

**A Critical Pragmatic Study of War  
Trauma in the Novel  
The President's Gardens**

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## Abstract

This study aims to analyze the novel *The President's Gardens* in order to detect and explain the methods and strategies that the writer used to portray the trauma of the war and the effects of this trauma on the individual and collective identity of the Iraqi people. The study also aims to offer a better understanding of how individuals and societies cope with the long lasting consequences of the violence, oppression and foreign occupation that Iraq has suffered from. It adopts a qualitative research approach because it an adequate approach that can be used to investigate the concepts of war trauma, power relations and the conflicts of ideology that are heavily presented

and expressed in the novel. This purpose is achieved by using the tools of the Critical Pragmatics (CP) approach to provide a deep and accurate answer to the questions of the study. The study has found that the linguistic choices that are made by the writer, such as metaphors, euphemisms, silences, and fragmented speech reveal a deep engagement with the psychological and sociopolitical dimensions of trauma. Moreover, pragmatic tools such as speech acts, implicature, and presupposition have been heavily used to reveal the hidden power dynamics that shape the experiences of the characters of the novel.

**Key Words:** The President's Gardens, Critical Pragmatic, Critical Discourse Analysis, Trauma, Power Relations, Resilience

## 1. Introduction

Suffering, particularly in the context of war, often becomes a profound source of learning and self-reflection. War trauma, with its invasive horrors, nightmares, and feelings of helplessness, leaves deep psychological scars on individuals and societies alike. In Iraq, the effects of war, the loss of loved ones, and socio-political collapse have drastically altered the social landscape. The suffering experienced is a direct result of the ongoing conflict and its traumatic consequences. Trauma, derived from the Greek word meaning “wound” no longer signifies only physical injury but has come to represent the deep psychological wounds inflicted upon the mind (Caruth, 1996: 4). These traumatic experiences often lead to severe psychological issues or even total emotional collapse in those who suffer.

As Resick (2001: 28) explains, trauma is often accompanied by intense fear, helplessness, and horror, stemming from sudden, violent events such as the loss of a loved one or serious injury. These experiences are marked by

abruptness and extreme negativity, overwhelming the individual's ability to process and understand the situation (Carlson & Dalenberg, 2000: 5). Caruth (1996:3) emphasizes that the true tragedy of trauma lies not solely in the catastrophic event but in the recurrent images and nightmares that keep the individual trapped in a constant state of distress.

In the face of war, literature has long served as a powerful means of exploring traumatic experiences. The ongoing conflicts in Iraq has left its people in a state of perpetual fear and horror. This study seeks to use CP tools and concepts to explore how war trauma is represented in *The President's Gardens* by Muhsin al-Ramli. The devastation wrought by the war on Iraq, particularly during the U.S occupation, has created lasting psychological and social effects on the Iraqi people, who once lived under a different socio-political regime. There is scarcity in the representation of the cultural and personal impacts of war and its atrocities committed against Iraqi people in mainstream media and literature (Zangana, 2013: 26).

This study aims at analyzing the traumatic experiences that are viewed in *The President's Gardens*—a novel that tells the story of Iraq's resilience and the psychological toll of war- from the Iraqi people own point of view. This examination of the portrayal of war trauma and its effects on identity contributes to the broader understanding of how individuals and societies cope with the long-lasting impacts of violence, oppression, and foreign occupation. Thus, *The President's Gardens* serves as a powerful narrative that captures the unfathomable resilience of the Iraqi people amid the chaos of war.

### **1.1 Background and Context of the Novel *The President's Gardens***

*The President's Gardens* starts by a very gruesome scene that expresses the brutal and violent realities of Iraq's recent history. The scene starts when the village awakens to nine crates each containing the severed head of a beloved son. This horrific image is meant to reflect the unspeakable suffering that was inflicted on Iraq and the Iraqi people since the very foundation of the country. Each head represents not

only a life but also an unfulfilled future, highlighting the destructive impact of war and violence on generations. From the very beginning of the novel, the reader can instantly recognize that this narrative is not merely about the lives of individuals, but an allegory of the country itself, weaving a story that stretches from the Iran-Iraq war to the fallout of the U.S invasion (Nouri, 2020).

The novel is mainly centered around three childhood friends: Abdullah, Tariq, and Ibrahim, all born in the same village in 1959. The novel continuously reminds the reader that their deep bond and shared experiences reflect a sense of unity, one that is tragically shattered by the realities of war. They are known in the village by the name "Sons of the Earth Crack," their fates diverge with the onset of the Iraq-Iran War which constituted a defining moment for each of their lives. The three heroes of the novel are Abdullah, who was known as the philosophical "prince of pessimists," Tariq, a cleric seeking compromise for survival, and Ibrahim, whose severed head is found in one of the banana crates, each represent

different facets of the Iraqi experience (Al-Ramli 2016; Al-Samir, 2021).

