



A Cognitive Stylistic Analysis of Crisis Rhetoric in English and Arabic Populist Poetry

ABSTRACT

This study examines the rhetorical construction of crisis in English and Arabic populist poetry through the lens of Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT), as developed by Fauconnier and Turner (2002), within a cognitive stylistic framework. While previous research has extensively analyzed populist discourse in political speech and media (Moffitt, 2016), the study argues that there remains a significant gap in understanding how crisis rhetoric is cognitively and stylistically realized in poetic texts across different linguistic and cultural contexts. This study aims to address that gap by investigating how selected poets construct crisis narratives through conceptual blending, symbolic framing, and ideological positioning. Methodologically, the research applies CBT to purposively selected extracts from four poems, two in English by Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Benjamin Zephaniah, and two in Arabic by Mudhaffar al-Nawwab and Muwaffaq Muhammad. The analysis focuses on the cognitive mechanisms that shape emergent meaning through conceptual integration, paying close attention to poetic form and sociopolitical context. Findings reveal that the English poems tend to employ irony, satire, and appeals to universality, whereas the Arabic poems emphasize historical trauma and symbols of collective resistance. Ultimately, the contrastive analysis of blending networks shows how crisis rhetoric in populist poetry reflects culturally embedded yet thematically parallel strategies for articulating mobilizing identity.

* Corresponding Author

Salah Hadi Shukur

Wasit Directorate-General
of Education

Baida' Faisal Noori

College of Arts, University
of Baghdad

Email:

salah.shukur@gmail.com

baydaa.alarajiy@coart.uo.baghdad.edu.iq

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لغة الاحتجاج: بلاغة الأزمة في الشعر الشعبي الإنجليزي والعربي

م. م. صلاح هادي شكر/المديرية العامة لتربية واسط
أ.د. بيداء فيصل نوري/ كلية الآداب، جامعة بغداد

المستخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة البناء البلاغي للأزمة في الشعر الشعبي باللغتين الإنجليزية والعربية من خلال توظيف نظرية المزج المفاهيمي كما طورها فوكونييه وتيرنر (2002)، وذلك ضمن إطار الأسلوبية المعرفية. وعلى الرغم من أن الدراسات السابقة قد تناولت الخطاب الشعبي بصورة موسعة في سياقات الخطاب السياسي والإعلامي (موفيت، 2016)، إلا أن هذه الدراسة ترى أن هناك فجوة ملحوظة في فهم كيفية تجلّي بلاغة الأزمة معرفياً وأسلوبياً في النصوص الشعرية، وخصوصاً عبر لغات وثقافات مختلفة. وتهدف هذه الدراسة إلى معالجة هذه الفجوة من خلال تحليل كيفية قيام شعراء مختارين ببناء سرديات الأزمة عبر المزج المفاهيمي، والأطر الرمزية، والتوظيف الأيديولوجي. وتعتمد منهجية هذه الدراسة على نظرية المزج المفاهيمي عبر اقتباسات مختارة قصدياً من أربع قصائد، اثنتان باللغة الإنجليزية للشاعرين لورنس فيرلينغيتي وبنجامين صنفيا، واثنتان باللغة العربية للشاعرين مظفر النواب وموفق محمد. ويركز التحليل على الآليات المعرفية التي تسهم في تشكيل المعنى الناشئ من خلال التكامل المفاهيمي، مع إيلاء اهتمام دقيق بالشكل الشعري والسياق السوسيوسياسي. وتكشف النتائج أن القصائد الإنجليزية تميل إلى استخدام السخرية والتهكم واستدعاء الطابع الإنساني العام، بينما تركز القصائد العربية على استدعاء الصدمة التاريخية والرموز المرتبطة بالمقاومة الجمعية. وفي المحصلة، تُظهر المقارنة بين شبكات المزج المفاهيمي كيف تعكس بلاغة الأزمة في الشعر الشعبي استراتيجيات متجذرة ثقافياً، وإن كانت متوازية موضوعياً في التعبير عن هوية احتجاجية قابلة للتعبئة.

الكلمات المفتاحية : بلاغة الأزمة، نظرية المزج المفاهيمي، الشعر الشعبي، الأسلوبية المعرفية، اللغة المجازية (المجاز).

1. Introduction

Poetry has long served as a powerful tool of resistance, political criticism, and collective identity construction, functioning as a discursive force for encoding protest and historical memory. Within this conception, populist poetry can be seen as a rhetorical genre that intensifies public protest, targets elites, and dramatizes social crises. Although the term “crisis rhetoric” is not explicitly used across studies, it highly corresponds to the idea of populist discourse, where crises are not merely represented but constructed to capture social dissatisfaction (Moffitt, 2016, p. 46). Moffitt’s notion of populism as a “political style” confirms the discursive performance of urgency, exceptionalism, and polarization, which can be seen as traits often mirrored in populist poetry. Likewise, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017) describe populism as a “thin-centered ideology” that divides society

into two antagonistic groups: the pure people and the corrupt elite (pp. 6–7). This binary depiction is also a recurrent feature in the stylistics of populist poetry.

While investigating populist discourse has been extensively done within political studies, media studies, and discourse analysis (Moffitt, 2016), its poetic manifestations remain poorly explored. Poetry, with its effectiveness and symbolism, offers a unique discursive area where ideological conflicts are encoded literally and metaphorically. Stockwell (2020) argues that the richness of poetic language and its figurative capacity make it suitable for constructing cognitive and ideological frames (pp. 200–215). Arabic poetry, in particular, has been historically intertwined with themes of resistance and sociopolitical protest, often encoding criticism through historical allusions and symbolic imagery (Allen, 2000, pp. 234–236).

To investigate how crisis rhetoric is constructed in the discourse of populist poetry, this study adopts Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT) as an analytical framework. Developed by Fauconnier and Turner (2002), CBT explains how mental spaces such as historical events, ideological values, or emotional experiences interact to produce new emergent meanings. When applied to literary texts, particularly poetry, CBT helps explain how metaphors and symbolic language generate layered interpretations. Brandt and Brandt (2005) suggest that conceptual blends in literature often operate at multiple semiotic levels, creating interpretive richness through cognitive compression (p. 218). This study compares English and Arabic populist poetry through the lens of CBT, concentrating on the cognitive stylistic underpinnings of crisis. The following research questions guide this inquiry:

- 1- How do English and Arabic populist poets construct crisis rhetoric through conceptual blending?
- 2- What cognitive stylistic mechanisms shape emergent meaning in their poetry?
- 3- How does crisis rhetoric in English poetry differ from Arabic poetry in terms of blending mechanisms?

