



Washing the Dead, Weaving the Invisible: Magical Realism in Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer*

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Abstract in English

The current study examines how Sinan Antoon adeptly employs magical realism in *The Corpse Washer* (2010) to delineate the psychological and cultural toll perpetrated by decades of violence in Iraq. The paper examines Jawad's experiences as a reluctant corpse washer and aspiring artist, recurring nightmares, Shiite funerary rituals, and symbolic landscapes, aiming to show how Antoon adroitly use magical realism to critique the demolition of Iraqi identity during the American occupation and resist Western-centric accounts of the 2003 War. Through a qualitative literary analysis grounded in magical realism theory and postcolonial frameworks, the study explores the novel's blending of the mundane and surreal to voice Iraq's collective trauma and cultural resilience. The main findings reveal that rituals such as corpse washing and symbols like the death-fed pomegranate tree serve as subversive articulation to the hegemonic discourses, reclaiming agency of Iraqis whose country is engulfed by narratives of loss. Thus, the employment of magical realism in the novel not only uncovers the fragmentation of Iraqi identity but also espouses that the Iraqi cultural heritage persists amid devastation. This paper contributes to postcolonial literary scholarship by bringing to the fore Iraqi narrative of global war literature and highlights the importance of magical realism as an implement for marginalized nations to subvert erasure. The paper concludes with suggestions for further studies on gender roles and resilience in postcolonial contexts.

Paper Info

Keywords

Iraq, magical realism, Sinan Antoon, The Corpse Washer, Postcolonialism

1. Introduction

The twentieth century witnessed a global rise in ethnic and sectarian conflicts, leaving many countries, including Iraq, in a state of perpetual violence. Iraq's history is imbued by a series of devastating events: the 1968 military coup that positioned the "Ba'th Party and Saddam Hussein into power (1968–2003), the war with Iran from

1980 to 1988, the two Gulf wars of 1991 and 2003, a 13 year economic embargo, and lastly the post 2003 invasion and occupation" (Mahmoud, 2015, p.49). These historical events have deeply shaped Iraqi literature and identity, with authors drawing on their personal experiences of war and channeling these experiences into fiction to shed light on the psychological and cultural aftermaths of conflicts.

Throughout human civilizations, war and violence have been key subjects in literature. In Iraqi literature, the subject of war plays a prominent role. Authors constantly voice their personal experiences of the horrors of war and probe how wars have wounded them. These authors generate stories that represent war as vicious, obstinate and appalling. Likewise, "Iraqi writers in exile have been united in writing about a homeland that has suffered under repression, censorship, war, and occupation" (Mahmoud, 2015, p.50). In this context, the Iraqi American novelist, poet, and translator Sinan Antoon has articulated his voice regarding the 2003 occupation and other issues in *The Corpse Washer* and his whole oeuvre.

The Corpse Washer (2010) is a significant critique of the Iraq War and its reverberation, merging realism with magical rudiments to express the trauma of living through decades of conflicts. The novel sheds light on two critical events in contemporary Iraq: The Gulf War in 1990 and the American invasion in 2003. The novel is about an Iraqi young man named Jawad, who is coerced to work as corpse washer (Mankhia et al., 2020, p. 90). The Chinese scholar Chen Hao (2017) in "*The Corpse Washer: An Ontological Critique of Counter-Terrorist Discourse and Iraq War*," proclaims that the novel presented the Iraqi version of historicizing the 2003 war and subverts the Western hegemony. The current paper, however, explores how Antoon uses magical realism to voice the psychological and cultural impact of war on the Iraqi identity. According to Bertolt Brecht, "Art is not a mirror held up to reality but a hammer with which to shape it" reflecting the active role of literature in reshaping society, rather

than merely reflecting reality (Naiman, 2022). Thus, by merging the real and the magical, Antoon fashions a narrative that challenges the Western-centric discourse about the Iraq War, offering instead a profoundly Iraqi point of view on loss, trauma, and resilience.

2- Methodology

This paper applies a qualitative literary analysis, grounded in the theoretical frameworks of magical realism and postcolonialism. Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer* is examined through close reading to identify narrative techniques, symbols, and themes that reflect Iraq's collective trauma and cultural resilience. Magical realist elements such as Jawad's nightmares, the pomegranate tree, and Shiite funerary rituals are analyzed through close reading. The study builds on scholarly works on magical realism, postcolonial theory. The methodology incorporates textual analysis with theoretical framework to show how the writer blends the mundane with magical to critiques Western hegemony and voices Iraqi identity.

