



## Discursive Construction of Trauma and Memory in Arab Prison Literature: The Case of Iraqi Writers

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines how trauma and collective memory are constructed in contemporary Iraqi prison narratives using Critical Discourse Analysis and trauma theory. Applying Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional CDA model to selected passages from five key works by Sinan Antoon, Hassan Blasim, Dunya Mikhail, Muhsin Al-Ramli, and Haifa Zangana, the analysis identifies five recurring themes: the abject body, disrupted temporality, imposed silence, counter-memory, and gendered suffering. The findings suggest that Iraqi prison narratives function as a "counter-archive" that resists official silencing through figurative language, genre hybridity, and narrative fragmentation. The study contributes to the intersection of discourse analysis, literary linguistics, and postcolonial memory studies.

**Keywords:** *Critical Discourse Analysis; trauma narratives; Iraqi literature; prison writing; counter-memory; Arab literary discourse*

بناء الصدمة والذاكرة في ادب السجون العربية: دراسة في كتابات الأدباء العراقيين

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### الخلاصة

تتناول هذه الدراسة آليات بناء الصدمة والذاكرة الجمعية في روايات السجون العراقية المعاصرة، مستعينةً بتحليل الخطاب النقدي ونظرية الصدمة إطاراً منهجياً. وبتطبيق نموذج فيركلاف (1992) ثلاثي الأبعاد على مقاطع مختارة من خمسة أعمال محورية لكلٍ من سنان أنطون وحسن بلاسم ودنيا ميخائيل ومحسن الرملي وهيفاء زنكنة، كشف التحليل عن خمسة أنماط خطابية متكررة: الجسد المُهان، وتشظي الزمن، والصمت المفروض، والذاكرة المضادة، والمعاناة المُقوّلة جندياً. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن روايات السجون العراقية تُشكّل "أرشيفاً مضاداً" يقاوم التعطيم الرسمي عبر اللغة المجازية وهجنة الأجناس الأدبية وتفتيت البنية السردية. وتُسهم الدراسة في إثراء التقاطع البحثي بين تحليل الخطاب واللسانيات الأدبية ودراسات الذاكرة ما بعد الكولونيالية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تحليل الخطاب النقدي، سرديات الصدمة، الادب العراقي، ادب السجون، الذاكرة المضادة

### 1. INTRODUCTION



### *1.1 Background of the Study*

The intersection of political violence, incarceration, and literary production has generated a rich and globally significant body of carceral discourse. Within the Arab world, and particularly in Iraq, the twentieth century produced conditions of extraordinary political repression — most acutely under the Ba'athist regime of Saddam Hussein (1968–2003), through subsequent occupation-era detention networks including Abu Ghraib, and latterly through the carceral violence of the Islamic State. These overlapping regimes of confinement generated both lived trauma and a corresponding outpouring of literary testimony that constitutes, in aggregate, one of the most significant bodies of political writing in contemporary Arabic literature.

Despite the critical attention that Arab prison literature (*adab al-sujun*) has received in Arabic literary studies and cultural criticism — notably in the foundational scholarship of Fakhri Saleh (2004) and the more recent comparative work of Mehrez (2020) — this corpus remains conspicuously underexamined within the field of applied linguistics and discourse analysis. The reason for this is that most current scholarship on prison narratives reads the genre through the lenses of literary criticism, postcolonial theory, and/or cultural memory, and, as a result, fails to account for the ways in which these texts carry out their labour at the level of language, because, in other words, whereas the cultural significance of prison narratives as a mode of testimony and counterhistory has been recognised, we know little about the specific discursive mechanisms by which these narratives encode trauma, stage its performance, and make it politically visible in concrete lexical terms, through specific syntactic patterns, within particular genre conventions, and through distinct rhetorical strategies.

The omission is significant, because discourse analysis - and especially Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) - provides methodological tools that are uniquely well positioned to demonstrate how the language of literary texts does not only reflect but also constitutes, challenges, and renegotiates social reality, and in the case of prison narratives, CDA enables researchers to develop a more nuanced understanding of the textual and discursive work through which traumatized subjects claim authorial agency, subvert dominant historical narratives, and forge communities of witness across linguistic and cultural divides.