2. Crisis Rhetoric

As a discursive construct, crisis rhetoric refers to the strategic framing of a socio-political situation as urgent, exceptional, and in need of radical intervention. Although Moffitt

(2016) does not explicitly use the term “crisis rhetoric,” he describes populism as a “performative style” that actively shapes crises to legitimize and focuses on political stances (p. 46). In this respect, crisis is not treated as an objective reality but as a discursive effect that is constructed through linguistic and rhetorical strategies. In populist poetry, the crisis can be detected in figurative language represented by the use of metaphor, irony, hyperbole, etc. These rhetorical choices intensify the emotional appeals and serve to dichotomize political actors by typically contrasting virtuous people with corrupted elites. Therefore, the crisis is dramatized not only through content but also through stylistic form. following Laclau (2005), the construction of crisis is essential to the construction of populist hegemony, as it mobilizes public emotion and constructs a shared narrative of grievance (p. 39). English poets such as Ferlinghetti and Zephaniah employ figurative language (metaphor and satire) to attack capitalist exploitation, violence, and injustice. Similarly, Arabic populist poetry often encodes crisis through historical allusion and symbolic fragmentation. Al-Nawwab’s poems, for instance, frame the Arab world as a series of jails and exile spaces, thus reinforcing a spatial image of crisis.

In addition to its rhetorical and stylistic dimensions, crisis rhetoric also functions as a cognitive and ideological framing device that enables audiences to make sense of complex realities through simplified oppositions. As Lakoff (2004) argues, framing is essential to political discourse, shaping not only what is thought but how it is thought, especially in times of perceived instability (p. 4). Crisis rhetoric in populist poetry draws on such framing mechanisms to construct emotionally charged mental models that activate urgency, fear, or outrage. In return, these mental models usually rely on symbolic mappings that represent the nation as wounded and the people as betrayed. Through the use of these strategies, crisis rhetoric becomes an instrument of resistance that brings about the emotional with the ideological, motivating readers to identify, sympathize, and potentially mobilize against political, social, and cultural powers.

3. Cognitive Stylistics and Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT)

Style refers to the manner of expression in writing and speaking and can be seen as a variation in language use, whether literary or non-literary (Mohammed *et al.*, 2012, p. 41). On the other hand, Cognitive stylistics is an interdisciplinary field that integrates insights

from cognitive linguistics, literary theory, and discourse analysis to explore how texts shape meaning through cognitive processes (Stockwell, 2020). Semino and Culpeper (2002) emphasize that meaning in literature is not merely a product of language structure but of how readers mentally process textual input (p. 3). This conception offers cognitive stylistics the capability of being a tool for understanding how linguistic choices activate mental representations. In this study, the cognitive stylistic focus lies in exploring how metaphorical and symbolic structures in populist poetry function as conceptual blends.

Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT), introduced by Fauconnier and Turner (2002), deals with the meaning that arises through the interaction of mental spaces, which are partial cognitive models that represent domains of knowledge or experience. In a conceptual blend, input spaces are mapped onto each other to form a blended space that contains emergent meaning that is not present in either input. According to Fauconnier and Turner, the blending process encompasses four processes: composition, completion, elaboration, and compression (pp. 48–65). These processes allow the integration of elements across domains, e.g., historical memory, religious symbolism, and political criticism, to construct new conceptual structures. Brandt and Brandt (2005) state that literary texts often deploy “double-scope networks,” where input spaces have different organizing frames, and the blend integrates them to create novel interpretations (p. 218). Such blends are common in protest poetry, where religious, political, and existential domains interact. For instance, a poem might juxtapose biblical or Quranic imagery with images of contemporary warfare, producing layered criticism that chimes with the readers on both rational and emotional levels.

CBT has been widely applied in metaphor analysis, but its application to poetry, particularly in politically charged and culturally diverse contexts like English and Arabic populist poetry, remains underexplored. This study aims to bridge that gap and address the construction of crisis rhetoric and its stylistic manifestations. The analysis of poems focuses on an integral part of the theory, that is, the compression of vital relations. It is a cognitive blending process that allows humans to have simultaneous control over multiple chains of logical reasoning and understand such chains’ comprehensive significance (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, p. 92). They discuss many types and subtypes of vital

conceptual relations. These vital relations include Change, Identity, Time, Space, Cause-Effect, Part-Whole, Representation, Role, Analogy, Disanalogy, Property, Similarity, Category, Intentionality, and Uniqueness. However, following Fauconnier and Turner (2002), Vengaliene (2011, p. 104) distinguishes between “outer space vital relations,” which are the relations that connect separate input spaces in the conceptual integration network, and “inner space vital relations,” which are the relations that have been compressed inside the blended space.

4. Methodology

This section outlines the methodological framework adopted in this study, stating the details of the data of the study, the analytical tools, and the theoretical applications.

4.1 The Sample of The Study

The study examines four purposively selected poems by prominent English and Arabic populist poets. Each poem represents a significant instance of political engagement and crisis discourse. The data of this study includes:

Table 1

The Populist Poems Selected in the Study

| Language | Poet | Poem Title | Date |
|----------|-----------------------|---|-------|
| English | Benjamin Zephaniah | <i>Kill Them Before Ramadan</i> | 1997 |
| English | Lawrence Ferlinghetti | <i>To the Oracle at Delphi</i> | 2001 |
| Arabic | Mudhaffar al-Nawwab | <i>In the Ancient Tavern (في الحانة القديمة)</i> | 1980s |
| Arabic | Muwaffaq Muhammad | <i>New Sketches to Moayad Ni'mah (تخطيطات جديدة لمؤيد نعمة)</i> | 2005 |

The poems in Table (1) are selected based on the following criteria:

- 1) Clear engagement with socio-political crisis and themes of populism.
- 2) Representation of diverse linguistic, cultural, and ideological contexts.
- 3) Prominence of the poets in their respective national traditions.
- 4) Poetic techniques that correspond to conceptual blending mechanisms.