3- Aims of the Study

The study aims to examine magical realism in *The Corpse Washer* which serves as a narrative tool to critique the psychological and cultural devastation wrought by decades of war and occupation in Iraq .

The study also aims to analyze symbolic elements (e.g., the pomegranate tree, corpse-washing rituals) as acts of resistance against cultural erasure .

The study also investigates how the individual trauma of Jawad represents the collective Iraqi identity .

The study positions the novel within postcolonial literary scholarship which serves a counter-discourse to the

Western-centric narratives of the Iraq War .

4-Significance of the Study

This research contributes to postcolonial literary studies by foregrounding Iraqi voices in global war literature, a field often dominated by Western perspectives. The study affirms the role of literature and magical realism to reclaim agency for marginalized narratives and to resist cultural hegemony. The study demonstrates how local rituals and storytelling preserves identity amid conflict. Moreover, the study opens avenues for further scholarships on gender dynamics and comparative examination of magical realism in Arab literature. Eventually, it endorses that art is pionant tool to challenge erasure and voice the invisible wounds of war .

5- Literature Review

Sinan Antoon's *The corpse Washer* (2010), originally titled "Wahdaha Shajarat al-Rumman", has been the subject of many scholarly studies shedding light on the manner in which the war on Iraq has marred the sacred land. To begin with, "Art as Cultural Glue in Sinan Antoon's 'The Corpse Washer'" a paper submitted by Mohammed Lateef Aziz and Zhang Longhai (2022) has studied the novel from the postcolonial perspective. The study Asserts that *The Corpse Washer* contends that colonial ideologies have disfigured the Iraqi native culture; thus, influencing the rebellious spirit of Iraqis. They assert that the novel is a cultural artifact which resists Western ideological supremacy espousing that art may help in rewriting "history with a native perspective". (p.499).

Within an analogous context, José M. Yebra's paper, "Iraq Wars from the Other Side: Transmodern Reconciliation

in Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer*" (2018), synthesizes Sinan Antoon's novel *The Corpse Washer* under the umbrella of Transmodernity, a framework which aims to reconcile progress and tradition, chiefly in non-Western societies. Yebra (2018) asserts that *The Corpse Washer* is a potent critique of the Iraq conflicts, however, it also provides a glimpse of hope through highlighting art, ritual, and the persistent worth of Iraqi culture.

Central to the novel is the omnipresence of death, rituals and violence. In this framework, Radwa Ramadan Mahmoud in in her paper "War and Violence in Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer*" (2015) states that Iraq was ravaged by war. Literature is a platform with which writers may regain the humanity of the people who were devastated in the aftermaths of the war. Mahmoud (2015) stresses the narrative techniques used by Antoon to portray the traumatic experiences of Iraqi people. All in all, the novel is a testament of "the Iraqi trauma that is not otherwise available...[however] Iraqis continue to resist and dream, trying to create art as ways of coping with despair and healing trauma and violence" (p.54).

In "Necropolitics in Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer*" José M. Yebra and Alfonso Revilla (2022), state that *The Corpse Washer* defies Western necropolitics in two key ways: first the stereotypes of Iraqis are put into question, particularly their association with terror or martyrdom. Secondly, "surrealism and gothic elements help the protagonist and his country to sublimate the trauma derived from American neocolonial politics" (Yebra & Revilla, 2022, p.112).

Shedding light on the psychological toll of war and conflicts,

the paper titled "An Eco-Traumatic Iraqi Experience in Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer*: An Eco-Critical Perspective" by Shaima Abdullah Jassim and Sarmad Majeed Mohammed (2024) focuses on how the trauma of place impacts Iraqis. Through the character of Jawad, Antoon illustrates how the trauma of place can lead to a sense of alienation and dissociation from one's environment. The novel rails against the romantic view of nature as a place of relief and shelter, instead portraying it as a site of worry. In the same context, Azhar Hameed Mankhi, Hussein Jasim Mohammed, and Issa Radhi Hummadi in "Prolonged War Trauma in Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer*" by (2020), emphasize that the novel is not just a personal story but a collective one, reflecting the experiences of all Iraqis who have suffered under decades of war and violence that "The protagonist works as the author's puppet and spokesman who stands for every man in the war-torn Iraq where Iraqis suffer moral injuries that affect their psyches" (Mankhia et al., 2020, p.96).

