



Original article

## Wholeness Across Time: A Lacanian Reading of Migration and Identity Formation in Sinan Antoon's The Baghdad Eucharist

Hasnaa Sadruldeen Hasan<sup>1</sup>, Seyed Mohammad Marandi<sup>2</sup>,  
Mohammad Bagher Shabanpour<sup>3</sup>

*English Literature, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Tehran*

### ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes Sinan Antoon's *The Baghdad Eucharist* through Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic concepts of imaginary wholeness and the desire to fill the lack of being. Drawing on Lacan's stages of identity formation, including the mirror stage, the symbolic order, and the real order, the study argues that desire originates from a fundamental lack that persists throughout human experience. In Antoon's novel, this search for wholeness takes different forms in the two protagonists. Yusef, an elderly man, locates fulfillment in his memories of the past and seeks to preserve them, while Maha, a young woman, pursues completeness through migration to Europe. Through these contrasting quests, the novel reveals how displacement and memory intersect with Lacanian ideas of identity, loss, and the unattainable desire for unity.

*\*Correspondence author:*  
[hasna.sh@ut.ac.ir](mailto:hasna.sh@ut.ac.ir)  
[mmarandi@ut.ac.ir](mailto:mmarandi@ut.ac.ir)  
[mb.shabanpour@ut.ac.ir](mailto:mb.shabanpour@ut.ac.ir)

Received: 11 October 2025  
Accepted: 28 November 2025  
Published: 01 February 2026

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.31185/wjfh.Vol22.Iss1.1399>



1812-0512 /© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Wasit Journal for Humanities Sciences, Wasit University. This is an open access article under The CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

### Cite:

Hasan, H. S., Marandi, S. M. , & Shabanpour, M. B. .(2026). Wholeness Across Time: A Lacanian Reading of Migration and Identity Formation in Sinan Antoon's the Baghdad Eucharist. Wasit Journal for Human Sciences, 22(1).  
<https://doi.org/10.31185/wjfh.Vol22.Iss1.1399>

**K**eywords: Jacques Lacan; Migration; Wholeness

## الذات الموحد عبر الزمن: قراءة لأكانية للهجرة وتشكيل الهوية في رواية

سنان أنطون قداس بغداد (يا مريم)

م.م حسناء صدرالدين<sup>1</sup>، ا.د. سيد محمد مرندي<sup>2</sup>، ا.م.د. محمد باقر شعبان بور<sup>3</sup>  
جامعة طهران كلية اللغات الأجنبية والآداب

### المُستخلص

يناقش هذا البحث رواية سنان أنطون قداس بغداد من خلال مفاهيم التحليل النفسي لجاك لاكان، مثل الذات الموحد التخيلي والرغبة في ملء نقص الوجود. بالاعتماد على مراحل تشكيل الهوية عند لاكان، بما في ذلك مرحلة المرأة، والنظام الرمزي، والنظام الحقيقي، يجادل البحث بأن الرغبة تنشأ من نقص أساسي يستمر طوال حياة و التجارب الإنسانية. في رواية أنطون، يتخذ هذا البحث عن الذات الموحد أشكالاً مختلفة في الشخصيتين الرئيسيتين. يوسف، الرجل المسن، يجد الإشباع في ذكرياته عن الماضي ويسعى للحفاظ عليها، بينما مها، الشابة، تسعى لتحقيق الكمال في ذاتها من خلال الهجرة إلى أوروبا. ومن خلال هذين المسارين المتباينين، تكشف الرواية كيف يتقاطع التثريد والذاكرة مع أفكار لاكان حول الهوية والفقدان والرغبة المستحيلة في كمال الذات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: جاك لاكان؛ الهجرة؛ الذات الموحد

### Introduction

One of the main features of a migrant writer is showing ambivalence toward the past and the present. In fact, the emigration perspective is self-reflexive about the homeland, offering powerful insights into the real lived experiences of migration. Sinan Antoon, a contemporary diasporic Iraqi writer who emigrated with his family to the United States after the 1991 Gulf War, is no exception to this rule.

One of the recurring themes that Antoon explores in *The Baghdad Eucharist* (Year of Publications) migration. The novel presents various kinds of migration. Some refer to literal or physical migration, which is the movement from one place to another. This form of migration can be subdivided into migration outside Iraq, such as Youssef's sister Amal, who emigrates abroad, and migration within Iraq, such as Habibah, who moves to northern Iraq to continue her studies. Antoon also highlights two other important aspects of migration: forced migration, as in the case of Nasim's family who are displaced because they are Jewish, and voluntary migration, as in Amal's case, who leaves by choice to seek better opportunities and education. Furthermore, Antoon introduces another significant form of migration that does not involve physical movement. This is a spiritual or psychological migration, a journey of the soul and mind. Youssef, the protagonist, experiences this type of migration as he mentally returns to the past, recalling earlier times and places. Similarly, Maha does not physically leave her homeland, but she constantly expresses a desire to migrate and often idealizes life abroad. He presents two kinds of migration: the migration of the past, which the protagonist Yosef recalls when he looks at the photographs of his family and friends or remembers their departures; and the intention of future migration, expressed through Maha, the young female protagonist.

It is important to note that the spiritual or mental migration experienced by Youssef and the intentional migration desired by Maha are closely related to the theme of identity. There exists a strong connection between migration and identity, which this study seeks to examine through the lens of Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory. One of the underlying motivations for migration in the novel is the search for completeness or, in Lacanian terms, the pursuit of wholeness and unity. Modern Iraqi writers, including Antoon, differ from classical writers who focused primarily on observable social

issues; instead, they delve into the unconscious mind and emphasize the psychological dimensions of their characters' inner worlds (Abdel & Youssef, 2019, p. 194). In fact, these kinds of writings distinguish between writers who follow a traditional style and modern writers who reject the traditional approach.

As mentioned above, one of the psychological concepts discussed by Lacan is wholeness, introduced in the mirror stage, the first phase in his theory of identity formation. To understand this concept, it is essential to revisit Lacan's theory, which he defines through three interrelated stages: the mirror stage, the symbolic order, and the real. To elaborate further, Lacan employs the notions of retroaction and anticipation, both of which are discussed later in this paper to demonstrate how wholeness relates to the past in Yosef's case and the future in Maha's.

As mentioned above, one of the key issues addressed in relation to migration is identity, and several researchers have examined this connection. In "The Shattered Mirror: Disappointment of Iraqi People After the 2003 Invasion with Special Reference to The Baghdad Eucharist", Mahdi (2025) discusses two contrasting forms of identity, optimistic and disappointed. While Yosef, as an elderly man, embodies an optimistic identity, Maha, as a young woman, represents a disappointed one. Mahdi argues that disappointment in post-2003 Iraq is not merely a temporary emotional reaction but rather a condition that affects all aspects of individuals' lives, such as social, cultural, religious, and political (2025 p. 1235). While Mahdi presents two aspects of identity, optimistic and pessimistic, he focuses more on the latter.

While Mahdi examines the concept of identity across two generations, Hamood (2023) focuses solely on Maha, portraying her as "a woman belonging to a minority that has become alienated" (2023, p. 106). She claims that Maha possesses an alienated identity and seeks equality in all aspects of her life, particularly regarding opportunities (2023, p. 112). Maha thinks that she can find this opportunity abroad.

Similarly, (2024), drawing on Helen Benedict's works, also examines the representation of women's voices after the Iraq wars. Unlike Hamood, who focuses only on Maha's voice, Mashab, in *Female Voices in the Aftermath of the Iraqi War in Helen Benedict's Wolf Season*, gathers multiple female perspectives shaped by war, including those that mirror Maha's experiences (pp. 636–638). In fact, such articles focus on gender, on being male or female, indicating that sexuality plays a significant role.

Negaresh (2022) analyze identity as a fluid construct that shifts across different social positions—for example, from one of control and authority to humility or submission. This fluidity of identity, as they note, is evident in the second stage of Lacanian theory, the symbolic order, when the infant enters society or the system of meaning, where no word can fully define the individual. Moreover, Negaresh introduces a new interpretation of dystopia, linking it to psychological dimensions rather than external social structures (2022, p. 132). It means that instead of analyzing issues such as power or governance related to society, he focuses on analyzing identity.

In addition to these studies, Hamood (2023) and Hasan (2018), in their works on *The Baghdad Eucharist*, "Identity, Representation, and Conflict in Sinan Antoon's Novel *The Baghdad Eucharist*" address the issue of migration. Hasan (2018) identifies three types of identity—national, religious, and sectarian—arguing that national identity exerts the strongest influence (2018, p. 8). He refers to Nasim's family, who, despite being Jewish and pressured by society and the government to leave Iraq, resist migration to preserve their national belonging (2018, p. 11). Hamood (2023), by contrast, argues that Maha perceives opportunities as existing outside Iraq and therefore aspires to migrate in pursuit of

them (p. 88). In broadly speaking, migration occurs in two forms, voluntary migration, which arises from personal choice, and forced migration, which results from external pressures or compulsion.

Although several scholars have examined identity in Antoon's work, few have connected it to the concept of migration through Lacanian theory. This research seeks to bridge that gap by exploring the relationship between identity, desire, and migration within the framework of Lacan's theory of the lack of being. This study examines identity formation in Antoon's *The Baghdad Eucharist* through a Lacanian lens, focusing on the two main characters, Maha and Yosef. It aims to show how Maha's sense of lack leads to her desire for migration as a means of achieving wholeness, whereas Yosef finds a sense of completion through his attachment to the past.

Accordingly, this paper is organized into three sections: firstly, discusses Lacan's concept of Wholeness, lack and desire as an attempt to fill the lack of being. Secondly, analyzes Yosef's search for wholeness through nostalgia and memory. Thirdly, focuses on Maha's pursuit of unity and fulfillment through migration.

### **Lacan's Theory: The Search for Wholeness**

Among Jacques Lacan's important concepts of identity formation are the fragmented body and the imaginary entity as a wholeness. Lacan introduces these ideas in the process of identity formation through the three interrelated stages of which the mirror stage is one of them. Lacan (1966) claims this stage starts from six months and, as he states in *Écrits*, he has "given it up to the age of eighteen" (p. 1). This part tries to illustrate the importance of this stage in life and shows its function. Here, for a better understanding of this stage and its importance, one should step back to see what Lacan says about before this stage.

Before the mirror stage, around six months of age, "the child still [is] sunk in his motor incapacity and nursling dependence" (Lacan, 1966, p.2). The infant perceives its body as incapable and disorganized, experiencing a sense of helplessness in eating, drinking, sitting, or standing without support. This complete dependence on others arises from what Evans (1996, p. 6) describes as "the incoordination in the real body," a notion echoed in Lacan's concept of the "fragmented body" (Lacan, 1966, p. 3). It means that the infant feels a kind of lack, especially when compared with others who can support him. In other words, the infant sees that others have the ability to do what he cannot do. By speaking of the fragmented body, Lacan (1988) refers to the nature of human beings that has a kind of Lack that "isn't the lack of this or that, but lack of being whereby the being exists" (p.223). Beside this, Lacan also refers to another concept, desire. He states, "Desire is a relation of being to lack." According to Lacan, these two concepts are, in fact, inseparable.

It is important to note that the first form of lack Lacan discusses appears in Seminar II (1955) and is associated with the mirror stage. However, as Evans (1996) points out, in 1956 and 1957 Lacan introduces two additional forms of lack: "the lack of an object" and "the lack of a signifier in the Other" (p. 98). While the initial lack pertains to an internal deficiency, the latter two concern the absence of an external object beyond the individual and are linked to the second stage in the process of identity formation: the Symbolic order. According to Lacan, the Symbolic order operates through a signifying chain. This means that when the infant enters this realm, they actually enter the system of language, the world of words or signifiers. Lacan (1966) identifies the network or chain of the signifier within the stage of language, or what he terms the symbolic order. In this chain "each element assumes its precise function by being different from the others" (p.95), a structural principle that governs the distribution and operation of linguistic elements. Expanding on Lacan's theory, Evans (1996) explains that the chain of signifiers is inherently incomplete; human beings can never produce a fully complete

or definitive meaning for any position, as one signifier is always absent (p. 99). If the subject were to locate this missing signifier, they could theoretically complete the chain, and thereby complete the meaning of themselves, since the subject is constituted within this chain of signifiers.