4.2 Analytical Approach

The study follows a qualitative, interpretive approach grounded in Conceptual Blending Theory (2002). The analysis includes the following stages:

- 1) Identification of Extracts: One suitable, representative, figurative, and populist extract is selected for each poem to be analyzed qualitatively following CBT. The extracts selected usually represent more than one line of poetry to cover the full conceptual area tackled by the figurative use.
- 2) Identification of Input Spaces: Extract the primary conceptual domains represented in each selected extract (e.g., history, mythology, politics, religion).
- 3) Cross-Space Mapping: Identifying how elements from these domains are connected metaphorically, symbolically, or ideologically.
- 4) Blended Space Construction: Interpreting the emergent meaning constructed by integrating inputs and the subsequent blending mechanisms.
- 5) Comparative Interpretation: Drawing contrasts and parallels between English and Arabic blending strategies.

4.3 Study Tools and Validity

The analysis in this study is guided by:

- 1) Close textual reading of each poem.
- 2) Purposive selection of metaphorical and symbolic extracts.
- 3) Mapping of conceptual blends following CBT diagrams and principles
- 4) Stating the inner and outer vital relations that contribute to constructing the emergent meaning of the blend.

To achieve validity, the analysis draws directly on poetic extracts and is grounded in the theoretical literature on blending and stylistics. Where appropriate, interpretations are supported by secondary scholarly commentary on the poets' political and literary significance (Allen, 2000; MacPhee, 2020). This methodological framework allows for a systematic identification of the conceptualization of crisis rhetoric and how it is structured and communicated across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

5. Analysis and Discussions

In this section, four extracts are analyzed and discussed following CBT. Each extract represents a unique conceptual strategy for constructing crisis rhetoric through metaphor, irony, spatial reversal, and ideological framing. The concentrates on showing input spaces, cross-space mappings, emergent meaning, and vital relations in each network, showing how poets encode protest and crisis through poetic discourse.

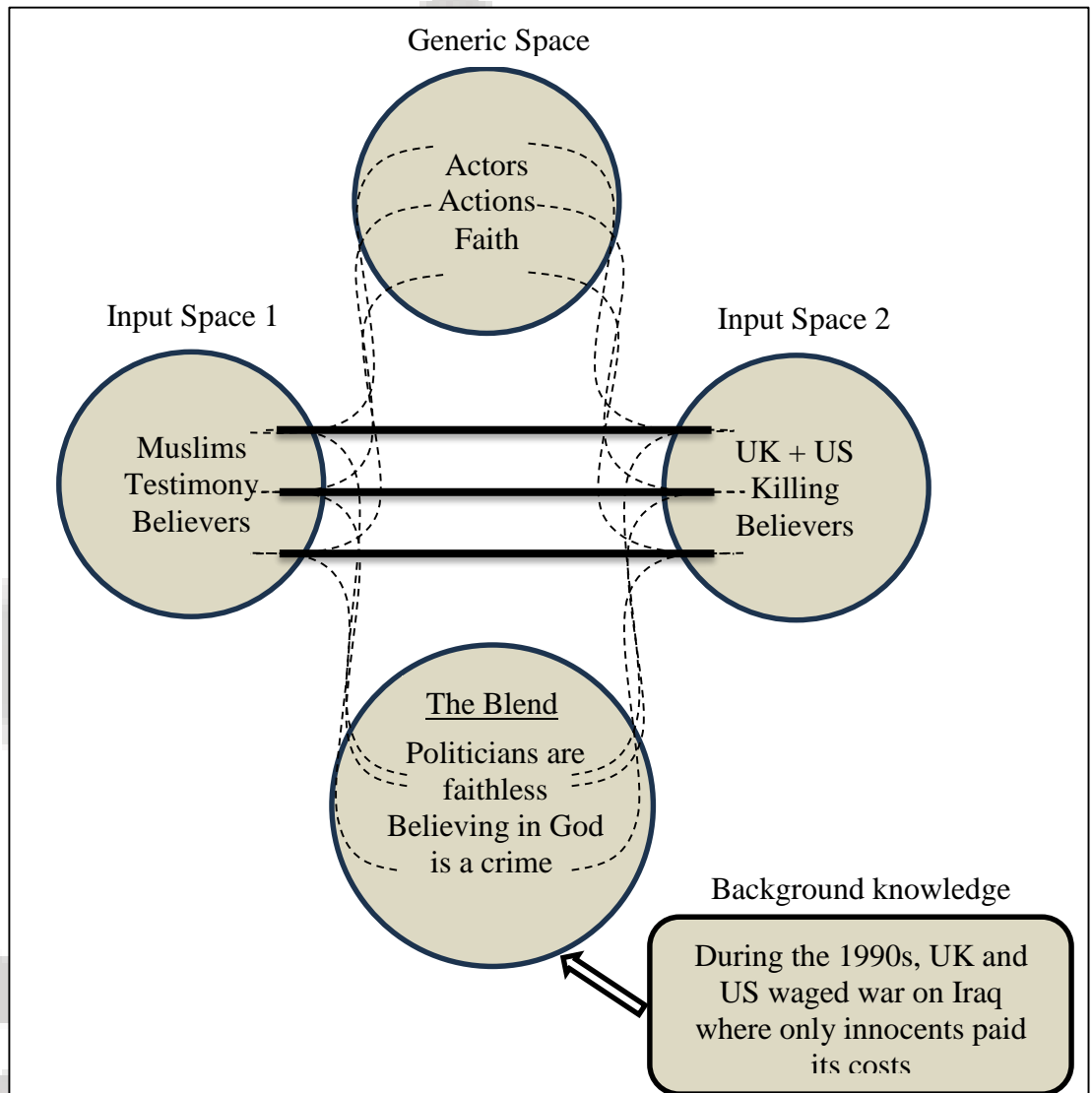
5.1 English Poem 1: Benjamin Zephaniah – Kill Them Before Ramadan

The Selected Extract:

“The Islamic mind now reaffirms / That there is but one God / And God is great. / So we must (we are told) / Kill them before Ramadan.” (lines 9–13)

This extract exemplifies the strategic use of irony and religious criticism in Zephaniah’s protest poetry. present a remarkable, imaginative cause-and-effect theme, which can be summarized as (Muslims do their testimony, that is why they are killed). The poet gives a religious dimension to war, refuting other excuses made by American and British politicians. This image invokes the Crusades and religious wars over the Holy Land in the Arab region during the 11th and 13th centuries. The five lines make two sentences that stand for one cause-effect idea; therefore, they are treated as one to be analyzed following conceptual blending theory. The two sentences formulate an ironic tone, extended throughout the whole poem, while the cause-effect relation is metaphorically gathered between two contrastive and unrelated actions and reactions in the modern world. Figure (1) shows the conceptual blending network of extract (1).

