emigrate from Iraq to settle in New York. Antoon has published two collections of poetry and some articles in (Arabic and English). His book of poetry, *The Baghdad Blues,* displays one of his major themes, which is his critical reaction to the First Gulf War and to the dictatorship of Saddam. His literary works (novels, and poetry) offer a critique of sectarian violence and reveal a sense of nostalgia for the homeland from a place of exile. Antoon's thoughts dwell on mediation and how to look at political issues

from an unbiased perspective; he is critical of both Iraqi domestic policy and U.S. foreign policy. Antoon not only has written and translated books, but he has also been the co-director and co-producer of a documentary titled *About Baghdad*. In an interview on YouTube, he describes the range of his literary output as being like a musician who can play various musical instruments in various styles. Moreover, he does not believe in borders between literary genres; rather he believes that each literary genre displays particular generic traits which may successfully convey his critical points to readers.

After he freed himself from a tyrannical regime by fleeing to the United States in 1991, he experienced more freedom in writing. But, living in United States has agitated his nostalgia, as well as awakening his drive to confront political issues bravely. While he was not able to write and publish any of his work when he was in Iraq, when he travelled to Paris, he published his first article in Arabic. He went on to write and publish. His first novel in Arabic. *I'jaam*, was published in 2004.

The parallel between the author and his fictional characters, in terms of their thoughts, longings, and desires, is one of the most interesting and significant connections that I will shed light on. Arabic readers often see similarities between the writer and his characters. For example, readers who know Antoon's biography may see aspects of the writer in Dr. Nameer, the main character in *The Book of Collateral Damage*, published in Arabic as *Fihris*, just as readers may see similar views on religion and nostalgia shared by Antoon and Youssef, the main character in *The Baghdad Eucharist,* published in Arabic as *Ya Maryam*. Despite these similarities, it would be a mistake to identify Antoon's characters as strictly autobiography representations. Middle Eastern readers'

attempts to make connections between the writer and his characters have been an old game repeated through generations. Just because Antoon and Youssef both have Christian backgrounds, they should not be seen as identical.

Antoon's biography and literary productions resonate with me because my own story, growing up in Iraq during times of conflict and emigrating to the U.S. after the second Gulf War, parallels his. When I learned about his biography and read his novels for the first time, I felt that I was one of his characters, and I am sure many Iraqi readers feel the same. Sinan Antoon brings to the surface many powerful details of the sufferings of Iraqis during the rule of Sadaam Hussein, the Gulf Wars, and after. He informs his English readers about cultural, traditional, religious, political and psychological aspects of Iraq. He deals with dictatorship and war and shows their disastrous effects—how they crush Iraqi Identity. Experiences of loss make people feel as if they are living on board a ship careening on the ocean, Nobody knows where this ship can find safe anchor. Sailing without a beautiful dream or hope, people face storms in a gloomy environment. In the first and second chapter I will discuss both Antoon's life story and his critique of the war and dictatorship at greater length, connecting his life and ideas to his literary works. I will trace a series of historical events in Iraq, events which have shaped the author and which he has chronicled. I will also trace how those events shape Antoon's novels, thematically and structurally.

The second topic, which I explore in the third chapter, is translation, which can be divided into three sections: Antoon's translation of his own works, Antoon's translation of other authors' literary works, and other translators' translations of some of Antoon's

works. Some translation issues that will be discussed include ways the original text conceals possible meanings, and cultural contexts and expressions that may not be apparent in translations.

Antoon is a bilingual writer who writes in both Arabic and English. He has translated his own literary works, as well as those of other writers. He has translated his novel *The Corpse Washer* from Arabic to English and collaborated with Rebecca C. Johnson on the translation of *I'jaam*. He has translated other writers' works, such as *The Book of Disappearance* by Palestinian writer Ibtisam Azem and *In the Presence of Absence* by Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, while he has let other translators translate his other novels: *The Baghdad Eucharist* (translated by Maia Tabet) and *The Book of Collateral Damage* (translated by Johnathan Wright). His translation of *The Corpse Washer* is an impressive work. The meaning in English conforms precisely to the original Arabic. I will analyze his translation of specific passages and phrases in my project, showing his accuracy. Antoon seeks to preserve the meaning and context of the original in his translation. His instinctive professional facility in both languages enables him to convert the word literally from one language (Arabic) to the other (English). The translator, in general, must choose the best fitting word (*le mot juste*) and unveil the shadow meaning of the word. I take Antoon as an example of a translator who makes the right word choices in his translations. Because Antoon is both the writer and the translator of his novel *The Corpse Washer*, he precisely removes any possible shadow meaning of the source language in order to make it clear in the target language. He skillfully manages this, despite dissimilarities between the two cultures and rituals which may pose challenges to the English reader.

During an interview Antoon was asked whether he made any significant changes while translating *The Corpse Washer.* He answers that he did not because once he finished writing the novel, the characters and the incidents were already imprinted in his mind and were fixed. Moreover, he adds that while translating he intentionally forgets that he is the author of the novel in order precisely to transfer the same images. Furthermore, he believes that when the author finishes writing his novel, nobody should mess with it, even if the writer himself is the translator. This is one of the most important points that I need to extend, supplying more examples, and making comparisons between Antoon's translation and others' translations of Antoon's literary works. Indeed, all translators are successful at preserving the original meaning and context, except Wright who has little nuance in his translation. For instance, *The Book of Collateral Damage,* translated by Johnathan Wright produces different effects, perhaps because he is not the writer, or perhaps because his grasp of the two languages is not sufficient. Wright unintentionally or intentionally skips translating one statement in his translation, (**اه من شرك الحنين**) (33), which I have translated as [Uh, from the trap of nostalgia] (31). This is a significant phrase that Wright should not cut out because it applies to the protagonist's inner image. There are many possible reasons for cutting this phrase, but I could not find any compelling reason. Moreover, what surprises me is that Antoon did not pay attention to it, although he is author and has translated works into English. As the translator reviews his work, he seeks to reduce his errors.

The third dimension of inquiry, addressed in chapter four, involves close examination of transnational movement and immigration, focusing on Antoon's perspectives and those of his characters. I will make comparisons between Antoon's

approach and other Western expatriate writers' approaches. In this part I will filter out the main impressions in the characters of Antoon's novels, particular the sense of loss of those characters' experience. This sort of loss can be applied to Antoon and can be compared to the ways of other Western writers, such as Paul Bowles and George Steiner, who have responded to exile and expatriation. I intend to shed light on Antoon's diasporic perspective through the lens of his characters. Antoon's second novel, *The Baghdad Eucharist*, titled *Ya Maryam* in Arabic, which was shortlisted for the International Prize for Arabic Fiction in 2013, exposes two opposite perspectives on immigration through two different characters. The novel recounts two Christian families that live together in the same house. Maha and her husband, displaced by sectarian violence, plan to emigrate to another country. Youssef, an old man, rejects the idea of immigration, although all his family left to live in the diaspora a long time ago. The difference in viewpoints is because of the age difference between Maha and Youssef, like the difference in viewpoints between Jawad and his father who insists that Jawad follows his career in *The Corpse Washer*. In other words, the age difference will certainly engender differences in the ideologies and thoughts between Jawad and his father, as well as Maha and Youssef, although they share the same religion. As usual, Antoon uses Time as the major measure to structure his novel. Maha accuses Youssef of living in the past, while he sees her as young and naïve. The interaction between older and younger generations unveils another binary that Antoon rejects in all its aspects. He points to a third possibility. Neither Maha nor Youssef is wrong. Both have valid views, based on personal life experience. I will further explore Antoon's mediation of Maha and Youssef's opinions.

Antoon presents Youssef's negative view on immigration as a warning of the challenge of life in the diaspora. His decision to stay in Iraq results in his death in a church explosion during the period of sectarian violence. In *The Book of Collateral Damage* Antoon again addresses the theme of immigration, showing the inner suffering that Dr. Nameer experiences upon returning to Baghdad, after being abroad. Dr. Nameer's character may reflect some of Antoon's complicated feelings, involving nostalgia, suffering, and critical perspectives on Iraqi politics.

I have noticed that Time plays a huge role in Antoon's thoughts, especially the role of the past that affects his archaic reminiscence. The past shapes Antoon's imagination. The influence of Time, drawing from my reading of Antoon's work. The past figures for Antoon in ways that might remind us of its importance in William Faulkner's work. Rather like Faulkner, Sinan Antoon considers the past as still existing and present all the time. He depicts some modern historical events as though they are happening in the present. Obviously, those historical events live in Antoon's imagination. He rejected the dictatorial demands during the previous regime. He refused to write articles that support the ideology of Saddam's regime. Eventually he freed his imagination when he immigrated to the United States.

I will examine some important facts and incidents that have been caused by the war since those facts are part of a history on which Antoon draws, making connections between the author, incidents, and characters. Antoon's success as a writer lies in his ability to evoke the history of his home country, crystalize it in his works such that it becomes alive in readers' imaginations. He bridges the past with the present and bridges

two different languages and cultures. This process is expressed through the title *The Presence of Absence*, a book by Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish that Antoon translated. In *The Book of Collateral Damage* Antoon reveals his feelings of being absent and the awareness he gains in exile (31). All those signs of absence are expressed many times in Antoon's works in various figures and expressions. Antoon's nostalgia clearly appears in his work in the diaspora, which is a significant feature of diasporic literature.

Certainly, nostalgia and memory influence his work. Antoon is not only a writer, but an historian of Iraq. The three parts of this thesis cover most of the significant issues related to Antoon's work: The writer's biography, translation issues, and the diasporic condition.

Chapter I

Sinan Antoon as an Idealist Writer

In order to understand Sinan Antoon's literary production, we must first review formative aspects of his biography. Sinan Antoon, the expatriate poet, novelist, translator, and scholar, was born in Baghdad in 1967 to an Iraqi father and an American mother. Having parents with two different native languages assists him to break culture and language barriers. Antoon travelled from Iraq to the United States in 1991 after receiving his B.A. from Baghdad University in 1990. In the U.S. he married Ibtism Azem, the well-known Palestinian short story writer, novelist, and journalist. Antoon completed graduate degrees at Georgetown and Harvard where he received his Ph.D. in Arabic literature in 2006. He now teaches at the Gallatin School of Individualized Studies at New York University. He at once an activist and writer.

Antoon's writing career began in 2002. His major works, as noted in the introduction, are four novels: *I'jaam*, *The Corpse Washer*, *The Baghdad Eucharist*, and *The Book of Collateral Damage.* All these works deal with social, political, and religious issues in Iraq, where he lived for twenty-three years. Antoon organizes his novels chronologically, following developments in contemporary Iraqi history, such as the dictatorship period, prewar and postwar periods, the period of sectarian violence, and finally the period of immigration. His first novel *I'jaam* narrates a writer's struggles under a dictatorial regime. *The Corpse Washer*, the winner of the 2014 Arab American

Book and longlisted for the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize, Antoon's second novel, recounts the story of a man named Jawad who lives during the transitional period in Iraq, beginning in a tyrannical regime through the war, and ending with the "liberation" of Iraq. The third novel is *The Book of Collateral Damages*, in which the main character Nameer, an Iraqi intellectual, lives in exile, and visits his home country (Iraq) after the "liberation" of Iraq in 2003. Antoon has published two collections of poetry and some articles in (Arabic and English). *The Baghdad Blues*, a collection of poetry, displays one of his major themes: his critical reactions to the First Gulf War and to the dictatorship of Saddam's regime. His literary works--novels and poetry--criticize sectarian violence and reveal a sense of nostalgia for the homeland from a place of exile.

The parallel between the author and his fictional characters--their thoughts, longings, and desires-- is one of the most interesting and significant issues that I need to shed light on. Arabic readers often detect similarities between the writer and his characters. For example, readers who are aware of Antoon's biography may notice some aspects of the writer in the personality of Dr. Nameer, the main character in *The Book of Collateral Damage*, published in Arabic as *Fihris*. Other readers may see similar views on religion and nostalgia shared by Antoon and his character Youssef, the main character in *The Baghdad Eucharist,* published in Arabic as *Ya Maryam*. Despite these similarities, it would be a mistake to identify Antoon's characters strictly as autobiographical representations. Middle Eastern readers' attempts to make connections between the writer and his characters have been an old game repeated through generations. Just because Antoon and Youssef both have Christian background, they should not be seen as identical.

Antoon dwells on mediation and how to look at political issues from an unbiased perspective. For instance, he voiced his disagreement with the First Gulf War in 1991, while at the same time he challenged the old regime in Iraq. Antoon, thus, stood in the middle, opposing both dictatorship and war While living in the United States, where he moved in 1991, has provided him with more freedom, it has also provoked his nostalgia, in addition to awakening his wish to confront political issues bravely. Sinan Antoon's political ideas, which have taken two trajectories, are clearly depicted in his novels. His loathing for the dictatorship is reflected in his first novel *I'jaam*, written primarily to critique the fascist political system in Iraq. Antoon plunged into political issues as a first step in his literary works since politics and literature are inseparable for any Middle Eastern writer. There, the writer dives into the swamp of politics; there, the writer has no options: either support the government or stand against it. The regime engages in surveillance over all citizens' activities including in the home, education, and even athletics. Antoon realizes the risk of practicing his freedom of writing which definitely would lead him to the gallows. This possibly fatal work of writing is clearly portrayed in *I'jaam.* Any writer can understand the risk of doing literary work under fascism. The meaning of the slogan which is inscribed on the tyrant's picture in each college is the best example of this hazardous path. The slogan indicates writers' critiques as dissenters against the authority, their pens write poison words to mobilize people against the government, As Antoon remarks, "The pen and the gun have one barrel" (3). The equivalence and unification of the power of the gun and pen in this slogan suggest that the word is as powerful as a weapon in battle; consequently, the regime demands that the word be linked to its own political and military purposes. Undercover agents infiltrate the

schools. They are students, employees, and professors. There is no way to revolt through criticism or dissent. Indeed, scholars become very frustrated reading distorted truths in the newspapers, which are simply mouthpieces of the government, spewing propaganda. Writing is the spark that ignites revolutions. *I'jaam* displays ways writers can use Arabic subversively, as a safe sort of resistance. Arabic letters have dots, and when the writer does not put in those dots, the Arabic word may have more than one meaning. Furat, the protagonist of *I'jaam*, writes some pages without putting dots on the Arabic letters. Government intelligence agents read these pages and try to decode the meaning of each word, but fortunately they fail. This idea underscores the skilled usage of language as a tool of opposition to one of the most dangerous totalitarian regimes in the Middle East.