However, no erstwhile study has applied magical realism to *The Corpse Washer*. In framing the novel in magical realism literary theory, the study will amplify how the novel probes even deeper into the psychological and cultural landscape of Iraq, providing a surreal yet down to earth examination of life, death, and resilience in the face of war and turmoil. The amalgamation of the real and the magical would echo the fragmented, dreamlike nature of trauma and memory, fashioning a poignant and lingering story.

6- Analysis and Discussion

Magical realism, as a literary theory, disturbs Western- accounts of war by bringing to the fore the

marginalized voices, native narratives, and peoples' ordeals. In Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer*, this mode becomes a means to voice Iraqi experiences of invasion, occupation, and cultural demolition that confront the Western perception of valor, development, or rationalism. The novel, thereby, "constitutes an account of post-war Iraq narrated by an Iraqi youth and authored by an Iraqi émigré. It is thus a valuable alternative to American fiction on the conflict and its aftermath" (Yebra & Revilla, 2022, p.96). Through the protagonist Jawad's odyssey—torn between his familial responsibility as a '*mghassilchi*' (body washer) and his ambition to be a sculptor—Antoon interweaves the tangible impacts of death with the ethereal language of visions and symbols. This mixture of realism and the magical realist becomes a narrative vehicle to pronounce trauma, both personal and collective.

The Corpse Washer relates the story of Jawad who lives in Baghdad. His family works in washing and shrouding corpses before their burial. So Jawad was geared to become a corpse washer, continuing the family's calling. From an early age his father teaches him how to wash corpses in the *mghaysil* (washhouse) the traditional job of the family. Jawad was repeatedly observing his father and Hammoudy (the assistant of his father) doing the ritual of cleansing and shrouding the corpses of the dead in order to master the profession. The *mghaysil*, early in the novel, was presented with such elegance and respect:

It was a bit smaller than I had imagined it. The scents of lotus and camphor wafted through the air... The first object that struck my eyes after we crossed the hallway and entered

the main room was the marble bench on which the dead were washed...The mghaysil was more than six decades old, and many generations of our family had worked in it, including my grandfather, who had died before I was born. The walls and ceiling were painted a yellowish white (Antoon, 2013, p.14)

Building on the theoretical framework of magical realism, the mghaysil, a landscape in which Jawad is in touch with death quotidianly, is a symbol for Iraq's collective trauma. The ritual of washing bodies—a act of poise amid turmoil—matches the country's melee to reserve identity amid death. Yet, as corpses increase during the U.S. occupation, Jawad's work sounds wasted. As he getting older, Jawad rejects to carry on the family's job. He has a dream to be an artist that's why he registers in Baghdad's Academy of Fine Arts to study there. Nonetheless, things go awry in Baghdad and encroach his aspirations; economic sanctions during Saddam Hussein's reign, and then the American intervention in Iraq exact their repercussion:

After weeks of bombing we woke up one morning to find the sky pitch black. The smoke from the torched oil wells in Kuwait had obliterated the sky. Black rain fell afterward, coloring everything with soot as if forecasting what would befall us later . (Antoon, 2013, p. 61)

Jawad has a feeling that he is clouded in an environment where "even the statues are too terrified to sleep at night lest they wake up as ruins" (Antoon, 2013, p. 67). This imagery suggests a world where inanimate objects are imbued with life and emotions, a hallmark of magical realism. This represents the ubiquitous

fear and flux in Jawad's milieu, where even the concrete structures (like statues) are susceptible to abrupt and ruinous change.

Jawad's ordeal is both personal and collective, mirroring Iraq's national trauma. The death of his brother Ammourey in the Iran-Iraq war and his father's unexpected death during the 2003 occupation doubled his existential crisis. To contextualize Jawad's trauma, Antoon fractures the narrative timeline, juxtaposing childhood reminiscences with adult disillusionments, to reflect trauma's disruption of linear time. All in all, in the novel, the timeline of the narrative swings back and forth since Antoon represent to us certain scenes and important situations from Jawad's life, virtually like episodes. This provides us with glimpses of the agony and distress of living in a time of an inexorable bereavement and devastation that has come with conflicts and war (Wine, 2014).