Al-Ramli's novel can be seen as representing various layers of the narratives as he blends the personal histories with the broader socio-political trauma experienced by Iraqis. This nonlinear technique of storytelling helped the novel to paint an epic, multi-generational portrait of war's effects on families, relationships, and individual identities (Ahmed, 2019). This is shown in Ibrahim's fatalism, reflected in his life and his daughter Qisma's rebellion against it, encapsulates a generational conflict in post-war Iraq—where youth yearn for agency in a world shaped by violence and oppression. (Al-Ramli, 2016)

The character of Abdullah Kafka is viewed as one with a lot of philosophical insights. This is purposely done to make him acts as the author's mouthpiece, allowing reflection on the absurdity and horror of Iraq's situation. Abdullah musings, particularly on America's invasion, offer a lens through which the trauma of occupation and foreign

intervention can be examined. For this reason, it can be safely deduced that the novel is not just a personal story of the three friends but a meditation on the larger forces of power, fate, and survival in a nation caught in perpetual conflict (Harb, 2018).

The title of the novel has not become of any significance or meaning until the character of Ibrahim worked as a gardener in one of the President's palaces—a symbol of opulence and tyranny. The writer has been keen on showing the sharp contrast between the palace's luxurious beauty and the grim realities of ordinary Iraqis and further emphasizes the disconnect between the rulers and the ruled. Although the writer did not name this president, but it is obvious that the character of the president is modeled after Saddam Hussein, represents the oppressive force of dictatorship, a recurring theme that critiques the senseless destruction of culture, life, and hope in Iraq (Khalaf, 2019).

Al-Ramli's decision to leave the President nameless universalizes the experience of living under a brutal regime, making the novel a broader

critique of dictatorship and war trauma beyond just Iraq. Longlisted for the International Prize for Arabic Fiction in 2013, *The President's Gardens* stands as a poignant exploration of the human cost of conflict, memory, and the cyclical nature of violence in Iraq.

## 1.2 Research Problem and Questions

*The President's Gardens* by Muhsin Al-Ramli is a novel that represents an emotional depiction of the concept of war trauma and the following massive impacts on Iraq. Despite the fact that this novel has been given its due evaluation and credit for its themes such as political repression and loss, but linguistically there has been limited explorations of how critical concepts have been represented and how language is discursively used with the help of pragmatic elements utilized by the writer to reflect the social and psychological dimensions of war trauma. Particularly, how the linguistic choices in the discourse of this novel discursively revealing the socio-political dimensions of war trauma in Iraq. As such, this study is outlined to use the CP tools and techniques to uncover the hidden

ideologies embedded in the novel to present a comprehensive understanding of how the concept of war trauma is constructed in the context of the novel. In order to achieve the objectives of the study, this research tries to answer the following specific questions:

- 1- How does the novel use language to represent war trauma within the context of power, ideology, and social structures?
- 2- What are the critical pragmatic strategies employed in the novel to convey the complexities of trauma?

## 1.3 Objectives of the Study

- 1- To critically analyze the representation of war trauma in the novel using critical pragmatic tools.
- 2- To explore how language reflects and challenges power dynamics, societal norms, and ideological constructs in the portrayal of trauma.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 War Trauma in Literature

War trauma has been a significant theme in literature across the globe, reflecting the devastating effects of violence on both individuals and societies. However, the depiction of trauma in literature is not solely a personal or psychological matter; it

is deeply intertwined with political ideologies and power structures (Bourke, 1999). The way trauma is framed in different literary traditions often reveals underlying socio-political narratives that shape both the representation of war and the public's understanding of its consequences (Vetlesen, 2015).

There has been a lot of literary works that focused on the personal trauma of soldiers in global literature, particularly in Western contexts. This focus, often, creates what Roy Scranton calls the "trauma hero myth," where the (typically white, male) soldier becomes the central figure of war narratives, his suffering symbolizing the collective trauma of the conflict, as is always noted, this myth erases the experiences of others, including civilians, women, and marginalized groups, whose traumas are equally severe but often overlooked (Scranton, 2015). Such narratives usually tend to reduce war to a personal journey of trauma and recovery, while sidelining the socio-political causes and impacts of the conflict, as was seen in cinematic works like *American Sniper* and *Redeployment*.

This narrative strategy can be serve as an ideological tool, depoliticizing war by turning it into a story of individual suffering, as Scranton suggests, these type of narratives usually turn the trauma of the soldier to obscure the larger power dynamics at play, removing war from its historical and political contexts and making it seem like a natural, inevitable event. Roland Barthes' theory of myth supports this view as he suggests that myth works by stripping events of their historical specificity and turning them into depoliticized, ideologically loaded narratives (Barthes, 1957). The final product of this trauma hero myth is to reinforce military and political ideologies, legitimizing war by focusing on the personal sacrifice of soldiers while ignoring the larger social and political forces driving the conflict.

In contrast to the Western view of trauma, Iraqi literature offers a different perspective on war trauma that foregrounds the collective suffering of civilians and the devastating socio-political consequences of conflict. Iraqi novels like *The President's Gardens* by Muhsin al-Ramli and *The*

*Baghdad Clock* by Shahad al-Rawi focus on the experiences of the ordinary people of Iraq, and aim to depict the war as a force that destroys the communities, disrupts the traditional social structures, and perpetuates vicious cycles of violence, these narratives also emphasize the power imbalances between occupying forces and the local population, highlighting how war serves the interests of political and military elites at the expense of civilian lives (Ameen, 2016; Harlow, 2011).