All books had to be approved by the Ministry of Culture before they were released to the public. Some foreign books and articles have been banned, such as works by George Orwell, in addition to other Iraqi poets' books, such as those of Al-Jawahiri, who was deemed the poet of Arabs. Al Jawahiri has influenced Antoon's life and work in significant ways. For example, both have written about issues of the homeland from a place of exile, both have evaded the regime's hammer, and both have charismatic personalities. The old regime is not able to ban all Al Jawahiri's literary works because the quality of his poetry compels that it be taught in Iraqi schools. Although Antoon has opposed the succession of governments from 2003 until now, Iraqi readers who support the new governments still read Antoon's works, and some readers are influenced by his articles and ideas for political reform. Now Iraqi readers can read what they want, while under Saddam's regime readers could not read what the government banned. Antoon depicts a lasting image in the mind of each dissident who lived under Saddam's regime,

sharing banned cassettes among fellow dissidents with the knowledge that it was dangerous to listen to or read banned books. Antoon tells how he used to get the cassettes of Al Jawahiri's poetry: "Some of his poems were smuggled in on cassette tapes that we would trade secretly in school" (69). Those cassettes of Al Jawahiri's poems call for reformation and democracy which threaten the government. Consequently, the government detained many political writers and activists, which, in turn prompted other interesting topics for writers, such as life in prison or jail and the fear of death. *I'jaam* vividly illustrates life in Saddam's prisons from the early 80s until the end of the 90s. Prisoners have been convicted for being critics, poets, or writers, and were especially badly treated if their minority religious views or Communist tendencies are displayed in their writings. Antoon skillfully depicts realistic images of how political writers struggle for a prosperous future. Writers were tortured brutally in the prisons, suffering sexual abuse, disrespect, manipulation, and dehumanization by the tyrant's followers. Meantime, the propaganda machine sought to embellish the leader's image in order to frighten people from pursuing money or power. Antoon has refused to be affected or controlled by the ideological agenda of the government. The political slogans, some written with cheap pens, are everywhere endlessly repeated, making them meaningless and making people numb to them. As he writes:

> Perhaps they have won, with all this filth they've smeared on the walls of my memory and subconscious—their slogans the reek of piss, the shit that piles up in the abandoned streets of my body. How can I be rid of it without dying myself, or going mad? Their chants penetrate my ears and

> eyes and seep out of my anus, only to invade again through my mouth, and I have no choice but to swallow them, while they mock me. (22).

The domination of the unconsciousness is the main goal of the regime, which it uses to distort the truth and make people believe what the regime wants them to believe. The situation of some writers becomes an intriguing paradox. Rationally they admit the truth but avoid writing it in the press or even uttering it to themselves. For more than two decades the disgraceful writers of the regime bolstered and praised the tyrant rather than uphold sanctioned values. Panegyric and acclamation become a part of Arabic literature under dictatorial regimes. Antoon refuses to have any part of this; the only chance for Antoon was to leave for another country, in order to write freely. He astutely unveils the noxious hegemony of the press that has a negative effect on identity, making people submissive and fragmented. Antoon rejects the regime's hegemony and becomes a productive, sharp writer when he settles in exile. His novel *I'jaam* is a dazzling, sophisticated political critique with poignant images of sexual abuse in the prisons of the regime, in contrast to the work of some writers who glorify power, incorporating or creating trivial slogans, lyric songs, tales of battle, and nationalist poetry, thus serving the regime's purposes. Criticism is completely absent in this sort of literature. Anyone who ever dared to criticize power would be persecuted and legally sentenced to death.

Politics is the main thing that forces writers to live in the exile. In *I'jaam* Antoon realizes and reflects upon what a tough job it is be a writer. Alongside politics, religion is the second main theme in Antoon's works. *The Corpse Washer* and *The Baghdad Eucharist* deliberately discuss some of the sharp connections between religious and

political issues. Antoon conveys the truth of the role religious parties play as opponents of the regime, yet after 2003 those same religious dissidents become political figures who hold the reins of power. Certainly, Antoon criticizes the merging of politics and religion. This merging reinforces the idea of "Duplicity" in Iraqi identity. The doubling of identity within the same character is the sharp sword that could slaughter belief. Instead of bolstering strong faith, doubling in identity makes it weaker. Having two faces—one political and other religious—is an old game that can deceive the uneducated or be exploited by greedy people. Traditionally, religious principle had been associated with abstinence and stoicism. A good example of the kind of duplicity seen in *The Baghdad Eucharist*, is Tariq Aziz, the Christian minister of foreign affairs in Iraq during the last phase of Sadaam's rule. Aziz professed his loyalty to the church, but indeed he was very dedicated and devoted to power and the political machine. Antoon points to Aziz in Youssef's debates with his sister Hinna. Yousef disagrees with Hinna, maintaining that Aziz's support of the church, indicating his faith, is undermined by his loyalty to Saddam's regime, but Hana states that "He made generous donations to the church, and had footed the bill for the magnificent new chandeliers hanging from the ceiling" (12). Yousef counters: "His contributions did not absolve him of responsibility for his history and his actions" (12). Yousef asserts that Aziz could not disassociate himself from the historic massacres against Kurds and Shiites in Iraq simply because he goes to church. The people in power, who mix religion with politics, are most likely imposters and great actors in houses of worship. The majority of them attempt to attract people's attention to their fake dedication to God, while, in fact, they worship their prestigious positions in the government.

The similarity between *I'jaam* by Antoon and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell attracts my attention, in terms of their shared subject and other details. Both are dystopian novels, dealing with government surveillance and social disintegration resulting from the fear of the ruling Party. In both *I'jaam* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* criticism and unauthorized thoughts are unacceptable and may lead the writers in their novels to be condemned to death. The protagonist (Furat) in *I'jaam* feels oppressed by the Baath Party (the totalitarian party of Saddam), and the prevalent despotism that has absolute political authority in ruling the country. Nepotism in the regime contributed to the absence of justice. Furat's painful experience of psychological and physical manipulation in prison adds to the pessimism, darkness, and frustration in the novel. George Orwell wrote *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in 1948 to warn people of possible future authoritarian rule. Unfortunately, his prophecy becomes reality in the 1980s in Iraq as Antoon shows in *I'jaam*. Antoon realizes the parallels between *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the realities of individual life in Iraq that Antoon depicts in his novel. He suggests this connection in *I'jaam* when he refers to the risk of writing about Orwell's books. Furat wants to write his thesis about Orwell's works, such as *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, but his professor, Areej, warns him against doing so, as well does Um Sa'ad (the librarian) who tells him that *1984* is on a list she has received of banned books, which she is not allowed to give to any student. Books that are not consistent with Ba'thist ideology will certainly be banned. Of course, criticism can be taught in the universities, but it cannot be used against those in power. Censoring books is not enough for the government; it goes further and monitors the language of writers. In *1984* the government invents a language called Newspeak. This language does not include

critique. It has one goal which is to support the government's ambitions. The ruling authority perceives that language can pose a threat that would potentially oust the current ruling class; therefore, they proclaim to the public that they uphold democracy, while they actually fight it.

Ba'thist ideology imposes many new political ideas that exclude opposing views. Propaganda is one of the hegemonic tools that has been used by totalitarians of the Ba'th party. People believe what they hear and see in the news. Unfortunately, anyone who does not believe the propaganda will be called a traitor by society. Any person's opinion and behavior should conform to prevailing social views, even if those views are wrong. Kendra Cherry, writer and educational consultant in psychology, defines this kind of conformity: "Changing your behaviors in order to 'fit in' or 'go along' with the people around you." (1). Conformity may be a normal practice for many people in society, but this "normal practice" is very dangerous under totalitarian rule. The fear of the regime by the majority of the people prevents people from ever thinking outside the box. It became impossible to break from conformity during the old regime, until of end that the black comedy, when the fearful barrier inside people's minds began to break down. Furat, the protagonist in *I'jaam*, is arrested because he tells his friend a joke about the regime. This joke is actually the black comedy that can encourage writers to overcome their fear of challenging the dictatorship.

Power is shaped like a pyramid, with the dictator on top, the resources of the totalitarian state in the middle, and the masses at the base. Propaganda is generated to keep the party and its leadership in power. The Ba'ath party's role is to produce

propaganda that secures the position of Ba'athists and the dictator. Consequently, propaganda is the soft yellow pretty skin of a poisonous snake. The work of Hannah Arendt, a political thinker and theorist who immigrated from Germany to America in 1941, remains relevant to contemporary instances of authoritarianism. Her 1951 study *The Origins of Totalitarianism* deals with totalitarianism in the aftermath of WWII and the fall of fascism in Germany. Arendt declares that propaganda and horror are totalitarian tools like two faces of one coin. As she states, "Propaganda is indeed part and parcel of 'psychological warfare'; but terror is more. Terror continues to be used by totalitarian regimes even when its psychological aims are achieved" (344). Arendt points to the hegemony of the psychology of masses through propaganda and fear, the most useful tools of the totalitarian. She regards propaganda as "Direct threat and crimes against individuals" (345). The main purpose of propaganda is to promote the party's ideology and make it serve rulers' interests. Ideology is created to serve and strengthen a certain power. Louis Althusser unveils the origin of ideology in his work *Ideology Has No History*, declaring "it has no history of its own" (1349). Althusser refers to an important idea: If ideology has no history, that means ideology is intentionally created by certain people for the purpose of domination.

Certainly, writers must be a part of the regime's propaganda; if they refuse to participate in the regime's programs, they will be considered traitors. In other words, the writer must carefully write in synch with the ideology of the ruling authority. Along lines presented by Althusser, propaganda permeates and is spread through TV channels, schools, journals, and youth centers. Propagandistic novels and newspapers are the only ones permitted in bookstores; other material will be banned. State authorized news and

articles can substitute falsehoods for fact. Moreover, the regime draws its support from those with rural backgrounds who are very simple and credulous. They believe what they watch in the media.

Antoon illustrates in *I'jaam* how propaganda plays a huge role in shaping and altering the truth. He purposely narrates how the president honors and rewards those who support the regime. As Antoon writes, "The leader was awarding a medal of courage to a man who killed his son for refusing to return to his military unit" (35). Antoon reveals how the ruling authority flips the truth which is that the son was killed as a result of a family dispute. He writes: "It appeared as though he had killed his son after an argument that had no relationship to nationalist duty, but rather family dispute" (35). Sadly, naïve citizens believe what the media has reported which presents a problematic issue for sophisticated and enlightened intellectuals who want to promote the truth. The majority of intellectuals in Iraq are religious scholars who belong to groups such as the Da'awa party or Communist leaders of the communist party, both of which were banned parties during the period of Ba'ath party rule. Antoon rejects both Fascist and Communist ideology. Although Ba'athists criticize Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, Francisco Franco, and Juan Peron, in fact Ba'athist and fascist ideology are alike; both promote nationalism at all costs. The basis of ruling people depends on fear. Every individual in a totalitarian society is afraid of the person above him, a pattern taking hierarchical shape. The leader sits on the top and gives executive orders that are passed on down to the bottom. Antoon displays this fear in *I'jaam*, and how this fear influences Furat in prison. Fear becomes a part of the daily life of Furat, a writer. Pen and the paper are tools of writing, which can be either a source of liberty or lead to the guillotine. What he writes can cost his life. The

pen that might be used to write critiques can be used to sign an executive order putting the writer to death. Antoon is a writer who persistently writes to reveal the truth of the old regime. Liberty is constrained within tight boundaries. Breaking through these boundaries in order to reach liberty can cost a lot, perhaps even one's life. Antoon's political insights motivate him to use his magic pen to call for freedom and human rights, standing up against the Iraqi tyrant. History will severely vilify those writers who enable and support the unfair ruler. Those authors who survive under tyrannical regimes and publicly proclaim the truth are rare and bold.