For example, Jawad's recall of his initial encounter with a corpse—a burned man whose "skin looked like a pack of wolves had attacked it"—haunts him decades later (Antoon, 2013, p.25). As such, "The fire had eaten away his skin and discolored all over... I vomited that day and was sick for days" (Antoon, 2013, p.24). Jawad confronts a charred body, a victim of industrial accidents during the Iran-Iraq war. The grotesque realism of the corpse disrupts the ritualistic act of washing, grounding the horror of war in the mundane. This tension between sacred duty and visceral horror exemplifies magical realism's ability to juxtapose the ordinary and extraordinary. The corpse becomes a metaphor for Iraq's desecrated body politic, its deformities laid bare yet regularized in Jawad's quotidian work.

As the dead toll of the occupation continues to mount, Jawad remains working in the washhouse. Death is ubiquitous in the novel, and Jawad appears incapable of escaping its pervasive miasma:

Death is not content with what it takes from me in my waking hours, it insists on haunting me even in my sleep. Isn't it enough that I toil all day tending to its eternal guests, preparing them to sleep in its lap? Is death punishing me because I thought I could escape its clutches? If my father were still alive he would mock my silly thoughts. (Antoon, 2013, p.3)

Antoon amplifies the influence of death by the presentation of sleeplessness and horrendous hallucinations which trouble Jawad every night. Those disturbing nightmares engulf the novel, and in one instance he's haunted by "an old man with long white hair and a long white beard" who exhorts him to "write down all the names" (Antoon, 2013, p.26). Though Jawad is unable to understand whose names to write and why, he complies. Nevertheless, once the Christian God-like figure leaves, he notices that he has only written "Every soul shall taste death" hundreds of times (Antoon, 2013, p.26). According to Yebra and Revilla (2022), "These words appear in the Quran three times alluding to humanity's inexorable mortality" (p.104). The *Corpse Washer* represents the Old man in magic realist manner:

Wake up, Jawad, and write down all the names! I think it very odd that he knows my name. I look at his eyes. They are a strange sky-blue color, set deep into his eye sockets. His face is laced with wrinkles as if he were hundreds of years old. I ask him

flatly: Who are you? What names? He smiles: You don't recognize me? Get a pen and paper and write down all the names. Don't forget a single name. They are the names of those whose souls I will pluck tomorrow and whose bodies I will leave for you to purify. (Antoon, 2013, p. 26)

The Mysterious Old Man's appearance, knowledge of Jawad's name, and his sky-blue eyes (uncommon in Iraq) renders him magical. His wrinkled visage renders him a spiritual entity. The command to write "all the names" of those fated to die the next day presents a magical intrusion into reality, a sagacious awareness of mortality which disregards logic. The old man's tranquil smile and curt commands "Don't forget a single name" amplify the uncanny yet ordinary atmosphere. Thus, the list of names represents the inexorableness of death, and Jawad's pen representing as a link between the living and the dead. His role becomes a metaphysical extension of his profession, troubling him with prudence he cannot handle.

In similar breath, in another scene Jawad sees a naked, probably dead, Reem lying on a limestone bench who whispers in his ears: "Wash me, darling" which shows that the borders between reality and dreams are porous (Antoon, 2013, p.1). Jawad washes Reem, doing the same rituals he and his father used to enact on corpses of dead people, and in the meantime there was falling rain as if purifying the corpses. Then, abruptly, a horde of soldiers assault Jawad and ostensibly they rape Reem and taking her with them:

She is lying naked on her back on a marble bench in an open place with no walls or ceilings... Raindrops begin to fall, and she closes her eyes.

I wipe a drop off her nose with my index finger. Her skin is warm, which means she is alive... Masked men... drag her away." (Antoon, 2013, p.3).

Jawad's recurrent nightmares merge erotic desire with ferocity, as Reem—his lost love—is dreamt of being kidnapped by masked men in an infertile and surreal background. This blurs the psychological trauma with surreal description. The open, boundary-less space and abrupt viciousness interrupt the logic of reality, showing Jawad's unsettled anguish. In the very same context, the rain, a symbol of purification, unlike the cruelty of Reem's kidnap, represents magical realism's capability to amalgamate together splendor and repulsion to express inner commotion.

According to Yebra and Revilla (2022), the scene is nightmarish but also a reliable document. Jawad is unable to raise his voice, "having his neck penetrated with a knife and kneeling on blood constitute a testimony of how necropolitics deprives Iraqi people of their humanity and turns them into bare life" (p.105). These magical realist hallucinations are represented with the same matter-of-fact tone as Jawad's daily experiences, rendering the bizarre looks normal. This *mélange* of dreams and realism is a trademark of magical realism with which the author, dexterously, reflects the subterranean psychological trauma exacted by war while invoking a poetic, almost mythic quality to memory and loss.