Iraqi literature also challenges the notion that trauma is an individual experience and represents it instead as a collective experience that is shaped by political oppression, foreign occupation, and the destruction of social and cultural institutions. This view about trauma from the Iraqi works align better with the theoretical perspectives on trauma in psychological analysis that emphasize the role of social and political contexts in shaping traumatic experiences, for example, scholars like Cathy Caruth asserts that trauma is not just a personal psychological wound but a disruption of the social order that

requires a collective response (Caruth, 1996). Indeed, trauma is depicted as both a result of and a response to the violent imposition of power by foreign occupiers, making it a deeply political issue in the context of Iraqi literature.

The representation of war trauma in literature must not and cannot be separated from questions of power and ideology. The trauma hero myth in global literature often serves to reinforce dominant military ideologies, while in Iraqi literature, trauma is depicted as a form of resistance against these same power structures. Iraqi literature offers a counter-narrative that challenges the ideological functions of war literature in the West because it focuses on the voices of civilians and marginalized groups. Consequently, it provides a more nuanced understanding of trauma, one that acknowledges the collective, socio-political dimensions of suffering and resists the depoliticization of war (Adnan, 2015).

## 2.2 CP as a Theoretical Framework

CP is an evolving field that integrates both the notions and tools of the traditional pragmatics with those of the critical approach to examine the ways in which language, power, and ideology intersect in discourse. Still, it is different from traditional pragmatics, which often focuses on how meaning is generated through language use in specific contexts, CP emphasizes the role of socio-political structures and power dynamics in shaping communication. This approach is particularly useful to analyze literary works that deal with themes of social inequality, power struggles, and ideological manipulation, such as *The President's Gardens* by Muhsin al-Ramli.

Pragmatics is concerned with the relationship between language and its users, and it focuses on the manner by which the particular context can influence the meaning of the language used. This is different from the traditional approaches, such as those rooted in Anglo-American schools of thought, which view pragmatics as a component of linguistics concerned with implicature, presupposition, speech

acts, and deixis (Huang, 2017: 2). This "component view" treats pragmatics as one of several elements that contribute to linguistic theory, alongside syntax, phonology, and semantics. In contrast, the European continental tradition sees pragmatics as a broader functional perspective that can be applied to all aspects of linguistics, emphasizing the cognitive, social, and cultural functions of language (Verschueren, 1999: 11).

CP extends beyond these foundational theories by integrating socio-pragmatic concerns because it adopts a critical lens to explore how language reflects and perpetuates power structures. It focuses on how utterances can reinforce or challenge ideologies. This approach aligns closely with the traditions of critical linguistics and CDA which investigate how language is used to maintain social hierarchies and ideologies. Mey (2017) notes that CP examines the social problems related to language use through a Theoretical-Marxian orientation, placing particular emphasis on the relationship between language and power (p.147).

Key concepts such as power dynamics, ideology, and discourse are central in this framework to understand how language functions within a particular social context, because power dynamics refer to the unequal distribution of power in society and how these imbalances manifest in communication. For example, certain speech acts may reinforce the dominance of one group over another, while discourse—structured communication—shapes how power relations are perceived and maintained. CP is interested in examining how these discursive practices reinforce or challenge dominant ideologies, defined as systems of belief that justify and maintain power structures (Huang, 2017: 9).

One of the primary tools in CP is the analysis of speech acts, which are communicative actions performed through language. In a critical perspective, speech acts are not just neutral exchanges of information but are imbued with power relations and ideological content (Fairclough, 2013). For example, in *The President's Gardens*, speech acts may reveal

how characters navigate the oppressive socio-political environment of Iraq, where language can both expose and conceal power struggles. These speech acts are understood not only in their immediate linguistic context but also within the broader social and political structures that influence their meaning.

Context plays a crucial role in CP because it extends beyond the immediate conversational setting to include historical, political, and cultural factors (van Dijk, 2008). For example, a reader cannot understand a statement in a war-torn society like Iraq without fully considering the political ideologies that shape the lives of its citizens and the speaker of that statement, and this is where context allows CP to uncover the deeper social meanings behind language use, particularly in situations of conflict and trauma.

### 2.2.1 CP Studies

CP is a field that examines the area of intersection between language, power, and social action. Addressing these issues can provide a comprehensive perspective on the discourse and how it does not only

reflect but also reinforces or challenges the structure of societal power (Mey, 2001). This perspective should take into consideration that although CP is less established compared to other areas of pragmatics, it has gained attention through the contributions of prominent theorists such as Jürgen Habermas, Jacob Mey, and the duo Korta and Perry, each of whom offers a unique perspective on how language functions within social and political contexts.

Jürgen Habermas is a central figure in critical social theory who is particularly known for his development of universal pragmatics, which explores the relationship between communication and power. Habermas (1984) distinguishes between two types of discourse: communicative discourse which aims to provide a type of mutual understanding, and between the strategic discourse which is power-oriented and often manipulative. He argues that this distinction is crucial in analyzing how institutional and political settings shape communication. Habermas proposes that power can affect and even distort the communication process, because

power relations can turn what should be a process of shared understanding into a tool for dominance and control. This is why he introduces three "validity claims" -truth, normative rightness, and sincerity- which underlie all forms of communication and he argues that these claims are tied to three conceptual dimensions of reality: the objective world (facts), the social world (norms), and the subjective world (individual experiences). Habermas' framework is thus very useful in understanding how power infiltrates discourse, particularly in settings where institutional or political forces limit open and free communication.