Antoon devotes attention to the topic of communism in his novels. The communist party in Iraq was founded on Mach 31, 1934, an event that becomes a nightmare for many subsequent governments in Iraq, because of its polarizing effect in the public sphere due to its ideological belief in equality between the Bourgeoisie and Proletarians. This ideology appeals to the majority of the population who are basically from the lower class. The secret behind the success of the communist party is its interactions with various social classes, cutting across religious lines. This ideology proclaims the equality of people regardless of their class, religion, or even race. Of course, that can attract many from the middle and lower classes. Once the Ba'ath party gained power, in 1979, they started arresting Communist party members. The ideological differences between the two parties led to clashes between them. Antoon depicts tragic images of some members of the Communist party. He has created three minor Communist characters, one in each of his novels, as he wants to show that the ideology of the Communist party used to be influential in the Middle East. Incidentally, the names of the Communist characters in *I'jaam* and *The Baghdad Eucharist* are the same. Elias, a

Christian character with a Christian name, embraces Communism. In *I'jaam* Elias is the second cousin of the main character Furat. He is under surveillance for a year. In addition, he spends one year in prison, and is occasionally interrogated by the state security. In *The Baghdad Eucharist,* Elias is the third brother of the protagonist Youssef. He is under surveillance for years because he is a political activist. His polemical debates with his friends led him to be detained and kept in prison for several years. Eventually, he ends up being lost in the streets, suffering from Alzheimer's. Yousef's family looked for him but could not find him. He is finally found dead at the house that had been used to hold secret meetings of his comrades in the Communist party. Alzheimer's disease affects his memory, though he remembers the place of his secret political meetings, which remains immortal in his memory. As Antoon writes, "Elias's Alzheimer's, or whatever dementia afflicted him, had erased everything except for that old party haunt" (40). Elias's solid belief in his party lives with him forever. Usually, Alzheimer's hits the brain (memory), and its victims lose control of everything. His sincerity, loyalty, and faithfulness to his party remain fixed in Elias's mind as unconscious elements because of his belief. He becomes a victim of corrupt political systems, whether he belongs to the Ba'ath or Communist party.

Sabri, Jawad's uncle, the Communist character in *The Corpse Washer,* has lived in exile for several years before he returns to Iraq at the conclusion of the second Gulf War. This character embodies three connected elements representing the key emphases of my research: he is a political activist, a translator, and lives for some time in a place of exile. The connection among those three elements is obvious and unconsciously instilled in the character. Sabri looks for his comrades in the Communist party when he comes

back to Iraq, but unfortunately most of them have fled to another country while the rest of them have joined religious parties to get votes in the elections. The Communist party's goals change: the party becomes submissive to other parties' goals. Sabri is disappointed that the Communist party did not achieve its ambitions. In fact, the party's betrayal is a shock to Sabri who has strongly believed in the party. The Communist party is murdered twice: once by the Ba'ath party, then again by other religious parties.

Political circumstances differ from time to time and place to place. Political slogans too are susceptible to change, created to respond to particular political facts. Antoon describes this volatility as being like changing shoes every season. He writes in *I jaam*, "I discovered that day that political slogans were like shoes, to be worn depending on the season or terrain. They are the shine, the heavy, the supple, and the spurred" (42). He refers to how political actors can change their masks, posing now as a Ba'athist, now as religious, depending on political expedience. Political hypocrisy is inseparable from political ideology, whereas a politician has a duplicitous identity. Antoon shows how some Communists, such as Elias in *I'jaam* and *The Baghdad Eucharist*, sacrifice for their party, while some Ba'athists claim that they had been Communists and later join religious parties just to gain positions in the new government. The politicians change their essential principles just as the chameleon changes its colors based on the environment. Thus, the successful politician has more than one mask that he can wear depending on which is the most expedient at the time. Two factors can expose this kind of opportunism and hypocrisy: honest media and an educated society. Unfortunately, the corrupt political system, especially dictatorial regimes, endeavors to keep people uneducated and promotes dishonest media. Education threatens the ruling system of the dictator. The

oppressive ruling system's plan is to control the minds of their population through various means, such as media, newspapers, posters, and educational curriculum. If that does not work, they will use fear as a warning to anyone who would dare to step out of line.

As a Middle Eastern writer, Antoon feels an obligation to convey true images of various types of oppression to reflect the tragedy of these societies. Antoon, as a committed writer dedicated to telling the truth, displays harsh realities so that his readers might see and criticize the unfairness, and the absence of justice. He wants his readers to free themselves from the mindset of old regimes and be aware of politics as participants, not only observers. He reveals the significance of those true writers, who persistently work to clear the foggy thoughts of their readers.

I summarize the significant points that have been discussed above. Antoon illustrates through his characters how distorted political reflections influence the citizenry. Many critics and readers see similarities between the author and his characters. These similarities add a sense of realism to the novels, which depict tragic images and embody the deep psychological thoughts of his characters. Each character has at least one or two characteristics seen in the author, such as religion, nationality, tradition, or even thoughts. I have noted, too, that Antoon refuses to side either with the forces of dictatorship or the forces of war. He stresses the significance of the writer as a guide and educator for his reader. He puts himself at risk for revealing the truth. The absence of critics means the absence of democracy, which is what happens in a dictatorial regime. Antoon refuses to be like the writers who become the tools that support authoritarian

agendas. This sort of rejection is dangerous business. For instance, Furat, a dissenter who tries to hide his criticism, is tortured, and abused in the prison. At least Furat tries to write in a clever way, not putting dots on words which makes the word have more than one meaning.

Antoon's main goal is to increase awareness. The writer's duty is to save people from living in a state of fear and illusion. Furat notes that George Orwell is a writer whose books are banned by the regime. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell invites comparisons between the oppressive apparatuses in that novel and those used by the regime in Iraq. These ruling regimes dominate the minds of individuals by posting the leader's pictures everywhere—even in houses, controlling the media, censoring newspapers before publishing them, and many other normal acts that must submit to security surveillance. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *I'jaam* are dystopian novels, both displaying pessimism, darkness, and frustration. The characters are melancholic and have no future to look forward to. Antoon points to the connection between religion and politics. Religious people who become involved in politics will become duplicitous and deceptive. They wear more than one mask to carry on their projects. This sort if of politician has existed every time and everywhere.

Antoon's sympathy for the Iraqi Communists is evident in his novels. Antoon sheds light on Communism because the ideology of this party was prominent and viable in that period. His depiction of Elias as Christian and Communist is the best example of the loyal, faithful, and trustworthy member of the party. Of course, the clash between the fascist ideology of the Ba'athists, on one side, and the Communist ideology, on the other

side. ruptured the fabric of society. The Communists have been under surveillance for years, regardless of whether they are either active or not. Some of them have died in Ba'athist prisons. Elias's return to the secret shelter of the Communist party, at a time his memory is failing, indicates his freedom from Ba'athist ideology. Sabri, the Communist character, notices that the new generations of the Communist party have changed their ideology to fit the exigencies of society. Who would think that the Communists would align themselves with the religious parties? Antoon criticizes the change in principles, a change that in fact occurred. Political change and adaptation exist everywhere and in every time period. Politicians have duplicitous identities. No matter which one is the real identity, it is hypocrisy. This hypocritical mask is worn by many writers who have praised the old regime, and currently praise the new regime. Antoon professionally presents his characters in his novels, his deep study to the Arabic readers' requirements of reflecting injustice of the autocracy and the despondency of bright future feature effective and aesthetic works.

Chapter II

Antoon's Critique of the War and Authoritarianism

War environments are seen throughout Antoon's works. The actual incidents that are described in his novels, while they are tragic and pessimistic, give his characters verisimilitude. Antoon acts as both author and historian. The contents of his four novels can be categorized chronologically according to three periods: pre-first war, war, and post-second war. Within his works, the prewar stage addresses the mobilization and justification for war through ideological media. The war stage displays and reflects on tragic scenes of wartime devastation and loss of life, and the postwar stage shows how characters cope with the psychological suffering caused by wartime trauma. This chapter focuses on these three periods and discusses major events and their effects on the characters. Antoon expresses his belief in pacifism by criticizing the war and emphasizing the permanent negative impact that wartime devastation has on characters' minds. He couples his loathing for war with his desire to oust the dictatorship, condemning both the old regime and the warmongers. However, this stance seems somewhat contradictory. Antoon rejects the war and wants the dictator to abdicate peacefully, yet a nonviolent transition of power is highly unlikely. This is reflected in Antoon's works. For example, in *I'jaam*, he challenges the political judgement of

despotism and illustrates the brutality and savagery of the regime, and in *The Corpse Washer*, he sharply criticizes the Gulf War.

Dark, tragic images of war establish the dystopian, psychological, and compelling tone found within Antoon's novels. The synthetic structure of characters' minds—formed by the ideology of a tyrannical authority and the fear of frequent wars—can serve as a basis to examine many significant cases of those born before and after the war. Antoon is similar to many anti-war English writers of the twentieth century, including Storm Jameson, Aldous Huxley, and Siegfried Sassoon, who used their works to reveal common issues like depression, psychological warfare, the fear of loss, and turmoil. Antoon also focuses on such sobering topics because they play an important role in changing society. This focus is accompanied by dark images, presents melancholic subjects, and conveys a sense of bitterness. For example, in *The Corpse Washer*, Antoon relates a gothic tale that centers on the horrors of killing and the process of cleansing corpses, extremely dark imagery within the historical and religious contexts of the novel.

Psychological warfare is one of the worst weapons used against the human mind. The psychological aspects of Antoon's characters add a distinctive ethical quality to his literary works. People agonize over the war and the dictatorship, and Antoon brings their psychological tribulations to the surface, encouraging a psychoanalytical approach to his works. Lyndsey Stonebridge, a professor of Humanities and Human Rights at the University of Birmingham, affirms the connection between psychoanalysis and literature; psychoanalysis facilitates the understanding of complex characters. She also emphasizes the ambiguity of this connection, stating, "The history of the relationship between

psychoanalysis and English literature is the history of various and diverse attempts to name an enigmatic something" (269). Stonebridge discusses the importance of understanding this connection and the ways in which psychoanalysis interprets the unconscious, asserting, "Freud was significant not only because he drew attention to the sheer force of the unconscious, but also because he insisted on the value of interpretation" (271). Psychoanalysis can be applied to literature to understand characters and their neuroses. Moreover, psychoanalysis contributes to our understanding of the inner conflicts of characters which come from this psychic condition; the inner conflicts and psychic conditions are like rust on metal. Before the war, people saw their future as a mirage destined to fade away. Before the war, the tough war produced black smoke signaling a dark end. Everybody looks at his relative's face and speculates; it could be the last look. Parents store as much food as they can for a possible shortage or famine. Writers prepare their pens and papers to line up, describe, and capture the most sorrowful images.

Antoon left Iraq after the onset of the First Gulf War in 1991. He experienced the psychological impact of warfare, which no doubt helped him effectively portray the tragic imagery in *The Corpse Washer*. Antoon depicts the process of preparing for war and the fear of death that haunts characters' homes. Such images occur in both the First and Second Gulf Wars. Ranjana Khanna, a literary critic, theorist, and feminist, examines significant points within *The Corpse Washer* and discusses the connection between the body and Jawad's hands. She declares that death is a normal occurrence when due to illness or natural causes, but that death resulting from war is intolerable. Her critique

focuses on how Antoon deals with death and explores significant topics in *The Corpse Washer*. She states:

> We come to understand how the inhabitants of Jawad's Baghdad suffer relentless war, homelessness, and illness wrought through depleted uranium—the slow effects of the nuclear rather than the sublime horror of the idea of immediate annihilation that criticizes the nuclear apocalyptic imaginary (410).

Like Antoon, Khanna criticizes the war, and her analysis emphasizes the destructive qualities of war in *The Corpse Washer*. Antoon ironically welcomes the Second Gulf War as if it were a visitor and portrays this irony in *The Corpse Washer*: "But we got ready for wars as if we were welcoming a visitor we knew very well, hoping to make his stay a pleasant one. During the last few weeks before the war we bought plenty of candles and canned food just in case" (61). Everyone seeks to be physically and mentally prepared for the war, whether they agree with it or not. The possibility of separation frightens families; they say each farewell as though they may never meet again. These images inspire sympathy for the characters and tie them to the action. Indeed, these images are inspired by real ones. People's fates are unknown and could be worse than death. Death becomes a familiar feature and terrifies everybody once the war starts.

The days preceding the war are aggravating. Antoon reflects, "I remembered how we took precaution for the 1991 war and sealed the bathroom window with the tape both outside and inside. They instructed us on the TV to do so in order to protect ourselves in

the event of an attack with chemical weapons" (61). The old regime's propaganda effectively frightens citizens with predictions of chemical warfare. Antoon reflects on people's preparations for attack by chemical weapons. Before the war, everyone tapes their windows to prevent harm from fragments of broken glass. Such precautions are taken to protect people; especially primary schools' windows are taped. Antoon skillfully articulates the mental and physical torments experienced during the pre-war period, drawing directly from reality without embellishment. In *The Book of Collateral Damage*, he describes US soldiers gathered in the airport, preparing to go to battle: "The rest were soldiers who seemed to be on their way to the fronts in Iraq or Afghanistan" (118). Antoon skillfully deploys images from both the United States and Iraq in order to criticize the war, and the people who started it. He recognizes soldiers as victims of war as well, remarking, "I realize that most of them were also victims of the massive machine of inequality, exploitation, and discrimination administrated by the new Rome, some of them still showed traces of innocence in their faces" (118). Some, who see soldiers as going to war to achieve justice and freedom, disagree with Antoon's description of soldiers as "victims of the massive machine." However, Antoon expresses this sentiment to reflect on both military and civilian loss of life. Because of this loss of life, Antoon believes that the war is a hateful act and a violation of humanity.

Charles Andrews, an associate professor of English at Whitworth University, explores the complexity of writings that call for peace in the interwar period between WWI and WWII. Andrews describes many writers who wrote critiques about war, particularly Storm Jameson and Aldous Huxley. First, Andrew declares:

> Storm Jameson captured the mood in the title of her New Clarion essay from October 1933: "Fifteen Years Ago— We Said, 'NEVER AGAIN!'" Jameson, like many others, recorded a sickening sense that the dark days of 1914 were returning. Putting the fearful mood in terms of a medical condition" (21).

Second, Andrews shows how Aldous Huxley likewise reflected on the interwar suffering and its psychological aspects. He remarks:

> Aldous Huxley described the condition of Europe in 1936: "Four and a half years of homicidal and suicidal mania were followed by seventeen of more or less acute neurosis during the last reign. At the start of a new reign our civilization is showing symptoms of physical and mental disease even more alarming than those which were discernable before 1914." (21)

Like Andrews, Antoon criticizes war, and his anti-war imagery is similar to imagery in Jameson and Huxley's war critiques. All reflect on the psychological suffering of both soldiers and civilians and emphasize dark themes within their literary works.

The parallels between Antoon and Jameson confirm the reality of their works. The twentieth-century desire for an end to war is expressed through various genres, and opposing war became a significant part of the twentieth century. Realistic British writers, including Arnold Bennett and George Moore, implicitly criticize war. Certainly, World Wars I and II influenced the development of the realism movement in the twentieth century. Antoon utilizes realism, accurately depicting the psychological status of people in the period between the First and Second Gulf Wars. Similar to the period between the

two world wars, this time is characterized by materialism and the crisis of spirituality. In both periods, it took countries years to recover.

Daily exposure to war and its consequences leads to psychological illness in Antoon's characters. These characters are traumatized by the first conflict and are terrified by the possibility of another one. Antoon thoroughly examines this period not only in his fiction, but also in his poetry. Antoon wrote a collection of poems, titled *The Baghdad Blues*, that criticizes war and dictatorship. Here, he depicts death differently than in *The Corpse Washer*. In his poem "When I was Torn by War," he satirizes war and clearly depicts his own agonies: "I saw another war / And a mother / Weaving a shroud / For the dead man / Still in her womb" (7). Antoon is unable to conceal his sorrow, fatalism, or pessimism, which are prevalent throughout *The Baghdad Blues*. The idea of a future determined by death raises the question: Are people born to live or to die? According to Antoon, children are born to die. His criticism of war is cynical, and his satirical treatment of the instigators of war is persistently poignant. The war is initiated by a tyrant who pretends to love his nation while ignoring his nation's casualties, many of whom are women and children. Antoon makes his characters sympathetic; he describes infants thusly: "We will baptize our infants with smoke, plough their tongues, with flagrant war songs" (4). Antoon satirically uses smoke, a symbol of war and the destruction it causes, as a replacement for water, a symbol of peace and cleansing. This parody is mirrored in Kurt Vonnegut, who also uses dark humor to criticize war. In his 1969 novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut narrates his time imprisoned by Nazis. He survived the bombing of Dresden in Germany in 1945 by hiding himself in a meat locker

at a slaughterhouse, and his satirical criticism of the war and dark humor are apparent in the letters he sent while a prisoner in Nazi Germany.

Women's voices project their perspectives on war. They lose husbands, brothers, and sons in battles, which makes their lives harder and more complicated, especially in the period around World Wars I and II and in the Iraqi wars as well. Deborah Parsons, an author and lecturer at the University of Birmingham, describes the concealed role of women during war, remarking that "notably the women who volunteered as field nurses, ambulance drivers and army domestic staff…were also subject to the severe physical and psychological shocks that could result in traumatic symptoms" (183). Like men, women involved in war experience fear, depression, and melancholy. Moreover, they work hard as soldiers, teachers, engineers, and doctors on the domestic front. For example, Virginia Woolf was a prominent feminist writer between the wars who was keenly aware of war's effect. Her aesthetic image in *Three Guineas* (1938) reveals women's desire for peace:

> But that would be to dream—to dream the recurring dream that has haunted the human mind since the beginning of time, the dream of peace, the dream of freedom. But, with the sound of the guns in your ears you have not asked us to dream. You have not asked us what peace is; you have asked us how to prevent war. Let us then leave it to the poets to tell us what the dream is; and fix our eyes upon the photograph again: the fact. (130)

Woolf presents her critique of the war from a woman's perspective. Her desires for peace and freedom remained dreams until there was a ceasefire. Antoon, likewise,

covers the role of women in war, presenting antiwar female voices from inside and outside the U.S. In *The Book of Collateral Damage*, Kate—a student in Nameer's Arabic class—asks Nameer to join a group called Students Against the War, established to express their condemnation of the war. Kate informs him "that they were planning to arrange some events to raise awareness of the negative effects of the war" (95). Antoon depicts Nameer's enthusiasm to join this group as a way for him to express his opposition to the war, and he uses Kate to compare the political influence of female voices in the U.S. and in Iraq.

The group Students Against the War expresses their disapproval of the war with white roses. Each group member plants a white rose in the main square of the university. When students passing through the square ask why they are planting the flowers, members of the group reply that the white roses represent peace. Antoon presents Kate to the Arabic reader as a peaceful character who is exercising her right to criticize war from within the U.S. As Woolf claims, there is a connection between freedom and peace. This is in contrast to an Iraqi woman, who would not have been able to express her opinions like Kate does.

In *The Baghdad Eucharist*, Maha is a baby girl who cries continuously because of the explosions and other loud wartime sounds. Yousef, an old man, tries to calm her when he meets her in the shelter for the first time. She is terrified by the loud noises and cannot soothe herself. Yousef does his best to help: "No, no, I told her. It's not boom, boom. It's just raining! It's raining really, really hard. Don't worry, it'll be over soon. All gone!' Her eyes grew wide as if she were thinking over what I had just said" (19).

Antoon gives a voice to the baby girl crying in her mother's lap. The presentation of antiwar images steers people toward an antiwar stance. Both Kate, an American woman, and Maha, an Iraqi baby, denounce war and condemn it in different ways; Kate uses her white roses, and Maha uses her tears.

There are also female writers who, like Antoon, criticize war. For instance, Riverbend, a 25-year-old Iraqi writer who maintains anonymity for her safety, wrote *Baghdad Burning: Girl Blog from Iraq*. The blog recorded daily events and political reactions to the war, especially the UN daily reports during the war in 2003. Riverbend blames certain politicians for the economic crisis and the sectarian violence in Iraq. She blamed the war for the destruction of infrastructure and of human identity. Antoon enriches his works with male and female antiwar voices, which makes them more appealing for a diverse audience.

In 2016, *The Guardian* published an article titled "Top 10 books about the Iraq war." Those books explore the causes of the war, forensic intelligence reports, and include a mixture of fictional and true accounts. Antoon's *The Corpse Washer* (2010) and Riverbend's *Baghdad Burning* (2005) were selected for this list. *The Corpse Washer* includes a detailed account of life during the war. The lack of food, the dreadful sound of falling bombs, and the collapse of infrastructure were imprinted on Antoon's mind. As he notes, "My memory became a notebook for the faces of the dead" (131). Antoon expresses such memories without presenting a hero in his works, although many war writers often present a hero. Jawad is the protagonist but does not play a heroic role, and through Jawad, Antoon is able to communicate the loss and chaos of the war. Antoon's

2018 *New York Times* article voices his blunt condemnation of the war; in it, he states, "When the cheerleading for the Iraq war started, I was vehemently against the proposed invasion." In the article, he disagrees with both the Bush administration and the dictator Saddam Hussein. Antoon's position is reflected through his character's disapproval of the dictatorship, his disapproval of war through his character Jawad. He then condemns the dictatorship and the second Gulf war:

> I was one of about 500 Iraqis in the diaspora — of various ethnic and political backgrounds, many of whom were dissidents and victims of Saddam's regime — who signed a petition: "No to war on Iraq. No to dictatorship." While condemning Saddam's reign of terror, we were against a "war that would cause more death and suffering" for innocent Iraqis and one that threatened to push the entire region into violent chaos. (1)

Through his critique of the old regime and the war, Antoon implies that the people's voice, which rejects dictatorship and war, is not being heard or respected. In his 2018 article in *Aljazeera,* he voices criticism of the war and exposes the bombing of a civilian shelter in Al Amiriya that killed 408 civilians, including 261 women and 52 children. Eight of the children were from the same family, and the youngest child was six years old. In addition, he criticizes the old regime, claiming, "The Iraqi regime made use of the tragedy and the site for its propaganda purposes." The regime produced propaganda to gain sympathy for the Al Amirriya shelter catastrophe, using the incident to distract from its own human rights violations. It was perceived as the bloodiest and

most ruthless regime in the Middle East. Antoon criticizes both war and dictatorship in his novels, his poetry, and his journals. A successful writer expresses the truth, avoiding political agendas and propaganda. Antoon exposes the hypocrisy of politicians who instigated the war. At the end of the old regime, there was no law, no propaganda, and only one job: picking up scattered corpses, bringing them to the corpse washer, and then burying them. In battles, the number of corpses rises, most of them young soldiers. When the battle reaches Baghdad, however, the corpses are children and women. Consequently, after Jawad graduates from the Department of Art, rather than sculpting a child's statue, he washes a child's body.

Like the Irish novelist James Joyce and many other writers, Antoon integrates psychology into his novels. His characters have been terribly affected by psychological issues, especially trauma. War, trauma, and loss of life are inextricably intertwined. Judith Lewis Herman, an American psychiatrist, identifies trauma as "Threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death" (33). Both fear and death can produce trauma; Herman posits that a threat can also lead to trauma. In Antoon's novels, post-war trauma is prominent due to fear of the dictatorship and loss of life from the consecutive wars. Although characters in all of Antoon's novels experience a certain level of trauma, *The Corpse Washer* presents the dynamic effects of trauma in a unique way. Radwa Ramadan Mahmoud, a scholar at Ain Al Shams University in Egypt, calls *The Corpse Washer* a "Trauma Novel" due to its themes of fear, loss, and war. The book reflects people's real experience and their psychological suffering. Mahmoud asserts, "*The Corpse Washer* is a 'trauma novel' on two levels. First, in an individual sense, it is a narrative of the trauma its characters' experience. Second on a broader

historical level, it is the cultural product of a country with a traumatic history" (51). *The Corpse Washer* chronologically covers two significant periods: the period of the regime and the second Gulf war. Thus, the trauma comes from the fear of an aggressive hegemonic power and the destruction caused by war.

Antoon's novels show individuals interacting within historical events that affect their inner psyches and relationships to community. Pathological and psychological conditions pervaded human minds after the Iran-Iraq War due to the loss of life. Almost every family had at least one member killed in action during the war. Antoon presents the image of loss in his works and depicts the immense psychological impact it has. Traumatized individuals experience great inner turmoil, and some also experience changes in behavior. For example, in *The Corpse Washer*, a father attends church to say farewell to the body of his son, who has been killed in a recent battle. The father acts strangely as he looks at the body, and his psychological condition worsens quickly. Furat's grandmother tells this story to him, saying, "Like the moon! And his father had gone mad, just mad. He was dancing and singing. 'My son's not dead. He is not dead.' Poor thing" (18). The father's psychosomatic disorders are manifest in a process whereby his dirge floats spontaneously on the surface of his mouth, coming from a deep sense in his brain. Antoon describes the father's reaction in order to create a strong sympathy between his readers and his character's reactions. Moreover, he informs readers that the father's psychological situation worsens profoundly. The martyr's wife's psychological condition also worsens; Antoon writes, "His wife was there, too. She was tearing out her hair. How they cried! And his father danced and cried like a woman" (18). Antoon successfully depicts loss to gain the sympathy of Arabic and English readers. Arabic

readers may have witnessed similar scenes firsthand during wartime, while English readers may know these events wholly through these stories. The father and the wife could not control their emotions; the catastrophic image of the boy's body caused the father and the wife to act from their unconscious minds instead of their conscious minds—both act as if they were mad, a sign of trauma. The trauma created from seeing his son's body causes the father's mind to swing between consciousness and unconsciousness. As though an additional image was inserted into the series of his memory's images, the immediate shock to the father's mind slows down his ability to think about and process what has happened. Perhaps the brain is not made to process such shocking images—especially lost lives which come without warning.

Individuals themselves, not others, should write their own consciousness, however they may not always be able to do so. Trauma begins with the loss of consciousness. Antoon identifies the dictatorship and the war as the main two factors that create trauma. He deliberately describes Furat when he is raped in prison, as well as the sense of degradation, squalor, and ignominy that drive Furat to anger and thoughts of suicide:

> Perhaps they have won, with all this filth they've smeared on the walls of my memory and subconscious-their slogan that the reek of piss, the shit that the piles up in the abandoned streets of my body. How can I be ride of it without dying myself, or going mad. (22)

Furat is entirely overwhelmed by his loathing of the regime's political system. The dictatorship plants the seeds of hate in his heart, and Furat reaches a point of no

return: he must either die or remain angry. The regime intentionally closes all the cognitive windows of consciousness. For example, Furat's consciousness is mobilized to detest life; he gives up, and even if he were to continue to live freely, the dark images of rape would haunt him and make him hysterical.

A final instance of trauma can be condensed into a single, effective image: the coffin of a martyr, wrapped in a flag, being shipped home. This traumatic scene resonates with many people around the world who have lost family members due to war. In *The Corpse Washer*, Antoon reflects on this and depicts the negative impact of trauma from such an incident. He describes Jawad's psychological state as he looks at his brother's coffin: "I drew the curtain open and saw a taxi with a flag-draped coffin on top of it. My heart sunk into an abyss" (8). Jawad has been severely traumatized, his conscious mind falling into unconsciousness. Jawad's mother and father have also been traumatized by the event, which Antoon depicts through Jawad's mother's state: "She stood next to the taxi, beating her head, staring at the coffin and screaming 'Oh my … Ammoury … Ammoury … Ammoury's gone … My son is gone" (9). There is a sense of loss and a loss of sense as she beats her head without feeling pain and screams cathartically; this is certainly an unconscious act. Herman regards abnormal reactions to violence as normal outcomes because, in such circumstances, the process of thinking is transferred from the conscious to the unconscious. She explains, "The ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness" (1). The outcomes of this trauma are seen in the responses of Jawad's father who becomes silent. As Herman says, "This is the meaning of unspeakable" (1). Jawad's father's mood changes after he loses his son Ammoury. Antoon writes, "Father had never been talkative and laughed rarely, but Ammoury's

death intensified his silence and dejection and made him more moody and volatile" (12). Jawad's father becomes silent because of his trauma; the loss of his son means that, though he is physically living among his family, he is mentally living in memories of his son. Trauma, hallucinations, and other psychiatric issues influence Antoon's characters during the wars' period. Some writers like Radwa Mahmoud regard *The Corpse Washer* as a "Trauma Novel." Mahmoud agrees with Antoon that trauma is a prominent component of war novels because the true tragic images that depict the environment of wars. Antoon reflects on this trauma, reminding readers of war incidents. According to psychologists, this assists traumatized patients to recover. They reclaim their tragic memories of the past through catharsis. The main goal of this chapter is to explore Antoon's narration of the critical periods of wars. Antoon's fictions help readers to overcome their hallucination and trauma. This aspiration is confirmed by Herman:

> By the mid1890s these investigators had also discovered that hysterical symptoms could be alleviated when the traumatic memories, as well as the intense feelings that accompanied them, were recovered, and put into words. This method of treatment became the basis of modern psychotherapy. Janet called the techniques "psychological analysis," Breuer and Freud called it "abreaction" or "catharsis" and Freud later called it "psycho-analysis." (13)

In conclusion, we see how Antoon's literary works are heavily influenced by the war, which mentally and physically devastates Antoon's characters. Dystopian, psychologistic, and tragic themes shape his novels, which are very melancholic but

provide a contemporary analysis of Iraqi history. The tragic, mourning, and grieving images that Antoon captures reflect the truth of war, and readers feel Antoon's portrayals are realistic. Indeed, his work fits within the realist tradition. As long as Antoon's images remain realistic, he is both writer and historian, reporting real events and projecting them to portray the brutality of war. In this way, he mirrors many antiwar English writers, including Arnold Bennett and George Moore. Women also play an important role in Antoon's presentation of war. Women were very active in World Wars I and II, yet they were marginalized by male writers and the media. In contrast, Antoon provides space for female voices in his work. He highlights Iraqi female characters and juxtaposes them against American female characters, demonstrating how women in the U.S. have a more effective voice and play more active political roles than women in Iraq. He depicts the despair and fear of his characters during the pre-war period, a time that becomes as difficult as wartime. Propaganda, out of fear for the future, aims to instigate intellectual chaos.

As has been noted, Antoon mediates between his condemnation of war and his desire overthrow the dictatorship. The war causes unexpected physical and psychological damage to all Antoon's characters. *I'jaam* reveals Antoon's disapproval of the regime, and *The Corpse Washer* conveys his disapproval of the war. He also criticized the war in his articles in *The New York Times* and *Aljazeera*. Certainly, writing acts as a sort of catharsis and is psychologically beneficial. Antoon reduces the harmful effects of trauma when he retells war incidents and recounts sorrowful images. Importantly, Antoon also helps readers examine their own history. In spite of these melancholy and pessimistic images, Antoon forms them into an aesthetic tale of bitter realism

Chapter III

The Target Language and Translation Proficiency

This chapter will focus on language as the main component of translation and on Sinan Antoon's translation work. Thus, the discussion will oscillate between language and translation theories reflecting Antoon's professional interest in English and Arabic. The parallel process of understanding both English and Arabic serves as the foundation of this discussion. It will allow Antoon's readers to gain an idea of how he skillfully composed his literary works. In addition, some linguists and theorists such as Noam Chomsky will be referred to in this section to provide unequivocal answers about the origin of language in the mind. The focus on the connection between language and translation will enable Antoon's readers to track the perplexing points in his translation. The chapter will also present theories of translation, such as Lawrence Venuti's theory on the concepts of foreignization and domestication, which emerge in Antoon's works. This theory expounds upon the critical steps to achieving equivalence, even while these steps often fail to maintain the essence of the original text because some phrases and terms lack precise equivalents in the source and the target language, which presents a challenge to the translator.

Antoon began to learn both Arabic and English as a young child. He learned Arabic from his father and the society that he was raised in, and English through his mother and college education. His mother was a native English speaker who was born in the United States, and he earned a BA in English from Baghdad University. A different

flavor is added to Antoon's works when they are translated by other translators, which allows his readers to recognize the differences in translation in terms of style and cultural adaptation. Antoon projects two fictional translators in his works: Uncle Sabri in *The Corpse Washer* and Nameer in *The Book of Collateral Damage*. Both expose how translators struggle when they return home after spending time abroad.

Antoon's works have been translated into many languages, especially his award-winning works, which have been translated into fourteen languages. Antoon collaborated with Rebecca C. Johnson to translate his first novel, *I'jaam*, and translated *The Corpse Washer* by himself. Antoon was awarded the Banipal Saif Ghobash Prize for his smoothness and fluency in the target language. He has let other translators translate two of his fictional works: *The Baghdad Eucharist*, translated by Maia Tabet, and *The Book of Collateral Damage*, translated by Jonathan Wright who has translated many well-known Arab writers' works. Antoon has translated works by a number of famous Arabic writers, such as Mahmoud Darwish (*In the Presence of Absence*), Ibtisam Azem (*The Book of Disappearance*), Ahmed Saadawi, Hassan Blasim, Rasha al-Ameer, Alaa el-Aswany, Ibrahim Essa, and Saadi Youssef (*Nostalgia My Enemy*). Furthermore, he has translated many poems and articles by other writers, including five poems by Muayaad al-Rawi, four poems by Mahmud al-Braykan, and two poems—"The River and the Death" and "The Book of Job"—by Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab, the pioneer of modern Arabic poetry. Antoon's self-translation of his works differentiates him from other translators, in that he will have the most accurate understanding of the intended meaning of the target and source text. Indeed, the reader can determine the differences between Antoon's translations of his works and those of other translators in transferring the source

language to the target one. Producing a successful translation requires deep knowledge in two areas: one concerns the cultural, traditional, and linguistic differences between the two languages, and the other concerns how the two languages are interrelated within one system in the translator's mind. Antoon embodies two different cultures like many other translators who have lived in a place of exile. His mixed-culture background provides him with proficiency and skills he deploys in his translations. His knowledge of English and Arabic allows him to decode the enigmatic connection between the two languages through his translated works. He confronts enormous challenges during his translation of the texts. As a translator, he attempts to build a bridge between the two languages which by no means afford easy transfer. This bridge will never be solid unless the translator deliberately studies history, literary tradition, and culture surrounding the source and target languages. The more a translator studies the target language, the more the translator is able to render a successful translation. In addition to being a writer, Antoon has shown himself to be a capable translator, displaying his creativity in both realms.

Because some translators consider translation a craft and want to develop their skills in this craft, deep knowledge of both the source language and target language is one of the main requirements for generating accurate translations. Knowing the vocabularies of both the source and target language is not sufficient to present a clear, complete work. Many other elements can help in producing a precise meaning. For example, knowing the culture, grammar, history, and many other matters like the religion and politics of the source and target language is a significant requirement for all translators who work on literary translation. The act of translation is not a mechanical process of replacing words in the source language with ones in the target language; instead, it is an analytical process

involving cultural, traditional, religious, political, and social considerations as each phrase is transposed from one language to another. Thus, semantic and historical experience in the source and target languages leads to a coherent approach in translation.

Language and translation involve the same process of transferring knowledge. Language is not simply a group of words transferred from the sender to the receiver; it includes within it a broad range of connotations. Each thought can be expressed as words that contain a range of meanings in all fields. Thus, there is no field outside of language's boundaries. Linguists study the science of language to explore its source, which may help reach a concrete definition of language. Noam Chomsky, a scholar and linguist, has probed the foundations of language. He has made the strong statement that there is a part of the brain that controls the use of language and knowledge, and that it is an organ like any other in the human body. Chomsky suggests that language is another tool or organ for transferring data:

> The first one is the assumption that there is a language faculty, that is, there is some part of the mind-brain, which is dedicated to the knowledge and use of language. That is a particular function in the body; it is a kind of language organ, roughly analogous to the visual system which is also dedicated to a particular task. Now that is an assumption but there is good evidence that is true. (3)

Thus, Chomsky suggests another sense organ, like those that are involved in the formulation of knowledge, namely the ear, eye, and tongue, which play a huge role in transferring data from the sender's brain to the receiver and vice versa. This certainly can apply to translation. The same organ will contribute to examining knowledge until

reaching the right match of transferring the statement from one language into another one. Chomsky's analysis of the science of language leads to some assumptions of how language operates Some of these assumptions are strong and others weak due to the complicated process of producing language, which is also based on the influential background of the memory of the sender or translator.

Another attempt to define and understand the operation of language, in addition to determining the right or intended meaning, is that of Pedro Diego Karczmarczyk, a professor of contemporary philosophy at the National University of La Plata (Argentina) and a researcher at the National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET). In his writing, he deals with the ideology, discourse, epistemology, and philosophy of languages. His theory focuses on revealing the process of language production and how to determine intended meaning. He put forth the Augustinian concept of language, which is similar to the process of translation production and how to determine intended meaning. Saint Augustine was a theologian, philosopher, and the bishop of Hippo Regius in Numidia, Roman North Africa. Karczmarczyk presents Augustine's definition of language as follows:

> He claims to remember understanding in the first place the meaning of some words and later acquiring the necessary training to pronounce the words to express the meanings previously understood. In other words, in the Augustinian picture, understanding and action are conceived as externally related, bearing a contingent relationship to one another, both linked in such a way that they should be thought (even if related) as mutually independent. (538)

Understanding is the first step of the process of a dynamic analysis of reason, followed by action, which is the second step in the process to interpret the picture that reason has drawn. For example, when a person says "rain," the mind examines this word to understand it, then performs the action of analyzing the data associated with the word. Reason finally uses imagination and draws a picture of rain as a small ball of water. But the question is whether there can be two pictures of the same word at the same time. Karczmarczyk comments on "playing the role of distinguishing one understanding from another (if another picture came to mind, then it would be a different understanding)" (540). He also explains the importance of understanding after having structured the picture triggered by a word because this understanding will go through a complicated process when two pictures show up at the same time. For instance, the word "غيوم" means "clouds" in English. Chomsky exposes the origins of language, then Karczmarczyk reveals the process of transferring the language to reach the precise meaning, which is most likely similar to the process of reaching the accurate meaning in the translation. In *The Corpse Washer*, Antoon translates the line in which the word "غيوم" appears as, "But that time I glimpsed a sadness and clouds in his eyes when he kissed me" (81). Although Antoon translates it literally, "clouds" here conjures up two pictures (meanings). The first is its literal meaning, and the second is "sorrows." If either translator or reader wants to judge or determine the right or intended picture (meaning), they must look at the context of the whole line. At this point, understanding the source language is halfway to professional transmission. The translator must focus on the whole context and the more precise meaning of clouds here, which is "sorrows." The whole line is a famous idiom in the Arabic language. The expression "clouds in his eyes" in Arabic conveys the meaning

"the heart is dark with sorrow," which itself should be translated into an English equivalent, but unfortunately is kept as it is, resulting in the Arabic meaning not being clear or complete enough to the English reader. The difference in the cultures of each language may cause the production of two pictures, with each language drawing its own picture based on its own culture, according to domestication theory.

The intended meanings can be reached by looking at the evidence and making the right final judgment about the meaning of the word. But sometimes the brain struggles to find the right word. As Eve V. Clerk, the American linguist, writes: "But access to the mental lexicon is not always easy, and the speakers sometimes have difficulty finding the right word" (74). Clerk describes the process of speaking as a process of translating. This analogy reveals that the birth of words requires effort, which sometimes leads to the unsuccessful effect of distorting the meaning. For instance, the imperfect use of language over generations through the choice of wrong words or incorrect pronunciation or grammar, or even the use of vulgar terms, leads to a change in language, and the vulgar or the distorted meaning will prevail while the original language will fade away into history. In recent years, standardized language has shown signs of demise, whereas vernacular language has taken its place. Therefore, often translators may face the translation of informal language, such as idiomatic matter. Antoon intentionally looks for faithful translations rather than ones based on picking terms because they sound good or elegant. In 1995, Lawrence Venuti introduced the two terms "domestication" and "foreignization" to the field of translation studies in his study *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation.* Venuti declares that the best path for transferring the culture of the source language is to look for a similar cultural term in the target

language. This is called domestication. Antoon and Johnson use domestication in their translation of *I'jaam*. I will translate an extract of the source text literally to serve as an example of this. Sarmad warns Furat about members of the Ba'ath Party, saying: [Take care of yourself; the folks intentionally point at you; they said your tongue is long and you see yourself as the best; they are preparing something for you and are sharpening their teeth for you, so be careful.] Antoon and Johnson commit a violation in their translation of this text as they translate it: "You'd better watch out, because they're after you. They say you're arrogant and have a big mouth. They're looking for something, anything, against you and you'll be gone. So please, be careful" (9). The domestication is obvious in Antoon and Johnson's translation; they translate the text holistically instead of translating words. They become creators of a new text while maintaining the same meaning. This type of translation, according to Jacques Derrida, is highly recommended to convey clear and coherent text.

Nevertheless, language is naturally inconsistent and using the wrong words effectively distorts the language. Transferring words from the brain into language and into translation are similar processes and may introduce distortions in meaning and imperfect language. Thus, just as language changes over time, so too do translations of the same text. For example, the language of the people who lived in the fourteenth century would be harder for contemporary speakers to understand than the language of the twentieth century. The same idea holds in translation: Translators in the fourteenth century and translators in the twentieth century would have created vastly different translations of the same text. In his work, Antoon uses a lot of old terminology that was used four to five decades prior to the time of his writing. New generations of Arabic

readers would find it difficult to understand these terms, some of which originated from the colonial period when readers would not have found it challenging to understand. The modern reader, however, would struggle to understand it correctly. Moreover, those word choices make it challenging for the translator because the terms are archaic and no longer in use. Antoon and his partners in translation keep these terms consistent with how people used to pronounce them, and they sometimes explain them, such as in *The Corpse Washer* where Antoon translates "I got to the *mghaysil*, the washhouse" (11) and "My mother gave him the *sufurtas* and the bread" (6). *Sufurtas* is an old term meaning containers for lunch or dinner; it is rarely used now. Antoon leaves it as it is, even if the modern Arabic reader might be confused by the term. In the context of the sentence, the reader might think *sufurtas* is a type of food. Consequently, the translator must have at least some knowledge of the history of the source language.

According to the theory above, it is possible to choose the wrong meaning (picture). The oldest language the Egyptians used was expressed through hieroglyphic script, based on an understanding of pictures. The mental process of the imagining of words is identical to the process of deriving and deciphering hieroglyphics. Through the hieroglyphic method, Egyptians expressed the pictures that their brains created, without first turning them into words. At this point, reason plays a huge role in choosing the right "picture" meaning of a word; some principles must be applied to reach the right meaning or picture. As Karczmarczyk states, "Judging is understood as something that can be immediately read through the comparison between the meaning (the picture) and the situation to which the meaning is to be applied" (540). Karczmarczyk refers to three main elements in the process of learning that can shape the intended picture: understanding,

evidence, and judgment. These cognitive elements comprise the process of learning a language and are similar to the cognitive elements of drawing out the right meaning in translation. Immanuel Kant, the German philosopher and enlightenment thinker, pointed to the process of cognition two centuries before Karczmarczyk. Both Karczmarczyk and Kant propose almost the same process of learning; however, Kant concentrates on the five senses as the main doors through which knowledge is acquired. In fact, evidence and judgment are significant elements in rationally analyzing data. The multiplicity of meanings and names make evidence and judgment necessary to identify and recognize things; for example, rain has more than one name and meaning, with each name expressing different qualities and quantities. Before judging the type of rain, the process of recognition relies on evidence; then, the ultimate decision will be whichever type of rain fits the original word and meaning to reach an accurate translation.

The multiplicity of names and meanings for one word in a specific language makes the judgment stage more complicated during the process of learning and translating. For instance, Jonathan Wright, the translator of Antoon's novel *The Book of Collateral Damage*, faces the issue of a multiplicity of signifiers because the number of names for each word varies from one language to another. For example, the word "-الجاهلية Al Jahalia" was translated by Wright as "Pre-Islam" (29), whereas, in fact, "-الجاهلية Al Jahalia" has multiple names, each referring to a subset of the principal meaning, such as pre-Islam, the period of ignorance, the uncultivated time, the unliberated age, and the period of slavery. Wright chooses the word with the closest meaning, but it is not exact. Another example is the word "rain." Those who know English will envision rain as drops of water falling from the clouds, but the range of lexical possibilities differs from

one language to another. In Arabic, there are at least nine words for types of rain. For example, regular rain is called "Hetan" (هتان), and huge drops of rain are called "Wabl" (وابل), which means "downpour." Heavy rain is called "Alghadaq" (الغدق), which, in English, could be translated using the expression "raining cats and dogs." Continuous rain for several days is called "Alwadaq" (الودق), which has no exact match in English, but could be roughly translated as drizzling for a week.

The meaning of rain may also be influenced by various other factors. Religious Arabs, for example, consider the concept of rain as a blessing from God, while farmers and villagers consider it simply as rain. Consequently, the drops of water that fall from the sky can carry more than one meaning and reference in the same language. For example, if a villager prays to God for rain, that means the person is likely asking God for water to irrigate the land, whereas if a religious person asks God for rain, that means the person is asking for a blessing, peace, grace, and abundance. In conclusion, a difference in the number of terms between the source and the target language leads to inexactitude in translated texts. For example, the translator, when faced with differing meanings, must either translate a word like Wabl (وابل), meaning huge drops of rain, as regular rain because there is no match in English, or explain its meaning in a footnote. Transferring all terms exactly from one language to another is an impossible feat because of the lack of matching terms in the two languages. Consequently, Antoon's translation of *The Corpse Washer* is unique compared to other translators' works in terms of the simple vocabulary choices and the use of foreignization, which is not always applicable. For instance, in his translation, he writes, "I turn back and see Reem crying as she tries to stop the fountain of blood gushing from the wound" (123). His translation of "the

fountain of blood" is an aesthetic attempt to maintain the culture of the source language as much as possible, considering this phrase is very common in Arabic. He succeeds in this transmission from the source to the target language, and the fact that he is both the writer, and the translator of the text helps him a lot when translating terms. Another translation approach used by Antoon and Tabet, the Arabic translator of *The Baghdad Eucharist*, is mimicking the pronunciation of the Arabic word (transliteration). For example, in *The Baghdad Eucharist*, the word "Istikans" (5), which means "cup," is used, and in *The Corpse Washer*, the word "abaya" (9), which means "black veil," is used. Because there is no corresponding term for these words in the target language, the translator chooses to retain the original word and its pronunciation, according to the foreignization theory.

Dreams and imagination also have their own language, which is most likely translated through the process of thoughts. Although the language of dreams is involuntary arbitrary, it reflects the psychological language of the environment of daily life. Antoon wrote many of his books in Arabic, and he translated one of them himself but co-translated his other works, working with other translators. This is, without a doubt, a big challenge, but he also directly wrote *The Baghdad Blues* in English, so it needed no translation. This major development raises a question: How does he flip the language in his mind without translation? In other words, does Antoon think in English instead of Arabic? He also speaks a third language, Chaldean Neo-Aramaic. So, was Antoon's imagination structured in English, Arabic, or Chaldean Neo-Aramaic when he wrote his poems in *The Baghdad Blues*? As I discussed earlier in this chapter, languages originate

with a group of pictures interpreted by the mind as words. Consequently, those images are gathered in all available languages before they find form in words.

The study of language still lacks many answers to many questions about its origins. For example, this question arises: Is there any pure language in the world? Indeed, there are many questions about language that call for further exploration. Literature could produce modern concepts of language, unlike the sciences, which use language to transfer scientific concepts from one generation to another. Language connects generations through history, whereas translation constructs bridges between nations contemporaneously. Language has the privilege of existence, continuity, and being used to teach other sciences. Education systems worldwide do not sufficiently highlight the literary scientific accomplishments that have come about because of accurate and careful translation. The realm of human knowledge has gradually increased over the past thirty years because of translation. Nations' education systems, economies, and technology are more tightly interwoven. Furthermore, nobody can deny the acknowledged role of translation in the development of nations and ties between them. Some nations support and attribute their development to translation, but others do not adequately credit their translators, or go further to treat them as traitors. Antoon supplies an example that shows his readers how some people do not trust translators. For example, in *The Corpse Washer* Jawad's uncle Sabri serves as translator in his work. Sabri runs away from Saddam Hussein's regime to live in exile because he is a communist. He works for an Arabic-language German satellite television channel. He comes back to Iraq after 2003 with a more open-minded and freer ideology. He criticizes the merging of the religious and liberal parties in Iraq. Sabri's character reflects the translator's position--

someone who loves his country despite some people's view that translators are traitors. Sabri, who returns from exile, is more nationalistic than people who have never left the country. Thus, Antoon wants to flip and challenge the view of some readers who think that translators are traitors. Indeed, Sabri's nationality reflects his love of his country as being stronger than that of the hypocritical politicians who feign loyalty to their country.

Nameer, the main character in *The Book of Collateral Damage*, is the second translator that appears in Antoon's works. An Iraqi translator who lives in exile, Nameer comes back to Baghdad on a mission to translate a documentary after the Second Gulf War. He meets Wadood, a writer and bookshop owner, who asks Nameer to translate one of his works. In the beginning, Nameer is hesitant to translate his work, but many factors later convince Nameer to change his mind and decide to translate it. Each translation has its own circumstances. Despite these difficult circumstances, Nameer becomes obsessed with the translation. Antoon illustrates Nameer's obsession through Nameer's dream. Nameer dreams that he is asked to translate one of the famous Arab poets, al-Karkhi. He explains the difference between translating poetry and conversations. As Antoon writes:

> "The Crusher," al-Karkhi's most famous poem, was the first in the collection. I fell asleep before I was halfway through and dreamed that al-Karkhi was our driver on the journey to Amman. All the way he recited his poems and explained their context and how they came about, but Roy kept insisting that I translate them. I lost my temper with him and said, "Poetry can't be translated that way. We're not at a press conference!" (7)

Antoon reflects his own obsession with translation, thinking deliberately about his role, readiness, passion, ability, accuracy, and many other factors. Antoon, like many

other translators, is afraid of making mistakes in his translation. This obsession is reflected through his dreams. Nameer, for instance, orally mistranslates a sentence or phrase in a conference and corrects his mistranslation in his dreams; the mechanical process wears out the translator's mind.

Antoon refers to the Chaldean Neo-Aramaic language more than once in his works, insisting that it should not die. Chaldean Neo-Aramaic has a limited number of speakers and therefore is in danger of dying out. A language dies when another language dominates the other for any reason. Consequently, a language will never die by itself unless another language prevails in the area. Jean Aitchison, a professor of language and communication at Oxford University, states the reason for the death of languages: "When a language dies, it is not because a community has forgotten how to speak, but because another language has gradually ousted the old one as the dominant language, for political and social reasons" (223). Antoon considers this language to be tied to Iraqi Christian identity, which raises the question: Does language represent a person's identity? Some readers consider language to be related to human identity due to religion, culture, origin, etc. Indeed, language is likely to represent the origins of their speakers or their nation. People do not choose their primary language (mother tongue), but some may choose their second language. Thus, language indicates a person's identity and race, while translation works to unify nations despite their different races, religions, and historical, cultural, and scientific backgrounds. Consequently, language's connection to human identity can negatively impact humans, especially writers who live in exile: when they immigrate, the only coin in their pockets is the mother language they use in their profession. Although they live in exile, they still write in their native language. Examples include Ernest

Hemingway, Ezra Pound, and Paul Bowles who have written in English while living abroad. Another example is Antoon, who, like those writers, prefers to write in Arabic because he feels he can express his thoughts more flexibly.

Antoon illuminates the connection between politics and language and how this connection has considerable power on daily life. His article "Why Speaking Arabic in America Feels like a Crime" reveals how language can become a factor in displays of racism. Antoon recounts the story of Khairuldeen Makhzoomi, an Iraqi refugee who was on board a Southwest Airlines flight when he was told to fly on another flight because he made a phone call to his uncle and used the well-known Arabic word "Inshallah," which means "God willing." One of the passengers was Islamophobic and refused to be on the same flight with Makhzoomi. The word "Inshallah" represents Makhazoomi's identity and language. Consequently, a question is raised: Is bilingualism seen positively or negatively in a community? Chomsky answered this question during a conference held at Delhi University in 1996 when he was asked about the commonality between his politics and his science of language, and whether bilingualism can be normal and positive for mankind. Chomsky's response was that language can change the world and bilingualism can accelerate globalization: "My political views are my own. Anything that one says about politics, of course, has to do with community and culture. How could it be otherwise? That is true not only of attempts to understand the world but also to change it" (42). Chomsky considers politics and language to be intrinsically related, and the bridge that connects them is bilingualism. He defends bilingualism and regards linguistic diversity as a part of nature as long as humans exist. Thus, as long as diversity exists,

bilingualism also exists because it is a normal phenomenon, especially in contemporary life.

The impossibility of reaching a common meaning of the same text is one of most fundamental aspects in translation because the meaning is relative. There is no common meaning of any text because the acquisition of the language itself varies from one reader to another. Thus, each reader understands the text—or carries out the strategic process of understanding it—based on certain factors, such as their level of education or psychological state. Grammar frames and unifies meaning, but it does not operate the same in all languages. Consequently, the reader and the writer will never reach a pure and shared meaning for the whole text unless the writer is also the reader. For example, *The Corpse Washer* is written and translated by Antoon. Presumably, the original concepts are transferred to English readers precisely because Antoon has sufficient command of the target and source language. Antoon translates the title of book as *The Corpse Washer*, whereas the actual title in Arabic translated literally is *The Lonely Pomegranate Tree*, "وحدها شجرة الرمان" This huge change in the translation of the title is necessary—Antoon and his publisher look for the cultural concept that matches the target language throughout the novel. Semantics refers to the complicated process by which writers and readers produce and derive the intended meaning from a text. The best reading of a text results in the best translation; consequently, reaching the best reading requires native and deep knowledge of the original language, background, culture, history, and many other factors that make understanding the target language easier. Some readers can understand formal language better than casual language, while others can understand casual language more than intimate language. As Eugene A. Nida, the linguist and scholar, suggests:

> Any language spoken by a large, structured society—this applies to all national and world languages—has several distinct levels of usage. In general, it is probably best to think in terms of five distinguishable levels or styles: formal, consultative, casual, intimate, and frozen. (175)

The variety in accents and dialects makes learning a language more complicated. The learner tries to reach the precise or intended meaning to get the fullest understanding. Nida connects this complexity to the case of foreigners who learn languages and become translators. Certainly, non-native speakers will study more than native speakers to become professional translators, as Nida states:

> In fact, in almost all languages speakers are aware of certain differences, some of which carry very important information about the status of the speakers and the relevance of the information involved. These are the subtle varieties of language of which the translator must be constantly aware if he is to do justice to the text which he must reproduce. (175)

Nida suggests that there will be subtle variances in how people who speak the same language will interpret the meaning of a text; these variances will increase among non-native speakers, such as translators. Backgrounds and consciousnesses differ from one individual to another, even if two people were born in the same house. All individuals have their own experience in learning languages, which conceivably leads to differences in cognitive ability. Thus, language can be more closely understood if a professional study of semantics is conducted.