Reem, Jawad's love, symbolizes both desire and absence. Her mastectomy and loss into exile render her a ghostly figure; her body a site of physical and metaphorical obliteration. Her final letter "I hate my body now and

wish I could run away from it to a new body"—reverberates with the trauma of a country blemished by war and conflicts (Antoon, 2013, p.113). According to Yebra and Revilla (2022), "Reem is featured as a mystic (yet sensual) figure who Jawad worships and desires" (p.106). To be sure, getting closer, he sees "two pomegranates on her chest instead of her breasts" (Antoon, 2013, p.123). Yet, in coming closer, he observes that "the left pomegranate falls" thus, he heads to take it, however, he sees that "Reem [is] crying as she tries to stop the fountain of blood gushing from the wound" (Antoon, 2013, p.123). Jawad, thereby, is wounded because she is injured.

Reem writes to Jawad in the aftermath of her mastectomy and self-inflicted banishment, breaking their relationship: "My body will carry your scents and pores in its memory... I am already jealous of her without knowing who she might be" (Antoon, 2013, p. 114). Reem's spectral presence in the letter—her body both absent and hauntingly present—blurs the line between physical and emotional reality. Her self-erasure echoes the disintegration of identity under trauma, a recurrent topos in magical realism. The letter's poetic abstraction transmutes personal loss into a general metaphor for displacement, aligning with the genre's examination of invisible lesions. As such, magical realism in the novel serves as a bridge between Jawad's exterior reality and his interior tumult. The recurrent nightmares: dreams of Reem, his lost love, being pulled away by masked men, or the visit of an old man—mirror the inevitability of anguish and virulence. These visions are not merely escapism but a instinctual expression of trauma.

Not only the human but the non-human becomes a site of subversion to the infliction of death, foreign hegemony. That being said, the pomegranate tree in the mghaysil's landscape, fed by runoff from corpse-washing, represents Iraq's ability to withstand decades of conflicts. Jawad espouses that: "The pomegranate tree my father loved so much stood... From the left-hand corner a small walkway led to the tiny garden where the pomegranate tree... drank the water of death for decades" (Antoon, 2013, p.16). The tree's roots, a naturalized magical part in the narrative, nourished by death, reflect Iraq's stamina through war and life stemming from death. The tree serves as a witness to generational trauma goes in line with magical realism's usage of symbolic objects to represent cultural memory. Like the ghosts in García Márquez's oeuvre, it becomes a silent curator of history.

At any rate, Jawad's quest to be an artist represents a pursuit of agency. His art, stimulated by Giacometti's skeletal figures, aims to commemorate the "shadow" of humanity in a country where life itself is momentary. Yet his father discards this as frolicsome. When Jawad is back to the washhouse, he takes a Giacometti statue which he washed as if it was a corpse. However, in uncanny scene, which reflects the dissolution of the Iraqi identity in time of conflicts and oppression, "the sculpture dissolves into tiny fragments" (Antoon, 2013, p.141). In fact, in spite of all his effort to repair it, "everything disintegrates" (Antoon, 2013, p.141). According to Yebra and Revilla (2022), Jawad washes the statue as if it were a corpse which "explains in a particularly perceptive way not only the disintegration of Jawad's dreams, but the dissolution of Iraqi people's lives

into bare lives under occupation" (p.107). Sabri, Jawad's uncle, proclaims that his nephew's hallucinations result from suffering (Antoon, 2013, p.98).

The novel's Iraqi milieu augments its magical realism. Shiite rituals—washing corpses, shrouding them with Quranic verses, putting pomegranate branches in coffins—are not only traditions but acts of confrontation against dehumanization. When Jawad's father dies mid-prayer, his perpetual prostration becomes a consecrated defiance in the face of death's finality: "He died in eternal prostration, his forehead pressed to the turba... as if he were still praying." (Antoon, 2013, p.63). The physical permanence of his prayer amalgamates the spiritual with the physical, a magical yet realistic element in the narrative. This image approves ritual as a kind of resistance against death's bedlam, a crucial motif in magical realism where the spiritual and ordinary coexist. The posture represents devoutness surpassing mortality, representing the diligence of cultural identity amid abolition. Likewise, the Americans defiled the Martyr's Monument—turning it into a military base—which shows that the Americans' indifference and willing to erase the Iraqi cultural memory.