Jacob Mey (2001) expands the scope of CP by incorporating CDA. His critical perspective emphasizes how language can both reflect and perpetuates the social struggles by focusing in the ways by which everyday conversations do reflect and manifest the power dynamics. Mey's approach addresses the power relations embedded in language use, exploring how societal hierarchies shape linguistic exchanges. The contribution of Mey (2001) to CP lies in his exploration of how

discourse can be used not only at the micro level which is the individual interactions but also for the broader societal structures. This is done by highlighting the reciprocal relationship between language and social power, showing how language can both reinforce and challenge existing power structures. Mey's emphasis on the communicative aspects of power remains a cornerstone of CP.

Korta and Perry (2011) contrasted the ideas of both Habermas and Mey and offer a more philosophically-oriented approach to CP which focuses more on the semantics-pragmatics interface. They explore how meaning can be derived through the use of particular forms of the language, and they focused particularly on examining the interplay between the intentions of the speaker and contextual interpretation. Korta and Perry (2011) focus more on the distinction between reflexive and referential truth conditions, which highlights the dual nature of meaning in communication because they believe that meaning is not only about the objects or events that the speakers are referring to, it is related also to the manner by which speakers intend

their utterances to be understood within specific contexts. This perspective moves away from the socio-political focus of Habermas and Mey, instead grounding CP in the philosophy of language and communication. Language is a form of action for Korta and Perry, and their work centers on how speakers and listeners navigate meaning-making processes within particular contexts. Their approach offers valuable insights into the mechanics of how meaning and understanding are negotiated in real-time interactions although it may be seem less politically engaged than that of Habermas or Mey.

### **2.3 Thematic Remarks of *The President's Gardens***

Muhsin al-Ramli intricately weaves themes of war trauma through his use of artistic and rhetorical imagery in his novel, and this means that the themes of his novel must be achieved through various literary devices, including metaphor, simile, and metonymy, which serve to deepen the reader's understanding of the psychological and emotional impacts of war on individuals. Some remarks of the thematic structure of the novel are in the following:

**a. Expressive and Aesthetic Connotations of Rhetorical Images**

Al-Ramli (2016) employs imagery not merely for aesthetic effect but also to convey some profound thematic implications, for example, the depiction of interpersonal relationships amidst the backdrop of war employs simile to starkly contrast human behavior with the mechanical brutality of war. The lines that says: "Therefore, among their thorny relations with each other, were shameful behaviors such as attack, terrorism, wars, invasion and occupation" (p. 8) illustrates the dehumanization and savagery prevalent in times of conflict, aligning with Kafka's bleak view of human behavior under the strain of war, as he likens it to barbaric attacks devoid of any moral or rational order.

**b. The Role of Metaphor in Conveying Psychological Trauma**

*The President's Gardens* employs the metaphors to convey the psychological trauma experienced by different characters, one obvious example is the metaphorical description of Ibrahim Qisma's death: "When the news reached the third of them in the friendship of a lifetime, Sheikh Tariq, he almost

fainted and fell" (Al-Ramli, 2016: 9). This metaphor not only conveys the severity of Tariq's emotional collapse but also reflects the pervasive sense of disorientation and despair that war inflicts upon individuals.

The writer also used another powerful metaphor to describe Zainab's emotional turmoil to highlight the impact of traumatic events on personal relationships. This metaphor of memory as a "new repository" for her father's experiences before his death demonstrates Zainab's inner conflict and regret (Al-Ramli, 2016: 28). This imagery underscores the theme of personal loss and the struggle to reconcile with the past.

**c. Metonymy and Its Thematic Implications**

Al-Ramli (2016) also used the concept of metonymy as a rhetorical device in order to describe the aspects of war and trauma. This is obvious in the phrase "the eternal trio" which is used to describe the bond between Abdullah Kafka, Ibrahim Qisma, and Sheikh Tariq. This phrase reflects the deep-seated connection that transcends even death (Al-Ramli, 2016: 11). This metonymy underscores the impact of

war on personal relationships, revealing the enduring emotional scars left by conflict.

The use of metonymy is also evident when Kafka was reflecting on his experiences. That is clear when Kafka identified himself as “the son of the dead until Abel” (Al-Ramli, 2016: 13). This identification conveys a sense of existential disillusionment and the perpetuation of victimhood, which reflects the broader theme of generational trauma perpetuated by war.

#### **d. Psychological and Intellectual Functions of Imagery**

The thematic exploration extends to the psychological and intellectual dimensions of war trauma. The novel portrays Kafka's emotional state through metaphors that reflect his internal struggle. For instance, Kafka's description of the Iranian captivity experiences as “worse than the worst nightmares” (Al-Ramli, 2016: 83) emphasizes the depth of his psychological suffering and the horror of his experiences.

Furthermore, the metaphorical portrayal of Zainab's distress—where her tears are described as “jumping” before her (Al-Ramli, 2016: 9) captures the intensity of her emotional pain and her desperate

plea to preserve her child. This vivid imagery not only reflects her psychological turmoil but also illustrates the broader impact of war on familial and personal relationships.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, emphasizing textual analysis as the primary method for investigating war trauma, power relations, and ideological conflicts. It is widely acknowledged that the qualitative research is particularly suited to exploring complex social phenomena, as it allows for an in-depth examination of the ways in which language and discourse shape and reflect the trauma of characters within the novel.