Figure 1

Conceptual Blending Network of Extract 1

This network comprises two input spaces, a generic space and a blended space, with a unique emergent structure that results from mixing the elements of the two spaces and their outer relations. In input space (1), we have Muslims doing their testimony as a major requirement for their religion, believing in only one God. The connotation of elements in input space (1) is positive and spiritual, referring to the roots of the Islamic religion. On the other hand, input space (2) presents elements with a very complex image (We must

kill them Before Ramadan). (WE) is taken in the poem to mean the allies (US and UK) politicians and policymakers. Ramadan is the holy month whereas Muslims fast and have certain religious rituals. The complicated relation between elements in input space (2) is tensioned internally and externally with elements of input space (1). Through cross-space mapping, Zephaniah links religious devotion to political violence, producing a deeply ironic emergent meaning: that faith becomes the justification for destruction. The blend integrates historical context (e.g., the Crusades) and contemporary politics (Operation Desert Fox), suggesting that the real cause of violence is not terrorism, but targeted belief. The major outer vital relation in the network is the cause-effect relation, which is compressed into uniqueness in the blended space. Elements in input space (1) ironically provide the cause for committing the war crime frame in input space (2). The ironic manner is understood from the illogical cause-effect relation between the two spaces, and the use of (Ramadan) reinforces the relation and its interpretation as it links the religious frame initiated in the input space (1) with the act of war and killing in input space (2). In addition, the vital relation of intentionality is projected from input space (1) to be compressed and retained in the blend. Intentionality belongs to the relations functioning inside the blend and encompasses such aspects as “hope, desire, want, fear, belief, memory, and other mental attitudes and dispositions” (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, p.100). Such a belief is manifested in Muslims giving their testimonies in the input space (1), which becomes the reason for their death. The irony understood from the blend results from the incompatibility of the elements of the input spaces projected into the blended space. This incompatibility also motivates inheriting the two frames of the input spaces in the blend to cooperate in establishing the meaning of the blend. Therefore, the network is a double-scope in which the emergent structure is not copied from either of the frames of the inputs but initiated dynamically by merging them with contextual and background knowledge recruited by the reader. This double-scope blend destabilizes logic and provokes moral outrage, revealing how language masks aggression under spiritual pretense.

5.2 English Poem 2: Lawrence Ferlinghetti – To the Oracle at Delphi

The Selected Extract:

“And tell us how to save us from ourselves / and how to survive our own rulers / who would make a plutocracy of our democracy / in Great Divide / between the rich and the poor.” (lines 18–22)

This extract presents an image of inequality, conveying disappointment in the ruling class and emphasizing economic divisions that threaten democracy. The “Great Divide” symbolizes the increasing gap between the rich and the poor, reinforcing the populist notion that power is concentrated among the few at the expense of the many. The extract highlights a typical “us vs. them” dynamic found in populist discourse, showing how ordinary people (us) struggle against corrupt elites (them). Figure (2) shows the conceptual blending network of the extract.