7. Theoretical and Practical Frameworks

Magical realism, as a literary theory, was inaugurated in postcolonial studies. This literary mode helps framing narratives which challenge western hegemony, and offers the non-Western the means to articulate their own perspectives about war, conflicts, history and heritage. The magical realist writings have proliferated in an epoch in

which the postcolonial novel has risen to the fore (Boehmer, 1995, p.235).

Postcolonialism, in essence, denotes a socio-political framework challenging colonial hegemony. It likewise points to the effects of colonialism on the colonized people. Postcolonial writing is a means of reexamining the identity of a nation in the aftermath of its liberation or a way of challenging the hegemony of colonialism. Colonialism refers not only to the ruling of one country over another but also to any effort of a nation to spread its swings or to erase the cultural, sociopolitical, artistic, or accepted norms of the colonized people. This habitually refers to the endeavor by foreign authorities to frame the colonized through the colonizers' gaze and to impose certain hegemony on the colonized people. These profound repercussions of colonialism on the colonized are, by and large, the most challenging facets to overcome (Mambrol, 2019).

Postcolonialism, as a literary theory, frames postcolonialism and colonialism as a discourse which is a socially and politically coloured language. Hence, the postcolonial novels espouse certain agenda which challenge or point a finger to the aftermaths of colonialism. In this logic, a motley of literary works though might not pliantly tackle the subject of colonialism or Postcolonialism, however, a careful examination divulges a concern with such issues. Elleke Boehmer (1995) states that there is an inexorable correlation between Postcolonialism and magical realism:

Drawing on the special effects of magic realism, postcolonial writers in English are able to express their view of a world fissured, distorted, and

made incredible by cultural displacement...[T]hey combine the supernatural with local legend and imagery derived from colonialist cultures to represent societies which have been repeatedly unsettled by invasion, occupation, and political corruption. Magic effects, therefore, are used to indict the follies of both empire and its aftermath. (p.235)

By blending the magical and the real, the writers can critique the legacy of Postcolonialism and reclaim the voice of the subaltern people. The Canadian postmodernist critic Stephen Slemon proclaims that magical realism can express three postcolonial cachets. First and foremost, magical realism can show both the colonized people's and colonizer's viewpoints because the dual narrative structure. Secondly, with magical realism, one may generate a narrative that discloses the strains and gaps of delineation in that context. Thirdly, with magical realism, the fissures of portrayal in a post-colonial milieu can be filled in by improving the fragments and voices of neglected histories from the perspectives of the colonized (Bowers, 2004).

Employing Bakhtin's model of dialogism, Slemon, states that in narration there are two discourses; the magical and the real which show different perspectives. These narratives, however, are in persistent tension with each other. In his own words, there are "two opposing discursive systems, with neither managing to subordinate or contain the other" (Slemon, 1995, p.410). Accordingly, this structure of the narrative mirrors the colonialist and colonized discourses in the postcolonial milieu, that is the "texts recapitulate a postcolonial account of the social and historical relations of the culture in

which they are set" (Slemon, 1995, p.409). Thus, this tension proves that the narrative contains certain 'gaps'. These gaps might be seen as a negatively mirroring the difficulty of the colonized to articulate themselves in the face of the colonialist authority. It can be, likewise, seen as a positive gap that amplifying the perspective of the colonized people. Slemon (1995) states that this is for there is:

a battle between two oppositional systems takes place, each working toward the creation of a different kind of fictional world from the other. Since the ground rules of these two worlds are incompatible, neither one can fully come into being, and each remains suspended, locked in a continuous disjunction within each of the separate discursive systems, rending them with gaps, absences and silences. (p.409)

To voice the colonized perspective, several authors like Hodgins and Kroetsch try to restructure historical accounts from the remnants of the history of the colonized showing their point of view. As Slemon (1995) proclaims, "This imaginative reconstruction has echoes in those forms of postcolonial thought which seek to recuperate the lost voices and discarded fragments, that imperialist cognitive structures push to the margins of critical consciousness" (p.415). As such, a motley of postcolonial works make use of oral storytelling to be a means of alternate viewpoints of articulating history, since the oral account is frequently the sole means to give voice to alternate accounts which might not concede with those the hegemony. Slemon (1995) marks that the purpose of these accounts is that "the dispossessed, the silenced, and the marginalized of our

own dominating systems can again find voice" (1995, p.422)

Magical realism provides the means by which society may self-describe itself. Through magical realism, writers can change the anchored categories with which the West had interpreted other cultures; with which writers likewise question the western capitalist myth of modernity and development, and affirms the importance of the aboriginal preindustrial society. Magical realism offers the means by which writers can articulate a non-Western or non-dominant outlook in the face of hegemonic cultural discourse. In the words of Brenda Cooper (1998), "magical realism and its associated styles and devices is alternatively characterized as a transgressive mechanism that parodies Authority, the Establishment and the Law, and also as the opposite of all of these, as a domain of play, desire and fantasy for the rich and powerful" (p.29).