#### **3.2 Data Collection**

The data analyzed by this study consists of a group of key passages from the novel. These passages are selected on the basis of their relation to the theme of war trauma, power relations, and ideological conflicts in the novel. They are chosen based on their relevance to the research questions. The selection process of the designated passages starts by a

close and cautious reading and re-reading of the entire novel while paying attention to the moments in which characters explicitly or implicitly engage in contexts that are related to war trauma, power relations, and ideological conflicts. The criteria for selecting the passages and dialogues is their relation to specific instances of language use (e.g., power-laden discourse, ideological narratives). The next step is to collect these passages while considering the particular contexts in which they are uttered. Then, these passages are analyzed to uncover the linguistic and discursive strategies used to express both the individual and collective trauma of the characters of the novel.

### **3.3 Analytical Framework**

This study uses the CP approach in order to achieve its objectives. The CP approach, here, incorporates various analytical tools which help to uncover the underlying power dynamics, ideological positions, and emotional impacts embedded in the text. The analytical framework is structured around the concepts of ideology, power and power relation, pragmatic strategies in depicting trauma and the representation of war

trauma. The analysis of these concepts must be done by utilizing particular tools that are explained in the next sections.

#### **a. Ideology Analysis**

Ideology represents a "specific basic framework of social cognition" that is deeply rooted in social structures and serves particular cognitive and social functions, Van Dijk (1995: 21), This view shifts away from the conventional understanding of ideology as merely a system of ideas and opinions, emphasizing instead its role as an inherent part of social cognition. One of the core objectives of CDA is to "demystify" discourses by uncovering the underlying ideologies embedded within them. By doing so, CDA aims to foster awareness among individuals, promoting enlightenment, emancipation, and resistance to oppressive power structures (Eagleton 1994: 15). This deconstruction of ideologies is critical in understanding how language and discourse serve to maintain or challenge societal power dynamics, particularly in contexts of war trauma, where ideological narratives often seek to justify

violence or marginalize victims' experiences.

### **b. Power and Power Relations**

Power is generally understood as the ability to influence others' thoughts, beliefs, and actions, as well as the capacity to shape the course of events. It encompasses the authority to impose agendas, ideologies, and value systems upon others (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 77). The sources of power are diverse, stemming from wealth, physical strength, gender, age, state control, and institutional, political, and religious authority. These factors contribute to hierarchical power relations, which are often negotiated in interactions to serve specific aims and agendas (Holmes, 1995: 17). In political discourse, such as interviews or negotiations, these power dynamics manifest dynamically, reflecting broader sociopolitical and ideological contexts. As Luke (1996: 23) notes, power may be exercised overtly, through visible coercion, or covertly, by influencing individuals' beliefs, perceptions, and desires. This dual mode of exercising power is especially relevant in contexts of war and trauma, where discourse is used not only to legitimize authority but

also to subtly shape collective memory and ideological conformity.

### **c. Pragmatic Strategies in Depicting Trauma**

Pragmatics, encompassing both verbal and non-verbal communication, plays a crucial role in the representation of trauma. Pragmatic competence is different from other linguistic competencies because it is developed through social interaction and evolves as individuals learn to navigate interpersonal communication (Leech, 1983). Pragmatics involves interpreting meaning beyond the literal content of words, recognizing intentions, and adapting linguistic forms to social contexts (Levinson, 1983). This is particularly important for those people who have survived a trauma as they may experience disruptions in their pragmatic abilities due to their lived experiences.

For example, (Koponen, et. al., 2009) propose that some children who have endured some type of abuse or trauma may struggle to interpret the intentions of other people in a correct manner and they may misinterpret the communication of other people which result in difficulties in expressing and

understanding emotional gestures and interactions. These children often face challenges in recognizing the subtleties of social cues and may misinterpret the words or intentions of the other people due to the cognitive and emotional impact of their trauma. The pragmatic disconnect of these children extends after their childhood and leave a permanent mark that is evident in the way by which the survivors of such trauma process and communicate their experiences, often marked by silence, fragmented speech, or hesitation. Previous research proved that the lack of affectionate interactions in early stages in life can stunt linguistic and socio-emotional development, influencing the individual's ability to respond to communicative demands later in life (Prathanee et. al., 2007).

This study is going to use the following tools in order to detect and analyze the above mentioned concepts:

**a. CDA**

Analytical research usually deploys CDA in order to examine the manner by which the type of the particular linguistic forms used in a particular context can construct and challenges the power dynamics and

ideological positions that are related to trauma. CDA focuses on how discourse reflects, reinforces, or contests power structures and ideologies, and it is one important tool in revealing how the trauma experienced by characters not only a personal affliction but also a reflection of broader power imbalances and ideological conflicts (Wodak & Meyer, 2001).

**b. Speech Acts in Critical Perspective**

The analysis of speech acts is an indispensable tool in this study because this analysis is able to provide deep insights into how language functions as a means of resistance, oppression, and negotiation of power relations. The theory of speech acts categorizes utterances based on their functional roles (e.g., assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations), and this makes it instrumental in understanding the characters' interactions and the power dynamics at play.

**c. Implicature and Presupposition**

Implicature and presupposition are among the most important tools for achieving the purposes of this study because they are usually used to investigate hidden meanings and

assumptions that reveal the impact of trauma within power structures. Implicature refers to the different meanings that are implied within the forms of language that are used in a particular context, provided that those meanings go beyond the literal content of utterances (Grice, 1975), while presupposition refers to the underlying assumptions that are taken for granted in the discourse (Stalnaker, 1974).

### **c. Deixis and Context Analysis**

Deixis and context analysis are interested in discovering how the spatial and the temporal references in the novel can highlight the disorientation and the displacement that the traumatized individuals usually show. The deictic expressions—such as those related to time, place, and person—are crucial in understanding how characters experience and navigate their traumatic realities. For example, shifting the temporal references in the designated novel might be taken as a sign for the struggles that face a particular character with his/her past experiences and with the present reality. Additionally, spatial deixis can reveal how the physical and

social environments contribute to feelings of alienation and instability. By analyzing these deictic elements within their socio-political context, we gain a clearer understanding of how trauma reshapes characters' perceptions and interactions.

## **4. Analysis**

### **4.1 Representation of War Trauma through CP**

The linguistic choices in the novel reflect how trauma intersects with power and ideology. The passage: “Heroism no longer has a face in this country, where heroism is intertwined with betrayal, humanity with savagery, and sacrifice with exploitation...” (Al-Ramli, 2016: 29) employs metaphorical language, merging heroism with treachery and humanity with savagery. These metaphors not only reveal the chaos of war but also illustrate the erosion of clear moral distinctions, which is a common psychological consequence of trauma, resulting in difficulties in emotional expression and interaction, as discussed by (Koponen, et. al. 2009). The fusion of concepts that are traditionally opposed—such as sacrifice and exploitation—serves as a commentary on how war distorts

ideological values, where power and betrayal blur the lines between right and wrong. This metaphorical blending is a form of linguistic resistance against the simplistic narratives of heroism typically propagated by ideological powers.

The use of silence and fragmented speech is also a linguistic marker of trauma. In the passage:

“I am sad this time, Ibrahim, **saaad**... perhaps it’s anxiety, perhaps it’s fear... I don’t know exactly.” (p. 54) the repetition and fragmentation indicate a breakdown in the speaker’s ability to fully articulate their emotions aligning with the notes of (Prathanee et. al., 2007). This represents trauma’s impact on communication, where language becomes insufficient to express the depth of the psychological distress. The uncertainty, expressed through the repetition of “perhaps” and “I don’t know exactly” showcases how trauma interrupts the normal flow of thought and speech, acting as a form of resistance against fully confronting the overwhelming emotional burden.

The passage "If every victim had a book, Iraq would be a vast library that would be impossible to even

catalog" (p. 10) highlights the scale of human loss through a poignant metaphor. The country is depicted as a library of suffering, too vast to categorize, illustrating how trauma overwhelms the collective memory. The inability to catalog such loss signifies not only the sheer number of victims but the impossibility of fully processing or memorializing each individual trauma.

Al-Ramli's use of metaphors, such as "the war is a dark cloud" (p. 45), symbolizes the pervasive nature of trauma and its all-encompassing impact on the psyche. This metaphor suggests that war covers all aspects of life, leaving no escape, which reflects the totalizing power of trauma and its relation to power structures that perpetuate war.

On page (102), one character, Ibrahim, is described as falling into long silences when recounting war experiences. These silences serve as a powerful marker of his internal trauma, signifying that words are inadequate to capture his suffering. In this context, silence can be interpreted as both resistance and submission—resistance to articulating what is unbearable, and

submission to the overwhelming nature of trauma itself.

In another passage, "Does life, with its shocks, teach each of us how to understand the meaning of life better?" (p. 29), the rhetorical question captures the uncertainty and confusion inherent in traumatic experiences. Life's "shocks" act as both a source of existential questioning and a disruption of meaning. The use of this rhetorical device underscores the character's search for understanding in the face of overwhelming emotional and psychological distress, revealing the philosophical grappling with the aftermath of trauma. This goes in line with (Holmes, 1995) who notes that power relations are often negotiated in interactions to serve specific aims and agendas.

#### **4.2 Power Dynamics and Ideological Constructs**

The novel frequently explores how characters' language reflects and contests power structures. The character in:

"He was resigned to his fate, obedient to his commanding officers" (p. 45) showcases submission to military authority, which mirrors larger ideological constructs of obedience to power.

This passage not only describes the character's physical compliance but also speaks to a deeper ideological submission to a system of control. The phrase: "He was resigned to his fate" suggests that the character's mental state has been shaped by an internalized acceptance of the authority that governs his life, a reflection of how oppressive structures use trauma to enforce compliance. This goes in line with the notes of (Brown and Levinson, 1987) that the authority tries to impose agendas, ideologies, and value systems upon others.

The dialogue between government officials and villagers on page (76) highlights the dissonance between the language of authority and the experience of the oppressed. For instance, the official's euphemistic use of "security operations" to describe violent crackdowns reflects an ideological effort to normalize state oppression, whereas the villagers' language is fragmented and filled with euphemisms, showing their precarious social position.

The novel critiques the narrative of sacrifice promoted by the state, where soldiers are depicted as martyrs in the name of national

honor. This critique is evident on page (143), where a soldier laments, "We are not martyrs; we are just bodies thrown into the fire." This statement exposes the gap between state ideology and the lived reality of trauma, subverting the glorified language of war.

However, in other instances, characters subtly contest these power structures through their language. For instance, when Tareq warns Abdullah:

"I advise you not to speak like that... I fear for you" (p. 93). The cautionary tone reflects the constant fear of surveillance in oppressive regimes, this aligns with Luke's (1996: 23) note that power may be exercised overtly, through visible coercion, or covertly. Tareq's warning reflects an awareness of the ideological grip that power holds over everyday interactions, yet by advising Abdullah, he is also enacting a small act of resistance, protecting him from the potential consequences of speaking too openly. This kind of pragmatic negotiation of power—knowing when and how to speak—reveals the intricate dance between submission and resistance within oppressive frameworks.

The portrayal of power dynamics is evident in how characters respond to loss and suffering. For instance, in the passage "At that moment, he wished he could present her with Abdullah's corpse in his hands... But to tell her, while holding the paper, that he is missing is a much harsher torment" (p. 66), the speaker reflects on how the uncertainty of Abdullah's fate is more torturous than his confirmed death. This reflection mirrors the ideological constructs of control that regimes often employ—uncertainty and ambiguity as tools of psychological oppression. This manipulation of hope and despair in this passage reflects the cruel power structures that leave victims suspended in emotional torment, exacerbating their trauma.

The line "Rest assured, peoples go through crises and suffer, but they never die" (p. 62) highlights the resilience of the collective despite the atrocities of war. While the statement suggests hope, it also risks trivializing individual trauma by subsuming it under the collective identity of a nation or people. This line assures that people will always be resistance to oppressive power

structures as stated by (Eagleton 1994).

### 4.3 Pragmatic Strategies in Depicting Trauma

Speech acts in the novel highlight the intersection of trauma, power, and resistance. In the passage where the president pulls the musician's tie and speaks in "calm... yet frightening" (p. 185), the president is calm yet threatening tone embodies a power dynamic that relies on intimidation and psychological manipulation. This is an example of a perlocutionary speech act, where the president's words do more than communicate information—they intimidate and instill fear, reinforcing the power he holds over others, and this resembles what is mentioned by (Prathanee et al., 2007).

In the passage "As some said tearfully in the final moments: "Our greetings to beloved Iraq and our kisses to every grain of its soil..." (p. 107), the use of reported speech serves as a pragmatic device to distance the speaker from the sentiments expressed. The character's detachment from the patriotic rhetoric of others reflects his disillusionment with nationalistic

ideologies. Here, the character's refusal to embrace the patriotic fervor of his peers becomes an act of resistance against the very ideologies that fuel war and trauma.

Furthermore, the passage poses deep philosophical questions about the nature of torture and the mindset of the torturer: "What does the torturer think about during his moments of calm? What does all this pain mean... and why?" (p. 107). These questions highlight the disconnect between the experience of pain and the ideological justifications for inflicting it. Through these reflections, the novel critiques the ideological frameworks that sanction violence under the guise of justice or truth, leaving characters grappling with the senselessness of their suffering.

Implicature and presupposition also play a key role in revealing underlying power dynamics. For example, the euphemistic language used in:

"In Al-Mansour district of Baghdad, there is a strange secret palace, one that is very, very private, reserved for the very, very personal affairs of the president" (p. 173) implies corruption and misuse of power without explicitly stating it. The

repetition of “very private” signals that there is something unspeakable about the president’s activities, which everyone understands but no one dares to name. This implicit communication underscores the societal norms that criticize the regime, while still acknowledging its corrupt practices.

On page (188), a mother’s refusal to accept the death of her son as a “heroic sacrifice” can be seen as a speech act of defiance against the state’s glorification of war. In contrast, other characters comply with the dominant narrative, exemplified by one soldier’s resigned acceptance: “If the government says I’m a hero, then a hero I must be” (p. 152), which reflects how trauma leads to submission under power.

On page (210), the presupposition in the phrase “They say we fight for peace, but where is this peace?” underscores the irony and contradiction embedded in the political rhetoric of the time. The implicature here challenges the official narrative by suggesting that the very premise of the war is false, thereby exposing deeper societal

norms and expectations around nationalism and sacrifice.

#### **4.4 Thematic Exploration of *The President's Gardens***

The novel’s depiction of war trauma is deeply tied to broader social, political, and ideological conflicts. The image of the growing cemetery in the conversation between Abdullah and Umm Ibrahim:

“The cemetery has doubled in size since I last saw it” (p. 117-118) reflects the physical and emotional toll of war, as well as the societal need to cope with loss. The metaphor of the expanding cemetery serves as a visual representation of how war pervades every aspect of life, from personal grief to collective memory. The unwillingness of villagers to bury their dead in isolation symbolizes the communal nature of trauma and the desire for solidarity even in death.

The novel presents war trauma not as an isolated personal experience but as a reflection of larger political and social conflicts. For example, on page (233), the character Abdullah’s mental breakdown is portrayed as symptomatic of the collective

national psyche fractured by decades of dictatorship, war, and economic hardship. His trauma reflects not only personal loss but also societal collapse.