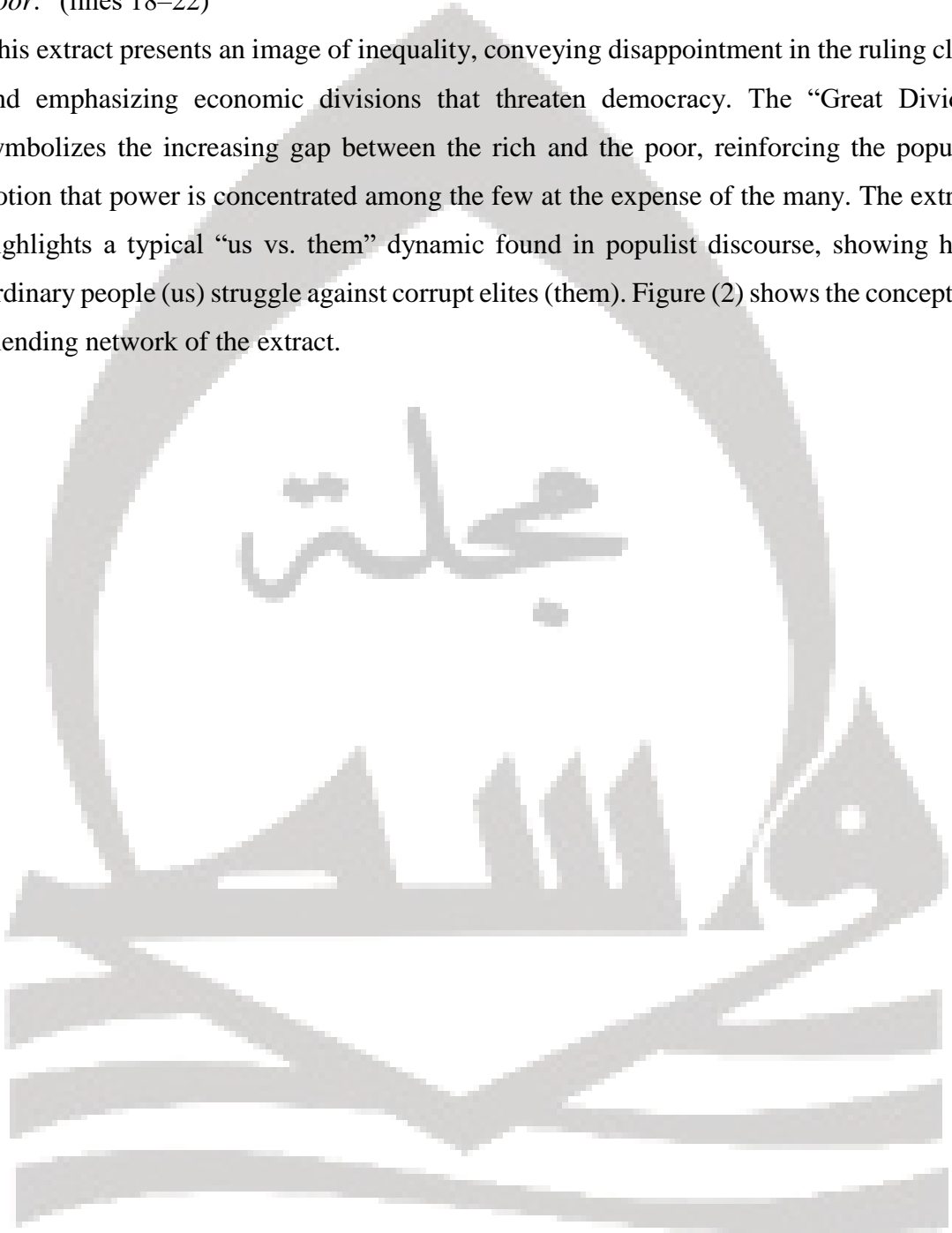
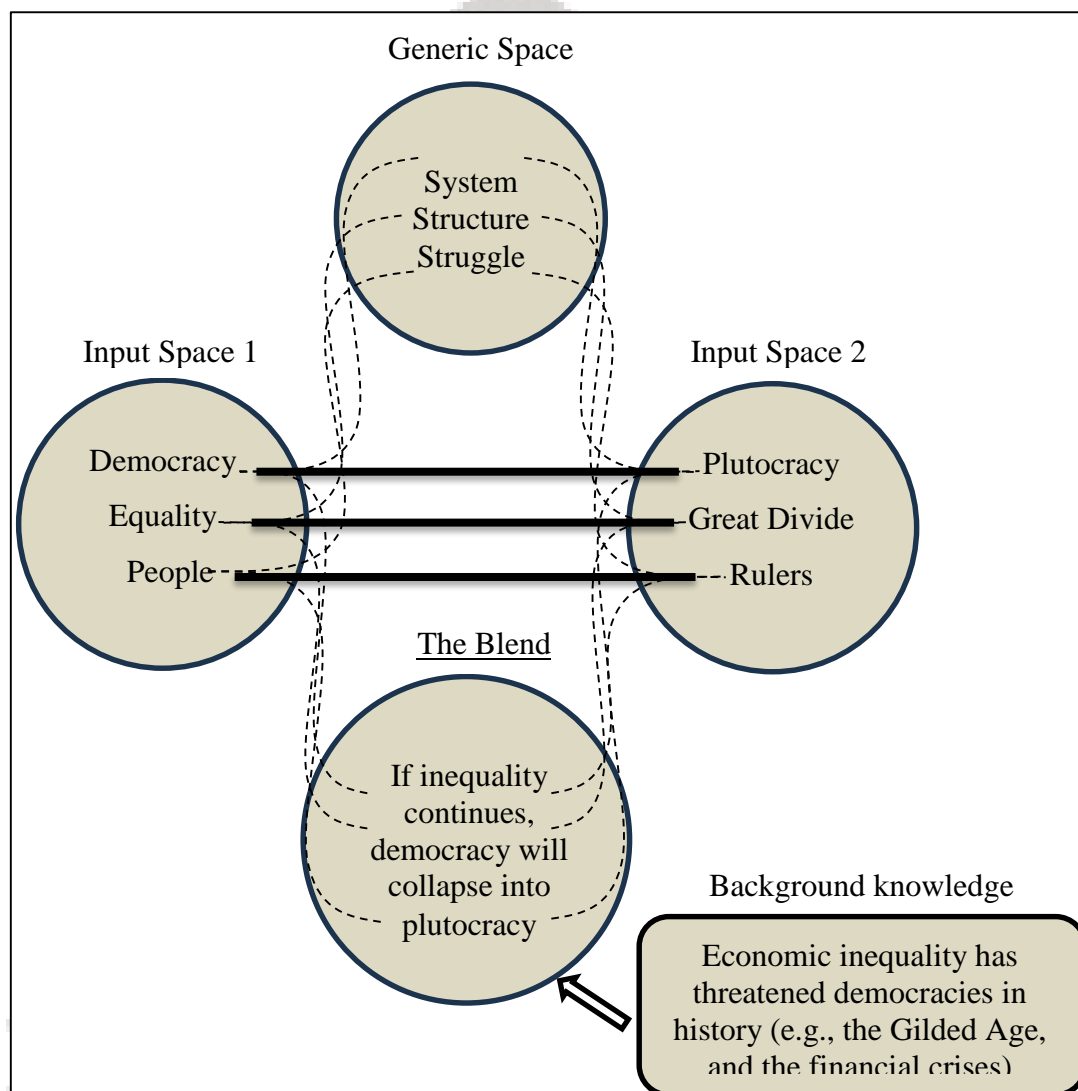


Figure 2

Conceptual Blending Network of Extract 2

The network comprises two input spaces. Input space (1), the idealized democracy space, consists of three elements: Democracy, Equality, and People. In contrast, input space two represents the plutocracy space, which includes Plutocracy, the Great Divide, and Rulers. Through cross-space mappings among elements, a generic space comprising the elements System, Structure, and Struggle is constructed. At the composition stage, elements from democracy and plutocracy spaces are mapped together: Democracy as “the rule of the

people” is mapped against plutocracy as a rule by the wealthy. Economic fairness in democracy is set against the financial control in plutocracy, while the “Great Divide” is framed as both an economic and a political crisis.

Then, at the completion stage, the reader recruits background knowledge to enrich the metaphor of democracy with historical context. Knowledge encompassing how economic inequality has threatened democracies in history (e.g., the Gilded Age and financial crises) enhances the blend’s emergent meaning. The contrast between democracy and plutocracy is seen as a continuous struggle rather than a fixed opposition, creating a state of conceptual tensions between the two spaces. Concerning vital relations, analogy, compressed into similarity in the blend, is the most notable outer-space vital relation. Democracy and plutocracy are projected as opposing, but structurally similar in that they are both governance systems. The outer vital relation of Cause-Effect is also evident in the network, indicating that economic inequality necessarily leads to democratic decline. Besides, the vital relation of Time is also present in the network, integrating instances of historical inequality with present economic and political crises. The struggles and tensions of the past and present are compressed into a single, continuous Identity relation of democratic crises within the blend. The network is a single-scope one, where the political and economic crisis frame in the Plutocracy space dominates the structure of the blend. The blend frames the idea that democracy is not guaranteed and must be protected against economic and political power imbalances. Similarly, the compression of vital relations makes the extract function as a populist warning, reinforcing that people are responsible for resisting plutocratic control.