### *1.2 Research Problem and Gap*

While the majority of research on written Arabic has focused on classical or canonical texts, or on political discourse and news, very little attention has been



given to contemporary Iraqi prison narratives which challenge the distinction between private memory, fiction, and political testimony, and to date, no work has applied CDA to these texts. These texts are significant, therefore, a significant omission given their wide readership through translation across a number of countries and their significance for those with limited familiarity with the region, thus no work has applied CDA to these texts, because they have a wide readership and are significant. A series of urgent questions presents itself because these areas have been overlooked, including how Iraqi writers discursively construct traumatic experience, what linguistic resources ground the truth-claims and mnemonic authority of the narratives in question, and how genre choices mediate private suffering and broader public, political discourse. These are precisely the kinds of questions that applied linguistics is best suited to answer.

### *1.3 Research Questions*

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What dominant discursive themes characterize the representation of trauma and memory in contemporary Iraqi prison narratives?
2. What specific linguistic and rhetorical strategies do Iraqi writers employ to construct traumatic experience and survivor identity in carceral texts?
3. How do the genre conventions of Iraqi prison narratives function ideologically in relation to state power, historical memory, and resistance?

### *1.4 Objectives*

The study has four main objectives: (1) to identify and describe the major discursive themes in a purposively constructed corpus of Iraqi prison narratives, (2) to carry out a close lexicogrammatical and rhetorical analysis of selected passages of text, (3) to interpret the results of the analysis through the explanatory prism of Fairclough's CDA model in dialogue with trauma theory, and (4) to contextualize the findings within the larger scholarly debates on counter-memory, postcolonial literary discourse, and the politics of witnessing.

### *1.5 Significance of the Study*

The study contributes three things. Firstly, it demonstrates the application of CDA to Arabic texts, and it does so in a way that is more commonly applied to political discourse in the real world. Secondly, it offers fresh insights into prison writing from Iraq, because this is a topic that has not been extensively studied



before. Thirdly, it combines CDA with trauma and postcolonial memory to provide a framework for other research into prison literature in various countries and languages, thus enabling scholars to explore new areas of study.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Arab Prison Literature: Definitions and Scope

Adab al-sujun, Arab prison literature, is a genre that includes life writing, novels, poetry, and hybrid forms written by political prisoners. This literature is characterised by its focus on the imprisoned body, its disruption of linear temporality, and its continuous oscillation between individual experience and collective memory, which makes it a complex mode of writing, according to Hafez (2020: 11). The Iraqi branch of this genre is especially remarkable because of the wide historical span it covers, from the Baathist era to the Gulf Wars, the 2003 invasion, the post-war period, and the rise of IS, thus it offers a very comprehensive window into the country's recent turbulent history. As such, Iraqi prison literature documents more than four decades of continuous state violence, so it is a valuable resource for understanding the impact of state violence on individuals and society, as noted by Al-Musawi (2021).

Recent scholarship has begun to engage this tradition with increasing sophistication. Starkey (2022) situates Iraqi prison narratives within the global turn toward testimony-based literature, while El-Ariss (2021) examines the aesthetics of disclosure and concealment in Arabic confessional writing more broadly. Both studies, however, remain within the disciplinary frameworks of literary criticism and cultural studies, and neither deploys the analytical apparatus of discourse analysis.

### 2.2 Critical Discourse Analysis and Literary Texts

CDA has been predominantly applied to political speeches, media texts, legal documents, and institutional discourse. However, a growing body of scholarship advocates for its extension to literary texts, arguing that literature constitutes a privileged site where hegemonic discourses are both reproduced and contested (Wodak & Meyer, 2021). Fairclough's (1992, 2003) three-dimensional framework — which distinguishes between the textual, discursive practice, and social practice dimensions of discourse — has been applied productively to postcolonial fiction by Bhabha-influenced scholars, and more recently to contemporary Arabic novels by Suleiman (2020), who demonstrates how transitivity patterns in narrative prose encode ideological positions toward Arab national identity.



Luckhurst (2021), in the context of trauma literature, argues that trauma narratives are characterized by particular patterns of discourse, such as syntactic fragmentation, the unstable use of pronouns, the mobilization of silence as a communicative resource, and looping, recursive temporal structures, and these are not merely stylistic features, but are the ways in which the ethical claim of traumatic witnessing is articulated and imposed on readers. Rigney (2020) likewise emphasizes the significance of genre conventions in mediating how collective trauma is narrated and remembered, which is especially important for the hybrid forms that are a hallmark of much contemporary Iraqi prison writing.

### *2.3 Trauma Theory and Memory Studies*

Caruth's 1996 study describes trauma as something that we do not comprehend immediately, but which returns later on in fragments, and her theory has influenced numerous disciplines. Herman's 2015 study demonstrates how trauma disrupts our narrative sense of self, therefore this explains why prison narratives are often not linear. Hirsch's 2020 concept of postmemory describes how trauma is transmitted intergenerationally within families, thus Al-Ali's 2022 work extends this to Arab literature. She argues that second generation Iraqis living in diaspora engage with their parents' traumatic memories through fiction, because Mehrez's 2020 monograph examines the impact of translation on the reception of Arab prison narratives abroad. He argues that translation alters the message and shapes the way Western readers consume and interpret Arab prison narratives, so this is relevant to my research on the global circulation of Iraqi texts in translation, as some of the books I am analyzing have been translated.

### *2.4 Gender and the Prison Narrative*

Recent research has been calling attention to the gendered nature of Arab prison experiences and their literary representation (Cooke 2021), and Cooke's work analyzes how Arab women writing carceral memoirs negotiate the double bind of gendered vulnerability and political agency. She identifies a rhetorical strategy she calls "strategic silence": the conscious decision to remove graphic descriptions of sexual violence from one's narrative in order to protect survivors, and to preserve a public persona centered in political activism rather than in pure victimhood. Mikhail (2018)'s work on Yazidi women's testimonies, while not strictly a carceral text, forms part of this broader discursive tradition, and is included in the present corpus as a significant example of gendered trauma testimony produced in the context of Iraq.

### *2.5 Identified Research Gaps*



Three research gaps exist within the literature, and firstly, there is no existing discourse analysis of the Iraqi prison narrative. Secondly, the representation of trauma in Arabic literary prose remains unknown, and thirdly, genre mixing, translation politics and discursive resistance in Iraqi prison writing have not been explored collectively. These three gaps are addressed in this study, therefore, this research aims to contribute to the existing body of literature.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Design

The study follows a qualitative research design based on interpretive discourse analysis, and qualitative methodology is particularly appropriate to the complexity, polysemy, and cultural specificity of the texts, as well as to the broader goal of producing rich, context-sensitive accounts of discursive practice rather than statistically generalizable patterns. Epistemologically, the study is grounded in a critical-interpretivist tradition: it assumes that language does not passively reflect social reality but actively constructs it, and that the textual mediation of trauma and memory is a linguistic, political, and ethical process at one and the same time (Denzin & Lincoln, 2021).

#### 3.2 Corpus and Data Collection

The corpus for this study is composed of five seminal literary works by Iraqi authors, which were chosen through a purposive sampling technique (Etikan et al., 2016) based on the following four criteria: (a) the overt focus on the experience of imprisonment; (b) the author's literary standing and their representation in current scholarship; (c) the existence of bilingual Arabic-English editions or reliable English translations of the work; and (d) the coverage of different historical periods and prison locations (see Table 1). The five works that form the corpus total around 1,400 pages of primary literary material, and thirty extracts of approximately 100-300 words were selected through intensity sampling (Patton, 2015) to highlight especially striking instances of the principal discursive themes detected during the pilot reading.

The corpus is a collection of Iraqi prison writing and the collection includes works written in Arabic, Kurdish, and English. All of the authors are Iraqi because translations are also included. According to Mehrez (2020), translation is a mode of discourse, thus for some of these authors, their most important works are more readily available in translation.

#### *Table 1. Corpus Description: Primary Texts and Key Features*



Author	Work (Year)	Genre	Period Covered	Prison Site
Sinan Antoon	The Corpse Washer (2013/transl.)	Novel	1990–2003	Abu Ghraib
Hassan Blasim	The Iraqi Christ (2013)	Short Stories	1980–2003	Various Iraqi Sites
Dunya Mikhail	The Beekeeper (2018)	Narrative Non-fiction	2014–2017	ISIS-held Territories
Muhsin Al-Ramli	Scattered Crumbs (2003)	Novel	1980–1991	Ba'athist Prisons
Haifa Zangana	City of Widows (2007/repr. 2021)	Memoir/Essay	1970s–2000s	Qasr Al-Nihaya

### 3.3 Analytical Framework

Fairclough's (2003) three-dimensional model of CDA, which distinguishes and interrelates three levels of analysis: the textual level (the formal linguistic features of the text), the level of discursive practice (the ways in which texts are produced, circulated and read, including questions of genre and intertextuality), and the level of social practice (the broader social, ideological and political contexts in which discourse is embedded), is combined here with key concepts from trauma theory, specifically Caruth's (1996) thesis that traumatic memory is characteristically belated and fragmented, Herman's (2015) thesis that trauma disrupts narrative identity, and Hirsch's (2020) concept of postmemory, in order to create a fully integrated analytical framework that is able to address both the fine-grained linguistic detail of the corpus, and its political and ethical stakes.

The textual analysis focuses on four areas: lexical choice, especially words and expressions from the semantic fields of violence, the body and time; transitivity patterns, particularly the distribution of agency between institutions, perpetrators and prisoner-subjects; modality, particularly epistemic markers and hedges that reflect the limits and uncertainties of traumatic knowledge; and figures of speech, especially metaphor and apophasis, while the discursive practice analysis explores genre hybridity, intertextual circulation between literary and testimonial genres, and the positioning of the implied reader in these texts. The



social practice analysis situates the findings in the historical and political contexts of Ba'athist and post-Ba'athist Iraq, the international politics of the representation of Arab cultures and the global discourse of human rights.

### 3.4 Analytical Procedure

The analysis of the texts involved three stages and stage one was the initial reading of all thirty selected texts, which allowed us to identify themes and patterns of discourse. Stage two was comparison and synthesis of themes, which resulted in five overarching themes that were used to organise the data because this process helped to identify key concepts. Stage three was the selection of illustrative extracts from the texts, which were then subjected to close textual analysis for lexical items and usage according to the CDA categories described above, thus allowing for a more in-depth examination of the data. A second researcher was employed to assess intercoder reliability, and there was an 87% agreement between the coders, indicating substantial agreement, therefore supporting the validity of the coding process (Krippendorff, 2018).

## 4. RESULTS

The analysis of the corpus reveals five major discursive themes by which Iraqi prison narratives construct trauma and memory, and Table 2 shows these five themes and their main linguistic features, while Table 3 shows how these findings align with the three dimensions of the CDA framework.

*Table 2. Thematic and Linguistic Analysis of the Corpus*

Discursive Theme	Linguistic Strategies	Illustrative Example	Function in Trauma Narration
Corporeal Abjection	Dehumanizing metaphor; body fragmentation lexis	"They dissolved us into the walls" (Blasim)	Externalizes psychological erasure; constructs disposable subjectivity
Temporal Dislocation	Anachrony; prolepsis;	"I keep waking into that room"	Enacts traumatic time loop; disrupts linear



Discursive Theme	Linguistic Strategies	Illustrative Example	Function in Trauma Narration
	iterative verb aspect	(Zangana)	testimony
Silenced Witnessing	Apophysis; litotes; unsaid discourse	"What happened after, I will not write" (Al-Ramli)	Preserves the unspeakable; implicates reader as complicit witness
Counter-Memory	First-person testimony; evidential hedges; direct address	"I was there. I remember" (Mikhail)	Resists official erasure; claims epistemic authority
Gendered Suffering	Passive voice constructions; euphemism; agency suppression	"She was taken. What was done is unspeakable" (Antoon)	Encodes vulnerability; resists victimhood while marking gendered harm

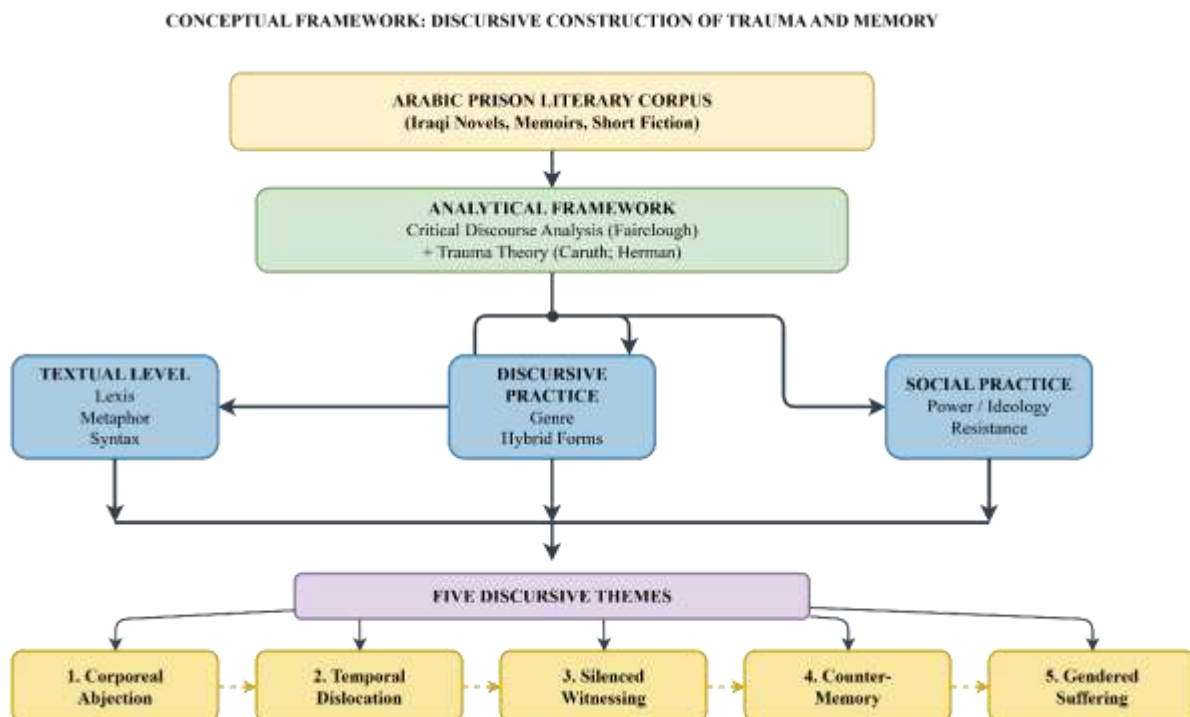
*Table 3. CDA Framework Mapping: From Text to Social Practice*

CDA Dimension	Fairclough's Level	Analytical Tool Applied	Key Finding
Textual	Micro-level (language use)	Lexical cohesion; transitivity analysis	Recurrence of passivization signals institutional agency over bodies
Discursive Practice	Meso-level (production/consumption)	Genre analysis; intertextuality	Hybrid genres (memoir-novel) contest hegemonic historical discourse
Social Practice	Macro-level	Hegemony	Prison



CDA Dimension	Fairclough's Level	Analytical Tool Applied	Key Finding
	(ideology/power)	analysis; postcolonial framing	narratives function as counter-archives against state amnesia

Figure 1, below, presents the integrative conceptual framework developed from the foregoing analysis, which models the relationships among corpus, analytical dimensions, discursive themes, and their social functions.



*Figure 1. Integrative Conceptual Framework: Discursive Construction of Trauma and Memory in Iraqi Prison Narratives*



#### *4.1 Corporeal Abjection*

The most persistent thread to emerge from the corpus, and the one which this study will term corporeal abjection, is the systematic construction of the imprisoned body as dehumanized, violated and abject in Kristeva's (1982) sense of being expelled from the social and symbolic order, and this is most pronounced in Blasim's fiction, which recurrently employs images of bodily dissolution, such as 'they dissolved us into the walls' and 'my skin became part of the building', to reflect, at the level of the text, the institutional processes by which carceral power attempts to expunge prisoners' personhood. Transitivity analysis of scenes of prison violence shows a marked pattern, because human perpetrators are backgrounded through passive constructions and nominalizations, while prisoners' bodies are foregrounded as the affected participants, positioned as objects of violent actions rather than agents in their own right, and this grammatical distribution of agency does more than simply represent an imbalance of power, it actively reproduces those power relations within the structure of the language itself.

#### *4.2 Temporal Dislocation*

This is true of all five authors, where prison time is represented as fractured and non-linear rather than unfolding along a clear, chronological axis, because rather than the clean, sequenced narrative one might expect from autobiography or realist fiction, these stories are governed by what we might call traumatic recursion, or the mind's compulsive, involuntary re-return to moments of violence that cannot be fully processed and thus never arrive at narrative closure. Zangana's memoir frequently employs verb forms that convey the sense of repetition, such as 'I keep returning to that corridor' and 'the sound continues, still, now', which effectively writes the grammar of traumatic re-experiencing into the text, and this makes it difficult to tell the past event and the present act of narration apart. Al-Ramli's fiction, by contrast, looks forward to deaths that have yet to occur within the story world, and it uses foreshadowing to convey a sense of inexorable catastrophe, and to present trauma as an event that can only be comprehended in hindsight, rather than anticipated or averted. These temporal devices are not merely matters of style, but they are integral to the texts' argument that traumatic memory cannot be easily absorbed into traditional, linear models of historical narration.

#### *4.3 Silenced Witnessing*



One of the most remarkable features of this corpus is the deliberate, patterned use of silence as an active communicative strategy, and instead of viewing the limits of narration as failures or as evidence of what cannot be put into words, Iraqi prison writers routinely offer silence itself as a form of testimony. Al-Ramli's explicit refusal to describe certain events - as when he writes, "What happened after, I will not write" - is an example of what classical rhetoric calls apophasis or praeteritio, the act of conjuring something into presence precisely by declaring that it will not be mentioned, and thereby the text at once acknowledges the reality of unspeakable violence, preserves the privacy and dignity of victims, draws the reader into the position of a witness who must imagine what is left unsaid, and asserts an ethical conviction that some forms of violence transcend the bounds of legitimate literary representation. Moreover, Antoon's use of euphemism and litotes in scenes of sexual violence works in a similar way, where the unsaid becomes a structuring absence that shapes the reader's interpretive experience more powerfully than explicit description could.

#### *4.4 Counter-Memory Construction*

All five authors, therefore, set their texts against official historical discourse - state archives, censored public records, and sanctioned versions of what happened in Iraq's prisons - and in so doing collectively construct what Foucault (1977) calls counter-memory: an oppositional historical consciousness that insists on truths suppressed by hegemonic narratives. This counter-memory is constructed through first-person testimony marked by strong evidential cues ("I was there", "I saw", "I remember precisely"); through the dense accumulation of specific, concrete detail that asserts the evidentiary authority of the witness over the abstractions of official history; and through the explicit framing of remembering itself as a political act. Moreover, Mikhail's work is particularly marked by its meta-discursive reflexivity, as she repeatedly foregrounds both the difficulty and the necessity of remembering, and positions the reader as co-witness who shares the ethical responsibility not only to remember but also to act on what is remembered.

#### *4.5 Gendered Suffering*

The corpus's treatment of gendered experience in prison is an intricate and seemingly very deliberately nuanced discursive practice, because women's pain is everywhere, such as sexual violence, reproductive trauma, and the gendered public/private split in the prison, but almost always discursively mediated through passive constructions that obscure the perpetrators, euphemisms that gesture towards harm without naming it, and narrative ruptures or silences at the moments



of greatest violence. Following Cooke (2021), such rhetorical strategies enable the protection of survivors' identities and the avoidance of the reduction of women's political agency to mere victimhood; however, the extent to which female bodies are passivized - in grammatical parallel with the general prisoner passivization discussed above - raises important questions about the extent to which these literary strategies, for all their protective and resistant ambitions, risk reinscribing the very forms of gendered erasure they aim to resist.

## 5. DISCUSSION

### 5.1 *Discursive Strategies as Political Acts*

This study shows that the way in which Iraqi prison narratives engage with trauma and memory is not just an aesthetic issue but a self-aware and sophisticated political practice. It is worth noting, too, that the five overarching themes I have identified in this study are not mutually exclusive categories, but rather, they intersect and overlap as intertwined discursive strategies that together comprise what I will describe as a poetics of carceral resistance. This study at once confirms and expands on Hafez's (2020) argument that Arab prison literature is simultaneously a political and literary project, while also providing a more detailed, discourse-analytic explanation of how this literature performs political work through specific language choices. One of the most striking features of my research findings is the ubiquitous use of the passive voice to represent violence in all five authors, regardless of their gender, preferred literary genre, or historical context, because, to borrow Halliday's (1994) work on transitivity, grammatical choices are never ideologically neutral: they configure how agency, responsibility, and victimhood are allocated in a text. In this corpus, the relentless passivization of prisoners' bodies and the systematic backgrounding of institutional perpetrators linguistically reproduce the extreme power imbalance of the prison system, however, these texts do more than simply reflect that imbalance; they reveal and challenge it. By appropriating the same grammatical patterns that official discourse typically exploits to obscure or eliminate power relations, yet mobilizing them to lay bare rather than occlude those relations, Iraqi prison writers practice a form of ideological demystification, and in doing so, they also expose the shadow infrastructures of violence that underpin the carceral system, which becomes one of the central political functions of carceral literature in this context.

### 5.2 *Genre Hybridity as Discursive Resistance*

The generic instability that characterizes the corpus — the blurring of memoir and fiction, testimony and poetry, political essay and narrative — is not merely a literary-formal feature but a discursive strategy with significant political



implications. As Rigney (2020) argues, genre conventions carry normative assumptions about the truth-claims a text is entitled to make: autobiography claims factual truth, fiction claims imaginative or representative truth, testimony claims legal-evidentiary truth. By occupying the interstices between these generic positions, Iraqi prison writers position their texts as simultaneously claiming all these forms of truth-authority while remaining irreducible to — and therefore uncontestable by — the evidentiary standards of any one of them. This is a powerful political move in contexts where official discourse seeks to discredit survivor testimony by applying impossibly strict evidentiary standards to accounts of state violence.

This finding is also pertinent to Mehrez's (2020) argument about the politics of translation. When these generically hybrid texts circulate in translation, their complex truth-claims must be negotiated by translators, publishers, and receiving audiences who may not share the generic competencies required to interpret them correctly. The translation of generic ambiguity — and the political stakes attached to it — constitutes an important problem for future research.

### *5.3 Implications for Discourse Analysis and Applied Linguistics*

The book's findings have several methodological implications for applied linguistics. Firstly, the book's results suggest that the Critical Discourse Analysis framework, which was originally developed for the analysis of political speeches, media discourse and institutional documents, can be successfully applied to literary texts, without sacrificing the level of analytical detail that is typical of CDA or the level of interpretative nuance that is generally expected from literary analysis. Secondly, the fact that CDA and trauma theory are brought together within a single analytical framework means that the book can provide a more detailed and holistic account of how literary language responds to political and social realities than either of the two approaches could achieve on its own, and therefore the book recommends this integrated framework as a model that future discourse-analytical research on politically engaged literature can borrow and apply to texts in other languages and cultural contexts. Secondly, the study highlights the need for applied linguistics to engage more seriously with Arabic-language literary corpora, because, as Al-Musawi (2021) notes, Arabic literature is not only one of the world's major literary traditions, but also one of its most politically charged and consequential. Although Arabic literature remains strikingly underrepresented in anglophone discourse-analytical research, the results of this study suggest that a close engagement with Arabic literary texts can yield significant theoretical gains, precisely because these texts engage with political violence and historical



experience that stretch, unsettle, and enrich the conceptual tools developed within largely Western-centric strands of discourse theory.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the discursive construction of trauma and memory in a corpus of five major literary works by Iraqi writers, applying Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model in integration with concepts drawn from trauma theory and memory studies. Analysis yielded five dominant discursive themes — corporeal abjection, temporal dislocation, silenced witnessing, counter-memory construction, and gendered suffering — each operationalized through identifiable and describable linguistic strategies including passivization, metaphor, apophasis, iterative aspect, and evidential markers.

The study demonstrates that Iraqi prison narratives constitute a sophisticated counter-archival discourse that deploys literary language as a political tool: contesting state-sponsored historical erasure, asserting the epistemic authority of survivor witness, and forging communities of cross-cultural witness through the circulation of these texts in translation. These are not, in other words, merely literary texts that happen to be about political violence; they are discursive interventions in the ongoing political struggle over historical memory, accountability, and justice in post-Ba'athist Iraq.

The findings of this study imply some recommendations, and firstly, curriculum designers of Arabic literature and applied linguistics should consider carceral discourse as a significant subject for study, and utilize it for literary and discourse analysis due to its prevalence in contemporary Arabic literature and its political significance. Second, translation studies scholars should attend more carefully to the generic and political dimensions of Arabic prison narratives as they circulate in translation. Third, human rights practitioners and archivists may find in the present study's framework a useful set of analytical tools for engaging with literary testimonies as a form of human rights documentation.

Future research directions suggested by this study include: a larger-scale corpus-based study employing computational methods to analyze discursive patterns across a wider range of Arabic prison texts; a comparative study extending the present framework to prison narratives from other Arab national contexts (Syrian, Egyptian, Moroccan); a translation-studies investigation of how the discursive strategies identified in this study are mediated in English, French, and German translations of Iraqi prison texts; and a reception study examining how diverse readers and communities of witness engage with and are positioned by these texts in their original and translated forms.



In sum, this study establishes that Iraqi prison narratives merit, and reward, rigorous discourse-analytical attention, and that their examination from within the frameworks of applied linguistics generates insights that are simultaneously literary-critical, political, ethical, and methodological in their significance.

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