In addition to the lack of being in the mirror stage, which arises from the divided nature of identity, there also exists a fundamental gap between the entity that experiences itself as a fragmented body and the entity perceived as a whole. In fact, what the infant perceives in the mirror is nothing but its own reflection; yet it sees this reflection as a wholeness, as a unified being (Evans, 1996, p. 6). However, as Lacan (1966) points out “the imago of one’s own body presents in hallucinations or dreams” (p.2). it means this image is just only a reflection of a fragmented reality. In fact, this reflection conceals the underlying fragmented condition, leading the infant to a misrecognition of itself. Thus, a fundamental gap exists between the fragmented body and the whole body. Lacan (1988), in Seminar II, directly addresses this gap, stating that “the human being has a special relation with his own image, a relation of gap, of alienating tension” (p. 323), a gap that fundamentally defines human identity. It means that “the subject is constituted by a gap, since the subject is essentially divided” (Evans, 1996, p. 72) or the same phenomenon that Lacan (1966) calls the “splitting of the ego” (p. 68). What is important to note , and what this study aims to emphasize, is that “the function of the imaginary is precisely to fill this gap, thus covering over the subject’s division and presenting an imaginary sense of unity and wholeness” (Evans, 1996, p. 72).Therefore, human beings continually attempt to fill this gap by covering it with an imaginary sense of wholeness. In other words, human beings constantly try to achieve completeness, even though this sense of wholeness is ultimately an illusion.

The question arises here: how does the human being achieve this wholeness? In other words, what mechanisms in the mirror stage operate to fill the gap and the lack? Lacan identifies two mechanisms for filling this gap, the first of which is anticipation. He introduces this concept in the initial phase known as the mirror stage, stating that “the mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation” (Lacan, 1966, p. 3). Elaborating on this, Evans (1996) explains that “the identification in the mirror stage involves the ideal ego, which functions as a promise of future wholeness that sustains the ego in anticipation” (p. 118). This claim highlights the importance and function of the mirror stage. The identification that occurs in this stage serves as a promise of achieving wholeness in the future; thus, the ego is continually sustained by its anticipation of this future completeness. In other words, one of the mechanisms in the mirror stage looks toward the future and operates through the anticipation of wholeness. The second mechanism Lacan refers to for completing this gap, in contrast to anticipation, is a return to the past, what Evans (1996) terms “retroaction” (p. 209). In fact, when Lacan (1966) speaks of the past, he indicates not to “the physical past whose existence is abolished,” but rather to “the past which reveals itself reversed in repetition” (p. 76). As Evans (1996) elaborates, “the past exists in the psyche only as a set of memories which are constantly being reworked and reinterpreted in the light of present experience” (p. 209). As Evans (1996) explains, Lacan employs this mechanism in treating his patients by using the process of revisiting and reinterpreting the past. This approach allows the patient to reconstruct meaning and symbolically move toward a sense of wholeness. In other words, returning to the past and recalling memories is one way through which the subject seeks relief and a feeling of unity or completeness. Based on this explanation, it becomes clear that Lacan emphasizes the synchronic, or timeless, structures of the unconscious ( p. 209). This suggests that human beings pursue wholeness both in the past and in the future within the framework of the unconscious.

This study aims to employ Lacan’s concepts of retroaction and anticipation, in other words, movement toward the past and the future, to show how Maha and Youssef, the main characters in Antoon’s *The Baghdad Eucharist*, are constantly in search of wholeness. In this context, the study

conceptualizes this movement as a form of migration. Here, migration refers to movement through time, rather than spatial movement from one place to another. The study demonstrates how Maha, as a young woman, seeks her happiness, or in the terms of this study, her wholeness, in the future, outside of Iraq, while Youssef, as an elderly man, searches for it in the past, through his memories and by looking at photographs. Thus, the focus of this study is on time: Maha's orientation is toward the future, while Youssef's tendency is toward the past, explored through memory.

### **Youssef Living in the Past**

The events in Sinan Antoon's *The Baghdad Eucharist* take place over just a single day, from morning to evening, from waking to an apparent eternal death. However, beneath this surface chronology, the narrative continuously returns to events from the past. The first main character, Youssef, is deeply preoccupied with memory, as Maha remarks: "You're just living in the past, Uncle!" (Antoon, 2017, p. 2). Living in the past is of great significance to Antoon, who even titles the first chapter "Living in the Past." This emphasis reflects Antoon's own position as a migrant writer who keeps his past alive through writing, by revisiting and reimagining the history of Iraq, particularly the events that followed the wars and the American invasion.

While the writer portrays the present situation in the novel as bleak, Youssef, in his attempt to escape this reality and find relief, constantly returns to the past. He recalls the past as *the good days*. As he says, "the past was alive and well, in one form or another, and it not only coexisted with the present, but continued to wrangle with it" (Antoon, 2017, p. 7). Two important expressions, *alive* and *well*, reveal how Youssef perceives the past as a living presence. In fact, Antoon, as a modern writer, employs Lacan's mechanism of retroaction, moving beyond traditional narrative structure and emphasizing synchronic rather than chronological sequence (Evans, 1996, p. 209). Through this timeless structure, Antoon illustrates how Youssef migrates through time. Youssef's migration to the past occurs in two ways: first, through looking at photographs, and second, through his memories.

Youssef's migration to the past through photographs is so significant that Antoon dedicates an entire chapter to it, titled "Family Photographs" (Antoon, 2017, p. 27). By looking at these photographs, Youssef attempts to fill his inner lack and attain a sense of completeness. Among all the photographs, only one is kept inside an envelope, the picture of Dalal, his beloved. Dalal is the girl he once wished to marry but could not, due to differences in both age and religion. After Dalal married another man and became pregnant, Youssef "never found out what became of her: he didn't know whether she was still in Iraq or had joined the ranks of the diaspora; he didn't even know if she was still alive" (Antoon, 2017, pp. 49–50). Yet this single photograph gives him a fleeting sense of wholeness. As Lacan claims, one of the functions of the mirror stage is to cover over the subject's division (Evans, 1996, 72). In this sense, Youssef covers his fragmented self or his lack by migrating through memory and the image of Dalal, seeking within it the illusion of completeness as he recalls the good days with her. The photograph reminds him of "the Arabian jasmine flowers he used to bring her, or of her smile as she sat beside him in the car, her hair fluttering in the wind, echoing the flutter of his own heart" (Antoon, 2017, p. 49). In fact, this image symbolically covers the lack within Youssef and offers him a sense of unity, the same wholeness that lovers or spouses experience together.

Another object that Youssef migrates to through photographs in order to fill his lack of being is family. In the mirror stage, according to Lacan, the infant internalizes "the earliest social structures" (Evans, 1996, p. 28). It primarily refers to the family. Thus, in the mirror stage, the infant begins by identifying with or internalizing the family. Similarly, Youssef hangs pictures of his parents and siblings on the wall, continually looking at them and recalling moments of familial togetherness. Similarly, Hinna, Youssef's unmarried sister, also keeps photographs of all her family members and hangs them above

her bed. In this way, both Youssef and Hinna attempt to cover their loneliness and, through these images, experience a temporary sense of completeness. Looking at his siblings who study in good universities outside Baghdad or even outside Iraq, allows Youssef to cover his lack of having a higher degree. He sees Habiba in the picture who went to Sulaymaniyah in the north of Iraq and became a nurse. He sees her as a wholeness because her “salary had been sufficient to support them all” (Antoon, 2017, p. 28). Here, one can say that wholeness is recognized in two areas: education and financial well-being. Finally, Youssef by stating this sentence: “stories laced with sighs of pleasure or with laughter that were lodged in my memory, and others that were preserved in an archive guarded by my heart” (Antoon, 2017, p. 8) exactly shows that he keeps them in his memory and his heart to achieve as he said to the pleasure or the same completeness in this study. Building on the explanation above, it becomes clear that holding on to memories is extremely important. This is why Youssef uses expressions such as “the past was like the garden which I so loved” (Antoon, 2017, p. 8) and “My own paradise in the heart of hell” (Antoon, 2017, p. 8) to metaphorically fill his lack of being and achieve a sense of wholeness.

Unlike Youssef, who seeks wholeness by escaping from the present into the past, Maha, the young Christian woman, pursues wholeness by looking forward and focusing on the future, a form of migration toward the future that will be discussed in the next section. As mentioned earlier, this study focuses on metaphorical migration rather than physical migration. In Maha’s case, only her intentions regarding migration will be discussed, since by the end of the novel it remains unclear whether she actually migrates or not.

#### **Maha’s Forward Migration: Seeking Wholeness in the Future**

Maha, the second main character and a young Christian woman, becomes disillusioned and hopeless after losing her infant as a result of a bombing near her house. Unlike Youssef, who in his seventies experienced a relatively stable past, Maha’s childhood and adulthood were dominated by wars including the Iran-Iraq War, the Gulf War, the civil war, and the American invasion. From her earliest years in the shelter, Maha was surrounded by the sounds of explosions. During one such moment, when the entire family had gathered in the shelter, Maha began to cry, as her mother Nawal explained, “she’s frightened to death!” (Antoon, 2017, p. 22). Being an infant, Maha instinctively searched for a place of safety. Unaware of the concept of a shelter, she buried her face in her mother’s chest, seeking comfort and protection. With tears in her eyes, she looked up at Youssef, as if longing for a sense of security from a male figure. Youssef, a young man at the time, offered her that reassurance by likening the sound of bombing to the sound of rain. He gently told Maha, “It’s not ‘boom, boom.’ It’s just raining! It’s raining” (p. 22). Here, Youssef, like everyone else, tries to identify the sound of bombs with the sound of rain, seeking relief and a sense of security in his city or country. By doing so, he creates an idealized perception of reality. As Lacan claims in the mirror stage, “the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other” (1966, p. 2), and “this form would have to be called the Ideal-I” (1966, p. 2). Thus, in the mirror stage, everyone strives to achieve the Ideal-I, which represents a sense of wholeness. By likening the sound of bombs to the sound of rain, Youssef was able to idealize his country and offer comfort to himself and perhaps to others. Maha, however, could not make such an idealization. From infancy, she sought security elsewhere: in her mother’s chest or in Youssef’s reassuring words. As Lacan (1966) explains, this condition becomes fixed in the human psyche during the mirror stage (p.1), so the sense of fear and the search for an alternative source of security continue to persist in Maha.

Unlike Youssef, who seeks wholeness through retroaction, as previously discussed, Maha pursues it through a different mechanism, anticipation, by looking toward the future. As explained

about this mechanism in the mirror stage, the infant initially recognizes themselves as a fragmented body or what Lacan terms insufficiency, but when they see their reflection in the mirror, in contrast to their truly fragmented body, they perceive a wholeness. By encountering this illusory image, the infant anticipates a future sense of wholeness and continually strives toward it. As Lacan states, “The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation” (1966, p. 3). Similarly, in *The Baghdad Eucharist*, Maha is constantly searching for wholeness beyond Iraq, as she associates the illusory image of life abroad with completeness, power, and security. For instance, she sees strength in Egypt and states, “It’s not as if it’s just here, in Iraq. Look at Egypt. There’s a strong state there” (Antoon, 2017, p. 19). Maha not only anticipates comfort abroad but also expresses a deep sense of hopelessness: “there’s no hope left for [them] in this country. She just wants to get her degree and leave with her husband” (Antoon, 2017, p. 58). This reflects the same concept of the infant’s fixed attitude in Lacan’s theory (1966, p.1). This means she has carried a sense of hopelessness since childhood, when she was in the shelter hearing the sounds of bombs and has always associated wholeness with a place abroad. Maha’s sense of hopelessness prevents her from achieving identification and internalization within Iraq. Unable to find wholeness within her environment, she perceives only the lack in her country and thus looks toward the future, viewing migration abroad as the path through which she might attain completeness. This indicates that Maha perceives Iraq as a weak country, lacking effective governance and the ability to manage itself properly.

In addition, one could argue that one reason for Maha’s inability to idealize her country stems from the loss of her infant during the war. This loss can be connected to a profound sense of lack, specifically, the lack of being, because she lost a life that was part of her own existence. Consequently, this lack of being can be linked to desire, and in Maha’s case, to the desire for migration. As Lacan (1988) states, “Desire is a relation of being to lack. This lack is the lack of being properly speaking. It isn’t the lack of this or that, but lack of being whereby the being exists” (p. 223). It is also important to note Lacan’s assertion that “Desire [is] a function central to all human experience” (p. 223). In this novel, the fear and insecurity Maha experienced during her childhood, along with the traumatic loss of her infant, which generates a profound sense of existential lack, give rise to a desire that plays a central role in shaping her lived experience, particularly her decision to migrate. Thus, as Lacan claims, “this desire lies at the origin of every variety of animation” (p. 223), and in the context of this novel, such animation is embodied in the characters of Youseff and Maha.

The question here is whether Maha, through this anticipation of future completeness, succeeds in achieving wholeness through migration. In fact, this study focuses solely on metaphorical migration. In Youssef’s case, his movement into the past through memory is considered a form of migration to the past. In Maha’s case, the discussion centers on her thoughts and intentions regarding migration, and how these relate to the idea of wholeness rather than physical migration.

## Conclusion

This article aimed to examine how individuals can achieve wholeness, which, according to Lacan’s theory, people can pursue through two mechanisms: anticipation and retroaction. In Sinan Antoon’s *The Baghdad Eucharist*, Youssef, a seventy-year-old Christian Iraqi man, seeks wholeness by reflecting on the past and attempting to reconcile with it. In contrast, Maha, a young Christian Iraqi woman, looks toward the future and migration in order to overcome the deficiencies in her country and achieve completeness. This article also aimed to answer the question of whether Maha and Youssef actually attain wholeness.

Regarding the ending of the novel, in which Youssef is killed by ISIS when he and Maha visit the church for his sister Hinna's memorial anniversary, Antoon illustrates that reflecting on the past does not enable Youssef to realize the idealized image of his country as a place of wholeness. Similarly, Antoon leaves Maha's story open-ended, so the reader never learns whether she migrates or not. In line with Lacan's view, wholeness is never fully attainable because it is merely an illusory image. Two key points emerge here: first, neither Youssef, who longs to rebuild the idealized country of his memory, nor Maha who desires to migrate achieves this illusion of wholeness. Second, even if they perceive themselves as having attained wholeness, how long does that sense last, given its illusory nature? If Maha migrates, does she truly achieve wholeness, or is it merely an illusion? Is migration genuinely beneficial for Maha, or, as Lacan states, is it simply the desire for nothing, as he describes in Seminar II (p. 223)? Thus, the novel opens a window onto critical contemporary issues such as immigration, identity, and the complexities of modern existence.

It is important to note that all novels by Sinan Antoon, a contemporary migrant writer producing his work in exile, offer a rich field for exploring critical issues such as migration and identity. These themes can be explored not only through Jacques Lacan's theoretical lens but also through the insights of other scholars working in related fields. However, this study focuses on Antoon's novel *The Baghdad Eucharist* through the framework of Lacanian theory, as his work has not yet been examined from this perspective in existing scholarship.

#### Works Citation

Abdel Hassan, A. Y. (2019). Space-time structure in Sinan Antoon's novels. *Journal of Tikrit University for Humanities*, 26(12), 192–206. <http://www.jtuh.tu.edu.iq>

Antoon, S. (2017). *The Baghdad Eucharist* (M. Tabet, Trans.). Hoopoe Fiction. (Original work published 2012)

Evans, D. (1996). *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. Routledge,

Hamood, Z. A. A. (2023, March 29). The status of Christians in post-2003 in Sinan Antoon's *The Baghdad Eucharist*. *Thi Qar Journal*, 1(41).

Hasan, M. F. (2018, January). الهوية التمثيل والصراع في رواية يا مريم لسنان أنطون [Identity, representation, and conflict in Sinan Antoon's *Ya Maryam*]. *Uruk for Humanities*.

Lacan, J. (2006). *Écrits: The first complete edition in English* (B. Fink, Trans.). W. W. Norton & Company. (Original work published 1966)

Lacan, J. (1988). *The seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book II. The ego in Freud's theory and in the technique of psychoanalysis, 1954–1955* (S. Tomaselli, Trans.; J.-A. Miller, Ed.). W. W. Norton & Company.

Mahdi, I. M. (2025, May). The shattered mirror: Disappointment of Iraqi people after the 2003 invasion with special reference to *The Baghdad Eucharist* novel. *Iraqi Journal of Humanitarian, Social and Scientific Research*, (17).

Mashab, R. K. (2024). Female voices in the aftermath of the Iraqi war in Helen Benedict's *Wolf Season*. *Wasit Journal for Human Sciences*, 20(3). University of Wasit. (Supervised by Prof. Azhar Hameed Mankhi), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31185/wjfh.Vol20.Iss3.547>

Negarash, J., Kaouri, S. E., & Jadri, S. (2022). Manifestations of dystopia in the modern Iraqi novel: *Ya Maryam* by Sinan Antoon as a model. *Journal of the Iranian Association of Arabic Language and Literature*, (61), 46.

Soghomonyan, A. (2021). *Exiled writer in migrant literature*. WISDOM, 17(1). <https://doi.org/10.24234/wisdom.v17i1.442>