5.3 Arabic Poem 1: Mudhaffar al-Nawwab – في الحانة القديمة

The Selected Extract:

| | |
|--|---|
| <i>I was content with my lot in life being as a bird's lot</i> | وقعت يكون نصيبي في الدنيا.. كنصيب الطير |
| <i>But, Praised are Thou, even birds have homes</i> | ..لكن سبحانك حتى الطير لها أوطان |
| <i>To return to . . . but I am still flying. . .</i> | وتعود إليها ... وأنا مازلت أطيّر... |
| <i>This home which extends from the sea to the sea</i> | فهذا الوطن الممتد من البحر إلى البحر |
| <i>Is adjacent jails,</i> | سجون متلاصقة |

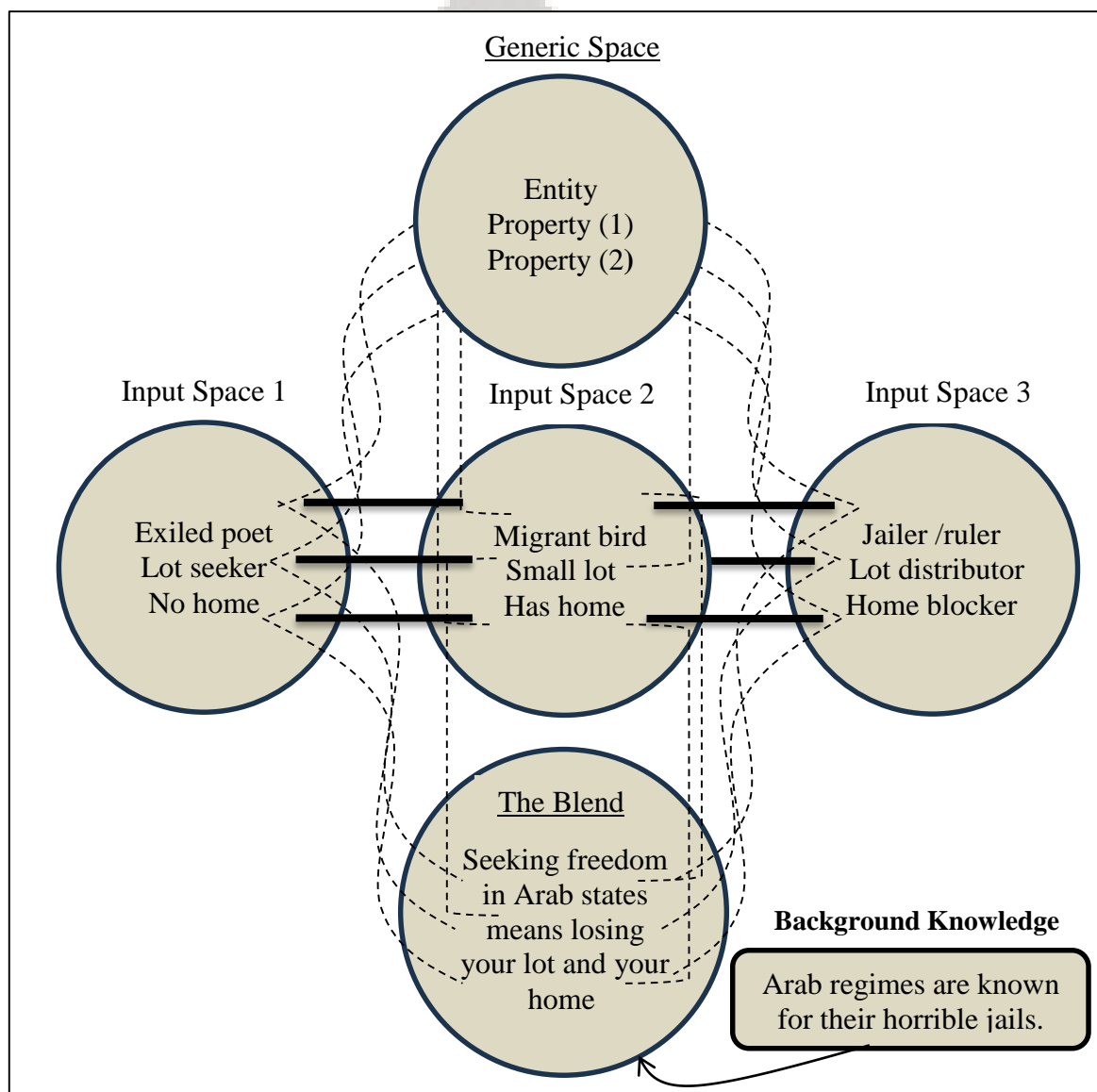
In this extract, which represents lines (64-69), the poet employs a powerful image with rhetorical efficiency to reflect upon his state. There are three images addressed in this extract: (1) the situation of the speaker (الأنا), (2) its relation to birds (الطير), and (3) the Arab states (سجون متلاصقة). These images are conceptual frames that construct this network. The poet is satisfied with the bird's lot, which is necessarily small. However, the word (Lot - نصيب) in Arabic has another connotation, which is (fate), and the fate of the poet is to be an emigrant like the bird, but an emigrant who cannot get back because he is "exiled". This sense of exile is tensioned by its size, which is very huge, indicating the area of oppression in the Arab region. Figure (3) shows the network of this extract.

As for the integration network, it is made of (3) input spaces: the exiled poet space as input space (1), the emigrant bird space as input space (2), and the jailer space as input space (3). Three constituent elements form the frame of each input, as indicated in Figure (3), which depicts the conceptual mappings intended by the text. In the composition stage, the elements undergo selective projection through cross-space mappings to shape the frame of the blend in the interpretation process carried by readers: there are (3) entities having (2) properties for each, and by putting them together, the poet must be alluding to some relation that has to be articulated among them. For readers of al-Nawwab, what unites them is the amount of freedom in each one of them.

Figure 3

The Conceptual Blending Network of Extract 3

In the completion stage, readers recruit the background and contextual knowledge of the



Arab regimes, the part of the relation with the highest power. Arab regimes are known for their horrible jails. They also fully control the ins and outs of their countries. This necessarily means that the poet is seeking freedom, which is a dangerous requisite in a jail-like country. Therefore, the poet is left with an insufficient lot and an exile, be it obligatory or by will. Besides, birds migrate to expand their lot and express their instinctive freedom. Their flights end up getting back to their original home. Thus, the

similarity relation initiated by the poet seems to clash with the reasonable interpretation of the readers. Hence, the conceptual integration network is built on the outer-space relation of Disanalogy in harmony with the chaotic world of the poem. As a result, the blend runs perfectly with the major themes of loss, desperation, and alienation addressed in the poem.

In addition to the vital relation of Disanalogy, the relation of Space also functions in the blend through mappings among the mental spaces that are related to home. The concept of HOME has different implications in each input: it is the free homeland for the poet (الوطن الممتد), the natural habitat to return to for the bird (أوطان), and the jail for the ruler (سجون متلاصقة). These three connotations of HOME, in addition to the relation of Analogy, are compressed into uniqueness within the blend, as a man can live with a bird lot, and homelands are described as a series of jails. Together, they are used to express seeking freedom and mocking the roles of the rulers who choose to be homosexual, sellers, and jailers. This harsh attack on policymakers and the full surrender of the ordinary people (poet – whore - lovers) shape the populist theme in al-Nawwab's poetry, which can be traced in a great deal of his poems.

5.4 Arabic Poem 2: Muwaffaq Muhammad – (تخطيطات جديدة لمؤيد نعمة)

My lords,

As you revel in your rosy transparency

In the palaces built by the tyrant with our hearts,

*We, the dwellers beneath bridges and mountains of
garbage,*

Come down and share our shelter from above,

So, we grasp the depth of your tragedy.

سادتي

وأنتم ترفلون بشفافية وردية في

القصور التي بناها الطاغوت من قلوبنا

نحنُ سكّنة ما تحت الجسور وجبال القمامة

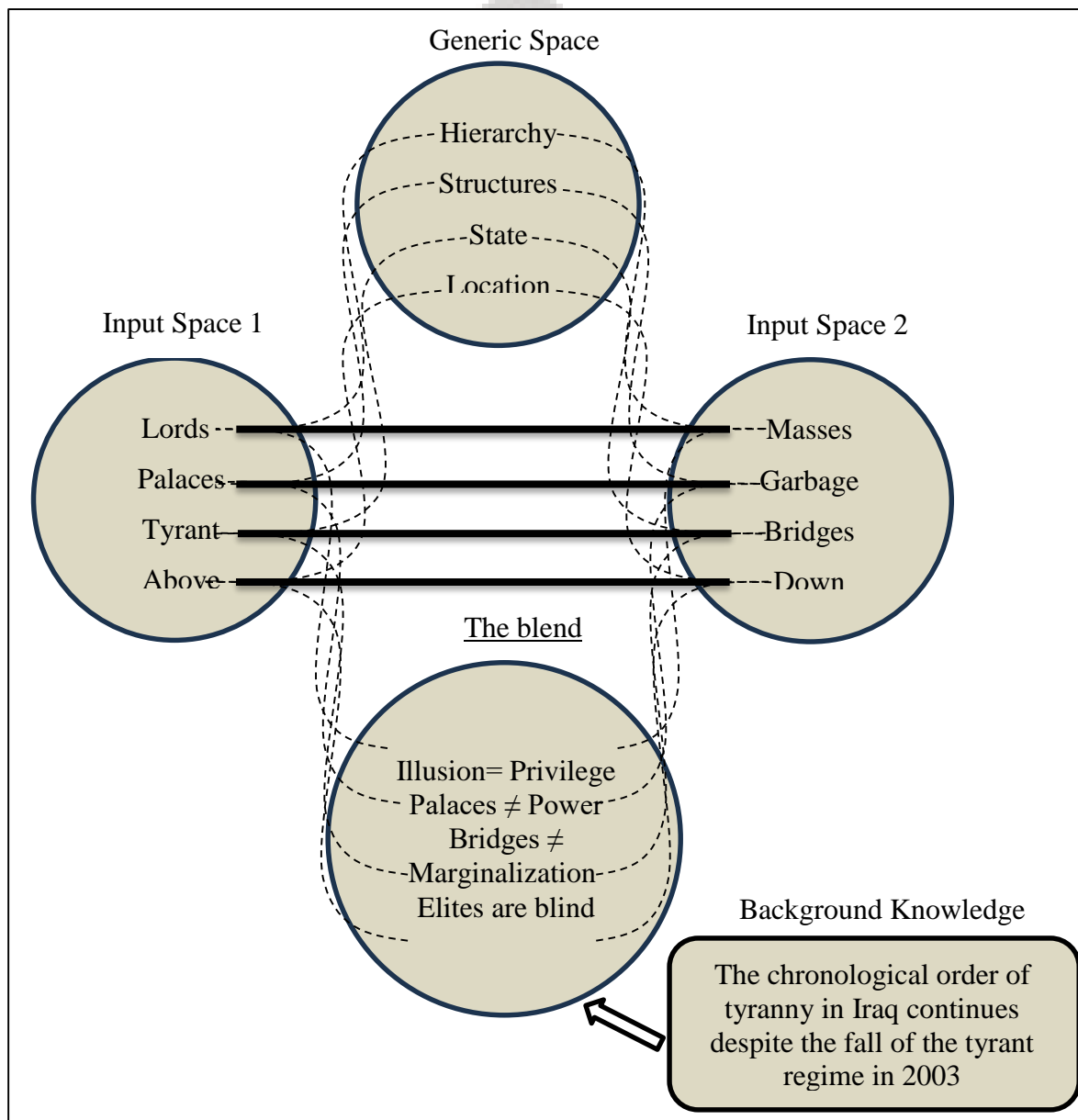
هلموا وشاركونا السكن من موقع أعلى

لنتعرف على عمق مأساتكم

This extract (lines 96-101) embodies sharp political irony, highlighting the blatant divide between the wealthy elites (سادتي) and the poor (سكّنة ما تحت الجسور وجبال القمامة), revealing the dehumanization of the masses. The ironic invitation to the elite to experience the suffering of the poor (هلموا وشاركونا السكن) flips the social hierarchy, framing the ruling class as blind to their own moral and political decay. The metaphor of "palaces built from our

hearts” (القصور التي بناها الطاغوت من قلوبنا) integrates physical space (elite palaces) with emotional labor and oppression, suggesting that the luxurious lives of the rulers are sustained through the suffering of the people. Figure (4) below shows the conceptual blending network of this extract, reflecting a simple network with (2) input spaces; one describes the elite’s situation, and the other expresses the situation of ordinary people. The frames of the two input spaces are conceptually projected based on the severe tension over the two states, resulting in a generic space that reflects a hierarchical order, as both spaces involve a clear stratification of power (Elites vs. masses). The generic space also shows the physical and social structure in which individuals exist in the system.