In the same language, the different usage of some words is obviously effective in translations; the translator who knows different dialects and informal language of the

source language will do better in translation than the translator who does not know. Regional dialects often differ from their overarching language. In other words, a language can sometimes contain vulgar or informal language that is limited to regional use. Thus, the translator may need more knowledge about local usages and accents to transfer the text precisely. For example: in the United States, some call the underground train system the "subway," while others call it the "metro," and in London it is called the "underground" or "tube." These differences may cause minor confusions for the translator, especially if the translator is translating into English. The translator must know the author's and readers' background—that is, which region they are in—to be precise when transmitting the text's meaning. Antoon refers to translation of regional terms and dialect as a complicated process for translators who lack sufficient experience in the region of the source or target language. Antoon informs his readers that antonyms or homonyms are used by people who speak the same language but live-in different regions. In *The Book of Collateral Damage*, Nameer points out the mistakes in the translation of the documentary about Iraq by the Egyptian translator. He sheds light on the antonyms in the same language that flip the meanings to their opposites, which creates a huge gap between the actual translation and the correct translation. The true meaning is diverted in an entirely different direction, as Nameer notes:

> How would the poor Egyptian have known how to translate *sondat* (rubber tube), *hwaaya* (very), *qashaamir* (idiot), *fannak* (I dare you), and other words that were used? I translated all the segments and the missing phrases and corrected some mistakes. He had thought that *bustuna* ("they

> hit us") meant the same as the equivalent word in Egyptian colloquial ("they give us a good time"). (68)

The existence of opposite concepts for the same terms is a concern for all translators, an enigmatic code that tests the experience of the professional translator. Antoon exposes the contradictory meanings—"they hit us" and "they give us a good time"—of the term *bustuna*. In Iraq, *bustuna* refers to hitting people using sticks or their hands, whereas in Egypt, it refers to taking care of people by offering them comfortable rest. Each region has its own accents, expressions, and colloquialisms. Consequently, the colloquialism may deviate from the original language, in terms of driving formal language to informal language and making this type of language more common. Consequently, people will use informal more than formal. Nameer is not satisfied with the translation by the Egyptian translator because of its conceptual chicaneries, and he rejects colloquialisms that will most likely become privileged language as long as writers continue to write in informal language, seeking to be more realistic. Of course, the translator's principal challenge is decoding informal terms and transferring them into their equivalent, formal forms before translating them.

Because the translator focuses on lexis in his translation instead of the context of texts, the translation may contain a broad range of inaccuracies. The translator will thereby never be able convey the original concepts precisely. Consequently, there is a difference between meaning and concept: meaning is related to the lexis, which is often clear, but concept is a synthetical analysis of the context of a text. A sophisticated translator may manage to translate lexically, word by word, but may encounter a big challenge transferring the meanings according to the accurate concepts in the target

language. Antoon uses “abaya” (9) to refer to the black veil that women use to cover themselves from men. The concept of the word would be abstruse to the reader, but he keeps this Arabic term for several reasons: First, he wants to add a hybrid word to the English language. Second, he presents a new word to his readers. Third, he wants to be as faithful to the text as possible. Indeed, the whole translation of *The Corpse Washer* is framed by fidelity in translation. His translation is the key that can open two doors: one for each language. Of course, there are some enigmatic contexts and words, but these add the spirit of a challenge for the translator.

The fragile bridge between translation and language needs to be explored and explained to readers who want to study translation through discourse analysis. This chapter has examined the main, enigmatic elements of discourse needed to present the best understanding of translation. Understanding the language of the source text is the halfway point in decoding the meaning of words during translation. The interrelation between two languages to produce the language of a translation is a complicated process that takes place in the mind, resulting in a synthetic language. These mental procedures differ from one person to another based on many factors. Each person analyzes data differently, even if two people grow up with the same culture, religion, traditions, education, etc. Antoon shows his readers that he is able to transfer whole phrases or terms (foreignization) as he translates “clouds in his eyes.” He attempts to keep the exotic atmosphere of the phrase for target language readers. The vague definitions of language itself lead linguists to rely on popular consensus that the literary definition of language approaches a more precise definition of language than the sciences do. Literature exposes language’s perspectives, while other sciences exploit language for scientific purposes.

Chomsky's attempt to delineate the operation of language comes closest to understanding language's function. He defines it as "a kind of language organ," thus suggesting the presence of an organ that deals with language, which is likely a valid theory. Karczmarczyk illustrates the process of analyzing information, which involves series of images. Then, he points to the abundance of potential images for the same word, making it more complicated to recognize and select the "right" image. Clerk refers to the complicated process of selecting the right meaning after taking Karczmarczyk's steps, which is similar to the analytical process of selecting the right meaning through translation. Antoon brings old terms like *mghaysil* to his readers, even though they are no longer being used. The new generation of Arabic readers will certainly be perplexed when they read these terms or misunderstand them because other modern translators would be less likely to translate those terms correctly unless they consult old dictionaries. Thus, conceivably, there is more than one possible reading and translation of a text based on the historical development of both source and target languages. As long as the process of learning continue to evolve, the hermeneutics of language and translation will also remain in flux.

Antoon suggests that language is connected to the identity of the speaker. At the same time, there is a close connection between politics and language and sometimes politics can hurt language (and therefore human identity). He criticizes those who regard Arabic as the language of terrorists, considering it an abuse of political power to distort identity in this way. Language can indicate a person's origins, but it does not necessarily represent a person's religion, ideology, or traditions. For example, Antoon is a descendant of a Christian family whose religious language is Chaldean Neo-Aramaic, but

his writings are in Arabic, and he has also written articles in English. According to Chomsky, as long as diversity exists as a natural phenomenon, bilingualism will also exist as such. Antoon and other bilingual modern writers are able to access more than one language through translation. In his works, he includes characters that may reflect his experiences, challenges, obsessions, and desires in translation, such as Sabri and Nameer. Nameer gestures toward the usage of vulgar or informal language adding another challenge for the translator. Antoon wants to focus on concept more than meaning because concepts can help come closer to the precise meaning, unlike lexis-based translation. Finally, Antoon's bilingualism adds a different flavor to his translation, which is embodied in the precision of his translation. Antoon's translation of some of his own works reduces the variance in meaning, although his grasp of the target language (English) lacks some understanding of idioms that could be useful for transferring meaning.

Chapter IV

Exile, Memory, and The Sense of Loss

Sinan Antoon's memory is strong enough to bring the past into the present. In *I'jaam* his character Furat represents so many people who have suffered under Saddam's regime. Furat's sense of loss and alienation is obvious. While physically he lives in his country, mentally he lives in a diasporic space. He never lives in a safe place; the absence of safety and comfort is one of the signs of life in exile. Furat's sense of exile and loss is a consequence of living under the tyrannical regime's power. Antoon, as a writer, reflects his concerns about dictatorship and wars, the main elements of the human diaspora.

In *The Baghdad Eucharist*, although Maha lives in her homeland country, like Furat she feels a sense of loss. Sectarian violence drives her from her home, and she moves to Youssef's house. Youssef, an old man, rejects and criticizes the idea of emigration, despite the risk of living midst turmoil in Iraq. His outdated idea of traveling leads him to his destiny. The huge differences between Maha and Youssef's views reflect Antoon's inner conflict of living in the place of exile or staying home. Antoon's focus is on a new birth of hybrid identity. This modernized identity will be a cross-national one, one that is satisfying and productive. This dual identity becomes a normal phenomenon in contemporary literature. Antoon creates another diasporic character, Sabri, Jawad's uncle in *The Corpse Washer*, a communist, who ran away from the Ba'ath regime to Germany because of his politics. He comes back home to reclaim some parts of his identity, but

unfortunately everything has already changed, even the principles that drove him into exile. Antoon reflects how politics and wars are the main forces that lie behind diaspora. Jawad wishes to leave his country, dreaming of a life elsewhere. Finally, in *The Book of Collateral Damage* Nameer, an Iraqi character who lives in New York, travels back to Iraq to work as a translator there. Nameer, like his creator, experiences nostalgia, suffering, and psychological anguish because of the sense of loss. Nameer's sense of being in between the United States and Iraq is an allegory for loving the whole universe as the main home of all human beings; thus, there is no specific land that represents human identity. Transnationalism is the mirror of humanity.

Antoon seeks in his fiction to inscribe the memory of gloomy historical moments and the sense of loss associated with internal and external exile. *I'jaam*, by Sinan Antoon, recaptures many grievous historical images that display a violation of humanity under the dictatorship. People were tortured and killed. Those dark memories occasionally evoke black images from history. They leave inherent trauma that agitates horror in the present. The brutality of Saddam's regime wounded identity, history, and the body. Antoon feels a rupture in history and the quality of being. Thus, he has no hope for a bright future and lives in darkness and pain in his homeland.

Antoon concentrates on time as the main aspect of diaspora. The passage of time leaves a fissure in Antoon's memories; recollections of tragedies can traumatize writers. Eventually, this trauma becomes part of his legacy chasing him through his journey in writing. In *I'jaam,* time allows diasporic subjects to find their lost identity. Time severs

and is the ghost that haunts Antoon's memory. All diasporic subjects wish to change time and await an unknown future or destiny. Antoon exposes Furat's frustration with time:

> To live here means to pass away three quarters of your life waiting. Waiting for things that rarely come: Revolution, the bus, a lover, Godot . . . and waiting so long that you drown in time, because time itself is a fugitive citizen, trembling with fear and stumbling on the sidewalk, only to be pissed and spat upon by a merciless History. (11)

Antoon dazzlingly compares Furat's status with Vladimir and Estragon, the main characters in *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett. All of them are waiting for elusive Godot. This waiting will physically end in the grave but mentally gives hope to continue. Furat is unable to find his homeland; he is certainly an exile in his country. Iraqis do not see a reason for existence. They are trapped within fear, poverty, and injustice. Waiting is time that Furat loses every day in his homeland. As Antoon states, "A watch is an instrument for measuring lost time" (14). Every day in prison, Furat's grows older. The sense of loss in prison is similar to the sense of loss in the place of exile. Consequently, time is worthless for the prisoners and for people who feel they have become worthless in society. While time consists of past, present, and future, Antoon's characters prefer to live in the past in order to deal with the future. Thus, they have one option: to travel to the past. Memory is the path to the past. Memory is like the galaxy, full of lost asteroids, some belonging to the past and others to the present. The past and future, like asteroids, may clash with each other, as Antoon indicates: "The past advances quickly toward the present. They collide. Their shards scatter" (53). This clash is occasionally followed by

frustration, repentance, and regret. Antoon exposes the sense of losing time. His desire is to change the future by traveling into the past. At the same time, he does not deny that there are some people who escape from the past. As he writes in *The Book of Collateral Damage*, “I think that people are divided into two types: those who escape from the past and those who escape to the past” (130). Then Nameer dreams of the “Black Hole” (23), the infinite space outside the bounds of time. Antoon is always caught between living in the past, making changes, or running away from memory which returns him to images of torture, anguish, and the pain of the past. Memory is essentially the vehicle that transports Antoon to the past, a region of loss and diaspora. As he writes:

> Memory is not an instrument for exploring the past but its theater. It is the medium of past experience, as the ground is the medium in which dead cities lie interred. He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging…Above all, he must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter, to scatter it as one scatters earth, to return it over and over as one turns over soil. (134)

Antoon warns his readers against digging into the past. Memory can be dangerous to some people somehow. However, others may celebrate in their happy memories and love to “escape to the past” (130). Memory travels on its own course and schedule, without warning, crossing borders. Along with memory comes the often-painful feeling of nostalgia: a collection of longings and nice feelings, missing some past events, conducting a raid on the memories, émigrés from the past without passport. According to

William Longman, an American poet, critic, and scholar, nostalgia is the place where authors retreat and dwell:

> But nostalgia is not necessarily a wish to return to the past; it is the wish to be privileged to recall it, and to the extent that nostalgia is the admission of a practice, is aware of limit in the character of its longing, it is a gesture of counter-sentiment. Nostalgia is the refuge of poets for whom the current modes of reminiscence have been irremediably stained with sentiment. (2)

Both Longman and Antoon realize that as long as man will not voluntarily forget history, reminiscence and nostalgia will occupy the mind and penetrate borders and time, digging back into the past. All Antoon's works display the longing for the past, vacillating between the present and the past. In *The Baghdad Blues,* for instance, the time and place of exile melt in nostalgia as Antoon concludes,

> the border line
>
> across the provinces
>
> of nostalgia
>
> between a country
>
> that never was
>
> and a country
>
> which will never be-
>
> whenever it is pulled away

by imagination

there

history

brings it back

here (35).

Antoon is influenced by his memory which irregularly transports him to the past as nostalgia does too. Consequently, Antoon lives in the past, misses living in the present, existing physically but absent mentally.