Political regimes and societal expectations deeply influence how characters experience and articulate their trauma. On page (98), a soldier's recounting of his experiences is shaped by the need to conform to societal ideals of masculinity and heroism. He suppresses his vulnerability, saying, "Men don't cry in war," which reflects the external pressure to embody strength, even when suffering internally.

War trauma is thematically explored as a byproduct of broader political and ideological conflicts. The passage "I do not understand how a person can be so happy that another person is afraid and terrified of him and is in his grip" (p. 94) points to the dehumanizing effects of power. The character's reflection on cruelty emphasizes the moral degradation that occurs when one person holds absolute power over another.

In a particularly bleak reflection on life and death, the passage

"Gardens are ultimately just another form of mass graves" (p. 207) employs a powerful metaphor to equate life with death. The image of gardens as mass graves encapsulates the inevitability of death and the futility of life in a world defined by violence and trauma. This metaphor reflects the omnipresence of trauma in a world that is, as the passage suggests, ultimately destined for oblivion.

Moreover, the role of external contexts, such as political regimes and social expectations, shapes characters' experiences of trauma. The reference to the president's personal indulgences (p. 173) and the reverence with which soldiers address him "They addressed Ibrahim as 'cousin,' but when speaking of the president, they referred to him as 'the president' or 'the leader'" (p. 231) highlight how power structures perpetuate a culture of submission and fear. These societal expectations—where people are required to show deference to authority figures—reinforce the traumatic environment in which characters live. The language of respect and deference serves to maintain the ideological narrative of the president's supremacy, even as it

contributes to the psychological trauma of those forced to live under such oppressive conditions.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Interpretation of Findings

In *The President's Gardens*, Muhsin al-Ramli masterfully intertwines language with the portrayal of war trauma, power, and ideology. The novel's linguistic choices—metaphors, euphemisms, silences, and fragmented speech—reveal a deep engagement with the psychological and sociopolitical dimensions of trauma. It is also evident that Al-Ramli uses metaphors to communicate the overwhelming and inescapable presence of trauma to illustrate how language becomes a vessel to convey the pervasive and oppressive forces of war.

A key finding of the analysis is the way silence and fragmented speech are used as markers of trauma, the examples are scattered all over the novel, but the clearest example is when the writer talked about Ibrahim's usually resort to silence (p. 102) which is a pragmatic response to the inadequacy of language in capturing traumatic experiences. Particularly, these periods of silence can be interpreted

as acts of both resistance and submission—resistance to the political and societal pressures to glorify or narrate war experiences and submission to the sheer weight of the trauma, which language cannot fully express.

Additionally, the novel critiques the state-driven ideological narratives by the use of particular linguistic forms by different characters, for example, the use of euphemisms like “security operations” (p. 76) by government officials to sanitize violence highlight the oppressive power structures that are at play in Iraqi context and Al-Ramli subverts these narratives through characters who, in moments of defiance, reject the state's glorification of war. Another example is the declaration that was stated by the soldier, “We are not martyrs; we are just bodies thrown into the fire” (p. 143), is a powerful critique of the state's ideological manipulation of war trauma.

The interplay between linguistic features and power dynamics is further revealed in the way by which different characters use speech acts of defiance and compliance, this is evident in the refusal of the mother

to accept her son's death as a "heroic sacrifice" (p. 188) which is a speech act of resistance against the official narrative that was told by the government, while other characters, through compliance, embody the submission to these power structures, illustrating the complex relationship between language, trauma, and ideological control.

## 5.2 Contribution to CP

This study found that the novel's linguistic choices - metaphors, euphemisms, silences, and fragmented speech- are heavily used to reflect the psychological, social and political dimensions of the concept of trauma. This study also found that the writer used various pragmatic tools to reveal the hidden power dynamics that shape the experiences of the characters of the novel and the trauma that they individually and collectively suffer from. The most distinctive pragmatic tools that are used by the writer are speech acts, implicature, and presupposition.

The findings from this study contribute significantly to the field of CP, particularly in the analysis of the concept of trauma in literary works. This study highlights the critical role that is played by the

linguistic choices to shape and portray the traumatic experiences, and that the use of metaphors, presuppositions, and silences played an important role in defining our understanding of how individuals communicate the unspeakable and resist oppressive ideological forces.

The study has found that CDA is an effective method for analyzing trauma and examining how trauma is mediated through language and how pragmatic tools can reveal that. This is done by demonstrating how silence, a non-verbal linguistic feature, can act as both a marker of trauma and a subtle form of resistance to power.

## 6. Conclusion

*The President's Gardens* by Muhsin al-Ramli offers a profound exploration of war trauma through the lens of CP. The novel demonstrates how linguistic choices, such as metaphors, euphemisms, and silences, function as tools to represent the psychological impact of war, while also reflecting and contesting power structures and ideological narratives. Al-Ramli critiques state-driven ideologies that glorify violence, using the characters' language to resist these

narratives and expose the deep fractures within their psyches and society.

This study enhances the understanding of CP, particularly in the context of trauma literature, by revealing how language mediates the experiences of trauma and reflects broader social and political conflicts. Through the pragmatic strategies deployed in the novel, we gain

insight into the complex ways in which trauma, power, and ideology intersect in literary texts. This research opens avenues for further investigation into the role of language in trauma literature, with implications for critical discourse studies, postcolonial analysis, and the broader study of war trauma in fiction.

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