Figure 4*The Conceptual Blending Network of Extract 4*

At the composition stage of the emergent structure, elements from Input Space (1) (The Elite) and Input Space (2) (The people) are mapped onto each other based on shared structural elements from the Generic Space (Hierarchy, State, Structures, Location). The blend inherits elements from both input spaces but reconfigures them conceptually: “Palaces” (القصور التي بناها الطاغوت) from Input (1) are linked with “Garbage & Bridges” (القمامة والجسور) from Input (2) as both represent living spaces, but one is built on suffering, while the other is where suffering is endured. Likewise, “Above” from Input (1) is tensioned with “Down” from Input (2), reflecting in the reader’s interpretation that the contrast establishes a spatial metaphor of power. “Lords” (سادتي) from Input (1) are mapped onto “Masses” (نحن) from Input (2), highlighting the dependency of rulers on the ruled. Then, at the completion stage, the reader infers the continuity of tyranny in Iraq despite the political change after (2003) and the fact that wealth and privilege often exist due to oppression within the regime. Background knowledge activates the blend, allowing readers to recognize the ironic inversion of power relations, indicating that the elites are no longer powerful on their own and that their existence relies entirely on the suffering of the poor. Ultimately, the elaboration stage runs the emergent structure of the blend by forcing a complete reversal of traditional power structures, exposing the elite’s power as artificial and dependent on systematic oppression.

In this double-scope network, the key vital relations are Analogy/Disanalogy and Place. The two relations are understood and inferred through the harsh comparison between the elites and the masses, analogically or spatially. Bridges and palaces both are homes but symbolize vastly different realities. Likewise, the elites perceive themselves as powerful, but in reality, they are powerless without oppression. These are compressed into Uniqueness within the blend, implying that power is not intrinsic but stolen from the people. Similarly, luxury and oppression are placed in the same Category to state that the ruling class is preserved only through the suffering they cause.

6. The Contrastive Analysis

This section provides a comparative account of how English and Arabic populist poets construct crisis rhetoric using CBT. Although both poetic traditions share populist themes,

their stylistic and cognitive mechanisms differ significantly. Table (2) presents the key components of the conceptual networks identified in the four extracts.

Table 2

Contrastive Dimensions of Crisis Rhetoric in English and Arabic Populist Poetry

| Category | English Populist Poems | Arabic Poems | Populist |
|-----------------------|--|---|----------|
| Crisis Theme | Religious violence, Plutocracy | Exile, oppression | State |
| Tone | Irony, Satire | Tragic, Emotional | |
| Emergent Meaning | Exposure of Western hypocrisy, capitalist decay | National betrayal, existential displacement | |
| Vital Relations | Cause-Effect, Intentionality, Analogy | Disanalogy, Space, Role-Value | |
| Cognitive Tension | faith and war; democracy and plutocracy | exile and homeland; rulers and ruled | |
| Narrative Perspective | Global/Universal “we” | First-person singular and plural “I”/”we” | |
| Rhetorical Mechanisms | Mockery, Juxtaposition, Classical Reference | Symbolism, Irony, Spatial Reversal | |
| Compression Type | Identity, Uniqueness, Similarity | Uniqueness, Role- Value, Category | |

As shown in the table, English poetry tends to adopt universalist rhetorical frames, relying heavily on satire and conceptual irony. It portrays systemic criticism by offering irony and oppositional metaphors, often integrating political and cultural knowledge of global capitalism and democratic disappointment. On the other hand, Arabic poems are highly occupied by collective trauma and loss. al-Nawwab and Muwaffaq Muhammad construct symbolic frames rooted in national suffering, exile, and betrayal, emphasizing the moral decay of leadership and the loss of homeland. On the conceptual plane, English poems

favor double-scope blending. They integrate past and present domains to highlight hypocrisy and injustice in modern democracies. Meanwhile, Arabic poems rely on multi-input blends, combining personal identity, public memory, and emotional depth. This reflects richer metaphorical use with a more direct expression of cultural and existential crisis. Finally, the comparison shows that the construction of crisis rhetoric in populist poetry is both culturally situated and cognitively complex.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study has demonstrated that Conceptual Blending Theory offers a cognitively grounded framework for analyzing the construction of crisis rhetoric in English and Arabic populist poetry. By applying CBT within a cognitive stylistic approach, the study has uncovered the mental and rhetorical mechanisms through which poets construct complex representations of crisis, resistance, and ideological opposition. The analysis has shown that although both English and Arabic populist poems are driven by similar thematic concerns, such as injustice, marginalization, and political disillusionment, their stylistic strategies and cognitive mechanisms diverge significantly due to differing cultural, historical, and sociopolitical contexts. In the English poems, the rhetoric of crisis is constructed through irony, satire, and oppositional metaphors that expose systemic failures and democratic decay. These texts often adopt a universalizing perspective, using conceptual blends that juxtapose idealized democratic values with images of corruption, inequality, and violence. In contrast, the Arabic poems deploy metaphorical and symbolic blends that evoke exile, loss, and historical trauma. The crisis is framed not only as political oppression but also as existential displacement, with a strong emphasis on spatial metaphors, symbolic resistance, and collective memory. The contrastive analysis further revealed that while English poems tend to favor double-scope blending, where frames from disparate domains are integrated to generate ironic or critical meanings, Arabic poems exhibit more complex multi-input networks that draw upon religious, historical, and emotional domains simultaneously. The compression of vital relations such as Identity, Space, Role, and Uniqueness plays a critical role in shaping emergent meaning across both traditions. These differences underscore the importance of viewing crisis

rhetoric as both cognitively structured and culturally embedded. Finally, the study presents the following recommendations:

- 1- Further research should apply CBT to a broader corpus of protest poetry, especially from underrepresented languages and traditions.
- 2- Cross-disciplinary collaboration between cognitive linguists and literary scholars is needed to refine conceptual models of poetic discourse.
- 3- Stylistic pedagogies in literary studies could incorporate CBT to help students interpret complex metaphors, especially in politically and socially engaged poetry.

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