Returning to the past, time, and nostalgia are very important matters in Antoon's literary works. During the interview on YouTube, titled *Literature of Annihilation, Exile, & Resistance-ft. Sinan Antoon*, Antoon declares the reason for concentrating on the past: "The importance of the past in our construction and our continuous… Past is always deployed in the present and for the future." Antoon illustrates many aesthetic images of the past; those images occupy a huge place in his memory. A train is a familiar Arab image and a symbol of age in Arab culture. Antoon uses the train as a symbolic figure that possibly transports him to the past. Thus, his train (age) takes him back, departing from the present to the past. In *The Book of Collateral Damage,* he retrieves his memory to portray moments of departure when he is in the train. As he writes, "I look at the train windows and I can see my family and friends waving to me from the windows and gesturing at me to hurry up…this train is going to the past" (97). Undoubtedly, the train is an allegory for time, but this train is going toward the past, where Antoon wants to go.

Readers may think that Antoon would go to the place of exile in the future, but unfortunately, he goes toward the past on a mission, which is most likely to change the present. Antoon does not give up on the past; to give up on the past would mean leaving history behind. No one can live without his history because history is the root of the plant. “History is inescapable,” Antoon says in regard to themes in *The Corpse Washer* and *The Baghdad Eucharist*, cited in a discussion by Olivia Snaije (1). Snajie underscores the significance of the history that haunts Antoon’s memory. Time rescues Antoon, taking him to the past.

Antoon manifests his inner conflict through opposing ideas regarding emigrating or staying home expressed by two characters. Maha, a young woman, wants to emigrate to the West because she is displaced by the sectarian violence. Youssef, an old man, rejects the idea of emigration, although he lives in a very dangerous area, and also suffers from the sectarian violence in Baghdad. *The Baghdad Eucharist* presents Maha and Youssef’s debates about whether leaving or staying is better. Maha reflects Antoon’s view of the new generation, that they are afraid of living with prospects of a dark future and the loss of ambitions, goals, and desires. She prefers to flee instead of living in a country beset by political chaos. The sense of loss traumatizes her; she has already lost her house and belongings and is wasting her time in vain. Her major debate with Youssef exposes differences between his archaic ideology of the old generation and the new generation’s views, which she shares. Her view mirrors Antoon’s inner wish to travel and live in the place of exile, despite the challenges there. Youssef’s memory binds him to the past. Youssef’s happy reminiscences and nostalgia anchor him in the past, similar to Antoon’s past sufferings. Certainly, Youssef embodies Antoon’s ghost of history chasing

him. Antoon and his character definitely do not give up on the past. Both are afraid of leaving because their memories are full of unforgettable historical events. Although both are looking for oblivion, their reminiscences are still valuable to them. Antoon illustrates Youssef's rejection of emigration, writing, "I want to die in my own home" (17). Youssef prefers death to living in exile. Eventually, he dies at the church after terrorists take hostages and commit suicide. The idea of murdering the hostages in the church comes from a real story. A group of six terrorists attacked an Assyrian church on October 31, 2010 and killed all the worshipers. Maha completely disagrees with Youssef's convictions. She insists that her Uncle Youssef lives in the past, declaring, "You're just living in the past, Uncle!" (17). She warns him about living in the past, which costs him his life.

Antoon attempts to recover the lost identity of people who live in exile. He sees the significance of identity as key to building a human character. In his article "Basics of Identity," Dr. Shahram Heshmat, an associate professor emeritus at the University of Illinois at Springfield, refers to the essential elements of shaping human identity. He stresses the importance of identity in making a bright future, stating, "Psychologists assume that the identity formation is a matter of 'finding oneself' by matching one's talents and potential with available social role" (Par. 4). He suggests that the formation of strong human identity makes for unique personalities and great societies. The person who is proud of his identity will be more productive and creative, contributing to the making of an ideal community. One the other hand, Heshmat states, "Lack of a coherent sense of identity will lead to uncertainty about what one wants to do in life" (Par. 1). Heshmat concludes that identity shapes individual personality, and any lack of this

identity leads to turmoil. Antoon's philosophy of dual identity or keeping one identity is embodied through his characters, especially Nameer. Nameer's identity is divided between his homeland and the place of exile. He attempts to find it in exile, but his memory and nostalgia anchor him in the past, in the country of his childhood. However, his return to Baghdad does not help him find his identity either; everything is changed, or he is from a hybrid or liminal identity. He leaves Iraq again, traveling back to New Hampshire. He goes to the DMV to get a driver's license, where a clerk asks him to get his birth certificate in order to obtain one, but unfortunately, all his documents were burnt in Baghdad. Antoon relates the conversation.

> "Madam, have you read the news recently or watched television?" I said. "There are manuscripts hundreds of years old that have been burned and lost, as well as antiquities and archives. Who's going to look for my birth certificate after all that?" "I am sorry but that's the law. I can't complete the process without a birth certificate." (92)

Nameer struggles to find his identity; the second identity relies on the first lost one. Consequently, Nameer is like many refugees who lost their identities during the war or fleeing from the dictatorship. Antoon's identity is like Nameer's exactly. Both go to Baghdad after a tough struggle with their nostalgia and memory, as translators, and both fail to confirm their identity. However, Antoon's identity is a writer and the writer's identity is expressed in his books. *The Book of Collateral Damage* reveals Antoon's identity; anyone who reads this book will figure out that Antoon and Nameer are a blend of two locations in the past and present: Iraq and the USA.

Maha reflects the present Iraqi identity as long as she lives in the present. Her wish is to live peacefully and have her rights, as Antoon illustrates: “Uncle, I know nothing about the old days! Nor do I want to know. All I want is to live with dignity and be treated like a human being!” (17). Maha’s ideology and philosophy are shared by the new generations who are willing to travel to find their lost identity. This identity is connected to their dreams. Once they achieve their dreams, they achieve their true identity. Antoon reveals the immigrant’s dream in *The Book of Collateral Damage*, a reflection of the refugee’s desire:

> I saw myself living in a faraway country, where everything was clean and tidy. A quiet life without wars, sects, or religions. Immigrants and refugees had all the rights and freedoms that humans could dream of. Even animals were respected and had rights. Science and technology were so developed that human beings could travel to the future or to the past, to visit or to stay, provided of course that they were adults and in good health and didn’t have a criminal record (129).

Antoon definitely presents a refugee’s or immigrant’s perspective on the place of exile, where the perfect life is without suffering, hardship, and pain. This perspective will feature a new identity for the refugee or immigrant. While Antoon depicts this perspective, he glimpses traveling to the past again, writing “human beings could travel to the future or to the past” (129). Surely, one day history will invade the memory, as history never knocks on the door before occupying the memory. Then, the suffering will start over again. Refugees and immigrants should not let history attack the door of memory because they are already extinct in their homeland. Consequently, nobody will

consider them, as Antoon writes in *The Baghdad Eucharist*, because "the migration route/taken by a rare bird/in its last season/before extinction" (37). Series of images, disordered feelings, and sad or happy memoir flow, furnishing the memory with unforgettable historical events. Nameer returns to Iraq with a documentary crew as a translator hoping to get rid of the history that attacks his memory. He thought that he could attack history instead of being its victim. Unfortunately, he has already disconnected physically. Like Sabri in *The Corpse Washer*, people consider him a foreigner or immigrant. Both become foreigners in both the homeland and place of exile. "The most foreign of foreigners is one who has become a stranger in his own land," Antoon states. (qtd. in Elimelekh 199). Antoon feels his characters' pain of being displaced in their homeland such as Maha and Wadood have felt. However, they do not have one specific identity, language, culture, and tradition. Memory and history rupture identity and time. Alienation and the sense of loss begin.

There are similarities between diasporic literature and expatriate literature. The comparison between a pair of diasporic and expatriate writers, however, clearly exposes the differences. Paul Bowles is an American expatriate writer, composer, and translator who travels to the East, in the opposite direction from Antoon, who travels East to West. Antoon is an Arab voice in exile. Both are writers and translators. Both have written fiction and translated books in exile. Antoon translates books by famous Arab writers such as Mahmud Darwish and Ibtsim Azem, while Paul Bowles translates unknown authors of short stories and tellers of old tales. Thus, Paul Bowles exercised creativity in his translation of those tales. Antoon and Bowles imaginatively transfer their literary works from the source language to the target language. Both deal with social matters,

such as poverty and hardship. A key difference between Bowles and Antoon is that Bowles chooses to be an expatriate in the East, while Antoon is obligated to be an immigrant in the West.

From his place of exile, Antoon brings the past to present through his memory, the only door to the past. His twin (character) Nameer reflects Antoon's desire, nostalgia, and endurance in the place of exile. War and dictatorship are the main forces conspiring to create diasporic literature. The hardship of life under a tyrannical regime and the successive wars creates a huge pressure on authors who flee seeking freedom. Antoon focuses on time and memory as the main tools that can be used to change the present and the future. Youssef, who represents the past, is not able to understand Maha, a symbol of the present, future, and new generation's ambitions. Youssef's unwillingness to emigrate to the West cost him his life. Antoon's position between the past and the present is like his vacillation between traditional ideas and modern ones. People whose memories are attacked by historical events physically live among us, but mentally live in the past, especially immigrants, refugees, and expatriates. Certainly, Antoon's dual identity is unified and embodied in his literary work. Thus, his true identity becomes his fiction, discernable in all his literary works.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that Sinan Antoon is a prominent author who writes in two languages, is a professional translator of works from Arabic to English and has a sophisticated political view of Iraqi politics. Through my journey in reading Antoon's works, I have found and examined many interested subjects that emerge in his literary works: writing under the dictatorship and war, translation, and writing in exile. His four novels, written in Arabic then translated into English in his exile, address many fundamental issues: archive and resistance, nostalgia, oblivion, time, and many other minor elements. Antoon criticizes, documents, and exposes many tragic and melancholic images of the injustice, coercion, and brutality of those in power. Writers often encourage resistance to despotism by presenting tragic images to their audiences. Under dictatorship the author, like a soldier, should be invincible and unflinching in the battle. Antoon's works record historical events and resist authoritarianism. His characters intentionally reflect his literary goals, mirroring the political, psychological, economic, and social needs of Arab and English readers and presenting an understanding of the community during and after the dictatorial regime. The chronological organization of Antoon's fiction enables his readers to follow the escalation of the catastrophic situation of Iraqi politics. Readers can realize the importance of outlining the map of the dictatorial stranglehold, and how literature attempts to free itself and screams for freedom. In a series of truthful images, Antoon exposes the exploitation and suppression of people under the Ba'ath party. Although writers were tortured brutally in prisons, suffering sexual abuse, disrespect, manipulation, and dehumanization at the hands of the tyrant's

followers and despite the risk of criticizing the regime, authors persisted, resisted, and challenged the dictatorship. Antoon and many other writers insisted on continuing to write and reflect the truth. Antoon believes that a writer's duty is to challenge and correct the ideological agenda promoted by the regime's propaganda. He serves as an example of writers who daringly expose the regime's fake news, hoping to free people's minds from the regime's hegemony by revealing the extreme submissiveness of the population. Antoon, as a part of this community, refuses to become a victim of the battles among religious, communistic, and fascistic ideologies. Antoon wants writers to unveil the hypocrisy of politicians. They have to clear the foggy thoughts of their readers. Readers should know that the absence of awareness or criticism is the absence of democracy.

Antoon has effectively criticized the war. Like many anti-war writers, he objects to the war, considering it a deadly machine. *The Corpse Washer* reveals the negative outcomes of warfare, in terms of physical and mental torment. A tragic and dystopian tone dominates *The Corpse Washer* with its descriptions of human loss and the search for ways to flee the country. Antoon presents dark, melancholic, and dismal images of life during and after the war, along with the resulting trauma that affects many people, like after WWII. Death is a familiar phenomenon in Antoon's literary works. He shows his readers that people on opposite sides can be innocent victims of the war: soldiers and civilians, children and the elderly, men and women. Politicians bear the responsibility for starting and sustaining the war. Antoon thus declares that dictatorship and war are two faces for one coin.

After reviewing and analyzing Antoon's translations, I draw three fundamental conclusions. First, a profession in translation requires sufficient knowledge in both languages, which Antoon has. Second, successful translation makes use of domestication theory, as seen in Antoon's translation of the title of his fiction. Third, the translator is the ambassador and politician, and is loyal to his work, as Antoon is through his characters. Antoon's translations are of a high quality. He finds a balance between Venuti's notions of foreignization and domestication and displays an understanding of the interrelation between English and Arabic. Antoon sees a relationship between politics, language, and translation, all of which spring from the same source. A translator is an ambassador who tries to connect parts of the world. He is often keener than politicians, which Antoon shows with his knowledge about Iraqi political issues, greater than that of Iraqi politicians. Antoon shows that the translator is not a traitor like many people think; rather the translator is often more loyal than many politicians.

Antoon's works embody key elements of diaspora literature, exposing three fundamental issues: the difference between physical and mental diaspora, the influence of the past on the writer in exile, and the dual identity of the refugee. Nostalgia, oblivion, and time are the main elements in Antoon's diasporic literature. A diasporic condition can occur while you are living in your homeland, not only while you are in the place of exile. Time becomes a main element in his literary works, as he moves between the present and the past. Readers realize that nostalgia and longing force Antoon to reclaim his identity by returning to Iraq to work as the translator of a documentary, but unfortunately his Iraqi identity has dissolved, and he becomes a foreigner. All of his characters struggle to find their true identity and suffer from loss.

Antoon’s literary works have been translated into thirteen languages, a sign of wide-spread interest in his writing, transcending boundaries of geography and language. Drawing on his archives, he stands up to authoritarianism, performs acts of translation, and grapples with the challenge of being a diasporic writer.

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