8. Conclusion

Through Jawad who is torn between familial duty and artistic aspiration, Sinan Antoon in *The Corpse Washer* mingles the mundane and the surreal, rendering visible the invisible wounds of collective trauma and suffering. The novel weaves magical symbols into its tapestry, like Jawad's haunting nightmares, the pomegranate tree fed by "death's water," and the violation of the Martyr's Monument, which serve as metaphors for Iraq's fragmented identity. These magical cachets intermingle to critique Western hegemonic narratives and help to reclaim the Iraqi agency through local rituals and storytelling. The corpse-washing, as a Shiite religious tradition and magic element, serves as an act of resistance—a tool to preserve dignity

amid hegemonic dehumanization. The paper concludes that magical realism serves two functions in postcolonial literature: it is a subversive tool with which the author sledgehammers hegemonic discourses and also serves as a bridge between collective memory and individual trauma. Framing *The Corpse Washer* within this framework, the critical analysis of the novel marks it as a tool to resist the hoax of “liberation” propagated by the Americans. This framework also foregrounds Iraq’s cultural resilience. This weaving of magical elements assists reclaiming the marginalized voices which have been muffled for long or overlooked.

The research offers insights of how postcolonial communities negotiate cultural erasure through art. Future studies may apply comparative analyses of magical realism in the novel with Iraqi and broader Middle Eastern fiction, especially that which addresses war and its aftermaths. Moreover, future studies may examine gender roles in the novel deeming Reem, for instance, as a site of bodily and national defilement. All in all, the novel stands as a poignant contribution to postcolonial and world literature, rendering the corporal and spectral as a manifestation of Iraq’s enduring spirit.

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Abstract in Arabic

المستخلص:

تتناول هذه الدراسة كيفية توظيف سنان أنطون للواقعية السحرية ببراعة في رواية "المغيسلجي" (2010) لتوضيح الآثار النفسية والثقافية المدمرة التي خلفها عقود من العنف في العراق. تبحث الورقة في تجارب "جواد" بوصفه غاسل جثث مُكرَّهاً وفنائاً طموحاً، وكوابيسه المتكررة، وطقوس الجنائز الشيعية، والفضاءات الرمزية، بهدف إظهار كيف يستخدم أنطون الواقعية السحرية بذكاء لنقد تدمير الهوية العراقية خلال الاحتلال الأمريكي ومقاومة الروايات الغربية المركزية عن حرب 2003. من خلال تحليل أدبي نوعي قائم على نظرية الواقعية السحرية وأطر ما بعد الاستعمار، تدرس البحث مزج الرواية بين اليومي والخيالي للتعبير عن الصدمة الجماعية للعراق وصموده الثقافي.

تكشف النتائج الرئيسية أن طقوساً مثل غسل الموتى ورموزاً مثل شجرة الرمان التي تتغذى على الموت تعمل كوسيلة تعبير مقاومة ضد الخطابات المهيمنة، مما يساهم في استعادة العراقيين لأصواتهم في ظل روايات فقدان التي تهيمن على بلدهم. وعليه، فإن توظيف الواقعية السحرية في الرواية لا يكشف فقط عن تنشيط الهوية العراقية فحسب، بل يؤكد أيضاً استمرار التراث الثقافي العراقي وسط الدمار. تُسهم هذه الورقة البحثية في دراسات الأدب ما بعد الاستعمار من خلال إبراز السرد العراقي في أدب الحرب العالمي، كما تسلط الضوء على أهمية الواقعية السحرية كأداة للأمم المهمشة مقاومة محاولات الطمس الثقافي. وتختتم الورقة باقتراحات لدراسات مستقبلية حول الذاكرة الثقافية والصمود في سياقات ما بعد الاستعمارية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العراق الواقعية السحرية، سنان أنطون، "المغيسلجي"، نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار.