

Inside the ‘Iraqi Coffin’: Generational Memory and Psychic Survival in Sinan Antoon’s Fiction

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ABSTRACT

*This article examines how Sinan Antoon’s *The Baghdad Eucharist*, *The Corpse Washer*, and *I’jaam: An Iraqi Rhapsody* portray the psychological aftermath of war as a generational problem of memory, continuity, and inheritance. While scholarship on Antoon has extensively explored themes of trauma, violence, displacement, and loss, less attention has been paid to the uneven psychic resources available to characters for negotiating these experiences. Drawing on Freudian psychoanalysis and Svetlana Boym’s distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia, this study asks how memory, ritual, domestic continuity, and inherited relationships to the past shape characters’ responses to prolonged violence. Through a qualitative textual analysis, the article argues that Antoon’s fiction challenges homogenised understandings of Iraqi trauma by depicting psychic survival as unevenly distributed across generations. Older characters frequently retain access to memories of a pre-war world, ritual practices, domestic routines, and historical perspectives that help situate suffering within broader frameworks of meaning. By contrast, younger characters often inherit disrupted attachments, damaged spaces, fractured futures, and memories already saturated by violence. Rather than encountering war as a rupture from stability, they experience violence as the condition through which reality itself is understood. The study contributes to scholarship on Antoon, Iraqi war literature, and trauma studies by offering a more differentiated account of how violence is lived, remembered, and negotiated across time. Antoon’s novels ultimately suggest that the legacy of war lies not only in the wounds it inflicts but also in the unequal inheritance of the memories, attachments, and continuities through which those wounds are endured.*

Keywords: Iraqi literature; post-2003 Iraq; memory; generational narrative; violence

INTRODUCTION

The devastation of the Iraqi social fabric, often described as the “last nail in the Iraqi coffin” (Antoon, 2007), has typically been interpreted through sociological or medical-psychological lenses that privilege collective trauma. While the human and economic toll of the Iran–Iraq War, the Gulf War, and the 2003 invasion is well documented (Cordesman, 2015), such macro-narratives risk obscuring the uneven, generationally inflected ways individuals actually live with war. As Al-Qarawee (2014) notes, “Iraq remains divided,” yet this division is not only political but deeply psychic and temporal.

Scholarship on Iraq has increasingly recognised the long-term psychological consequences of war, displacement, state violence, and social fragmentation. Studies in psychology, sociology, and cultural memory have demonstrated that trauma often persists across generations, shaping identities, relationships, and perceptions of the future. At the same time, literary scholarship on

contemporary Iraqi fiction has explored themes of trauma, mourning, loss, displacement, and survival, particularly in relation to the aftermath of the 2003 invasion. However, these studies frequently approach Iraqi suffering as a broadly shared or collective condition, emphasising common experiences of violence while paying less attention to the uneven psychic consequences of that violence across generations.

A similar tendency can be observed in scholarship on Sinan Antoon's fiction. While critics have productively examined war, death, memory, exile, and national suffering in his novels, individual protagonists are often treated as representative figures standing in for a collective Iraqi experience. Such readings risk reproducing what this article terms an "equalisation gap": the assumption that exposure to the same historical violence necessarily produces similar psychic outcomes. As a result, the differentiated ways in which memory, ritual, domestic stability, and historical continuity shape psychological survival remain insufficiently theorised.

This paper therefore asks: if trauma is widely shared, why do its psychic consequences appear so uneven across generations in Antoon's fiction? More specifically, how do memory, ritual practice, and pre-war historical continuity shape the ways individuals negotiate the psychological afterlife of war? Drawing on Freudian psychoanalysis and Svetlana Boym's distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia, this article examines how Antoon's novels repeatedly stage encounters between older and younger generations who inhabit the same landscape of violence yet appear to possess different relationships to the past.

Focusing on *The Baghdad Eucharist*, *The Corpse Washer*, and *I'jaam: An Iraqi Rhapsody*, the article explores whether access to lived memory, ritual structures, domestic continuity, and historical experience functions as an important resource in shaping responses to loss and instability. In doing so, it investigates the possibility that the psychic consequences of violence are mediated not only by traumatic events themselves but also by the mnemonic and cultural frameworks through which those events are understood and remembered. By foregrounding generational differences in the experience of war and its aftermath, the study seeks to contribute to scholarship on Antoon, Iraqi war literature, and trauma studies by offering a more differentiated account of how violence is lived, remembered, and negotiated across time.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Contemporary Iraqi literature has been profoundly shaped by decades of war, sanctions, authoritarian rule, occupation, and sectarian violence. Critics frequently describe post-2003 Iraqi fiction as a literature preoccupied with rupture, uncertainty, and the struggle to represent lives lived under conditions of prolonged instability. Sadiq (2020) argues that the contemporary Iraqi novel is marked by a pervasive "fogginess" of life, reflecting the collapse of familiar social and political certainties, while Morshed (2018) and Al-Hadithi (2016) identify recurring concerns with displacement, fragmentation, and the erosion of humane social relations. Rather than presenting coherent narratives of recovery, many Iraqi writers depict worlds characterised by loss, insecurity, and the persistent intrusion of violence into everyday life.

Scholars have further noted that Iraqi fiction frequently turns to gothic, surrealist, and absurdist modes to represent realities that resist conventional forms of narration (Firmani, 2018; Masmoudi, 2015). Within this literary landscape, writers such as Ahmed Saadawi and Hassan Blasim employ speculative, fantastical, and fragmented narrative forms to explore the physical and psychological consequences of war, foregrounding themes of bodily disintegration, displacement,

and fractured identity (Saadawi, 2014; Blasim, 2016). Such works reflect a broader literary concern with the aftermath of violence and the difficulties of constructing meaning in environments where social, political, and moral frameworks have been repeatedly disrupted.

Among contemporary Iraqi writers, Sinan Antoon has emerged as one of the most significant literary chroniclers of civilian life under conditions of war and social collapse (Alosman & Raihanah, 2024). Qasri (2018) argues that Antoon's fiction offers a counter-history to dominant Western narratives of conflict by centring Iraqi experiences and foregrounding the intimate human costs of violence. Through his sustained engagement with the everyday consequences of war, Antoon occupies a distinctive position within contemporary Iraqi literature as a writer concerned not only with historical catastrophe but also with its enduring psychological and social aftermath.

The psychological consequences of war in Iraq have been examined across a range of historical, sociological, and clinical studies, many of which emphasise the long temporal reach of violence beyond the battlefield. Rather than ending with ceasefires or regime change, war often persists as what Behrouzan (2013) describes as the “psychological afterlife of wars,” where memories, losses, and anxieties continue to shape everyday life long after the events that produced them. This perspective is particularly relevant to Iraq, where successive decades of conflict, sanctions, authoritarian repression, and sectarian violence have generated not only physical devastation but also enduring forms of psychological vulnerability.

Importantly, scholarship increasingly suggests that trauma is neither transmitted nor experienced uniformly. Studies of Iraqi prisoners of war and their families reveal how prolonged absence, delayed return, and emotional estrangement created a “psychological vacuum” within the family structure. By the time many prisoner files were officially closed in 2011, a generation of children had already grown into adulthood without the stable parental presence or “sweet memories” that might have provided continuity and emotional security (Salim, 2021). Similar patterns emerge in psychological studies of post-war Iraq. Sharma and Piachaud (2011) characterise Iraq as shaped by a “perpetual traumatic history,” while research on children and adolescents repeatedly documents elevated levels of psychological distress among those exposed to chronic violence and instability (Ahmed, 2007; Aljawadi, 2007; Al-Obaidi, 2011). Behrouzan's (2013) concept of “coercive memories” is particularly significant in this regard, suggesting that trauma may become normalised as a generational condition and incorporated into collective expectations about the future.

At the same time, empirical research consistently demonstrates that psychological outcomes are shaped not solely by traumatic exposure but also by the availability of social and emotional support. Studies indicate that the absence of affective support predicts depressive morbidity more strongly than trauma exposure alone (Ahmad et al., 2000), while research on war-affected families highlights the lasting consequences of disrupted attachments, orphanhood, and relational instability (Behrouzan, 2013; Hutchinson & Banks, 2006; Smith & Gala, 2014). Taken together, these studies challenge assumptions that war produces a singular psychological condition. Instead, they suggest that trauma is mediated by the differing relationships, attachments, and memory structures available to individuals across time, resulting in uneven psychological responses to violence and loss.

Questions of memory and continuity have also attracted increasing scholarly attention within studies of displacement, identity, and post-conflict societies. Brook (2003) argues that experiences of loss are shaped not only by traumatic events themselves but also by the resources through which individuals maintain connections to the past. Yet the Iraqi context complicates this formulation by raising a more difficult question: what happens when the remembered “there” has

itself been transformed by violence, displacement, or loss? This question is particularly relevant to the fiction of Sinan Antoon, where questions of memory, continuity, and loss frequently occupy a central place in characters' attempts to navigate the aftermath of violence.

Within scholarship on Sinan Antoon, considerable attention has been devoted to themes of trauma, death, displacement, exile, surveillance, and national suffering. Critics have shown how Antoon's fiction documents the human cost of war, foregrounds civilian experience, and challenges dominant narratives of conflict by centring Iraqi perspectives and everyday experiences of violence (Qasri, 2018; Qasim, 2015; Mankhil, 2020). Across novels such as *The Baghdad Eucharist*, *The Corpse Washer*, and *I'jaam: An Iraqi Rhapsody*, Antoon portrays individuals struggling to navigate landscapes marked by loss, instability, and social fragmentation, making him one of the most significant literary chroniclers of the psychological aftermath of war in contemporary Iraq.

However, existing readings frequently approach suffering in Antoon's fiction as a broadly shared national condition and often treat individual protagonists as representative figures standing in for a collective Iraqi experience. While such approaches illuminate the pervasive effects of war and displacement, they risk overlooking the uneven ways in which individuals experience, interpret, and negotiate violence. Consequently, the role of memory, ritual practice, domestic continuity, and generational inheritance in mediating uneven psychic responses to conflict remains insufficiently explored. Scholarship has paid considerable attention to what Antoon's characters suffer, but far less to the differing mnemonic, relational, and cultural resources available to them for making sense of that suffering. This article addresses that gap by examining how access to memory, domestic continuity, and inherited relationships to the past mediates the uneven psychological afterlife of war across generations in Antoon's fiction.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a psychoanalytic framework to examine the uneven psychological consequences of war in Sinan Antoon's fiction. Psychoanalysis begins from the premise that individuals do not respond identically to the same external circumstances because experience is mediated through unconscious processes, personal histories, and internalised relationships (Feist & Feist, 2009; Mitchell, 2014). Such an approach is particularly useful for addressing what this study identifies as the "equalisation gap" in existing scholarship, allowing for a more differentiated examination of how individuals negotiate the psychological aftermath of violence.

Central to this framework is Freud's understanding of the unconscious as a repository of desires, fears, memories, and conflicts that exceed conscious awareness (Freud, 1900/1953). Traumatic experiences may therefore continue to shape behaviour indirectly through repression, anxiety, dreams, and recurring patterns of thought and action. Rather than assuming that war produces uniform psychological effects, psychoanalysis directs attention to the differing psychic resources through which individuals attempt to contain, interpret, or survive traumatic experiences.

Questions of memory, continuity, and belonging provide a complementary perspective. Brook (2003) argues that place attachment functions as a source of stability, with homes, gardens, and everyday environments serving as repositories of identity and belonging. Similarly, studies of material culture suggest that domestic spaces and objects can preserve continuity between past and present, particularly under conditions of displacement and loss (Bryant, 2014; Burke, 2019). This study also draws on Boym's (2001) distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia. While restorative nostalgia seeks to reconstruct the lost home as an attainable reality, reflective nostalgia

acknowledges loss while preserving the emotional significance of what has disappeared. Boym's framework provides a useful means of examining how characters relate differently to memory, history, and absence. In addition, research on ritual suggests that repetitive practices can provide continuity and perceived control in environments marked by uncertainty (Sosis & Handwerker, 2011). Rituals, routines, and inherited cultural practices may therefore function as stabilising structures through which individuals negotiate disruption, loss, and historical change. Together, psychoanalysis, nostalgia theory, and studies of memory and ritual provide a framework for examining how the psychological afterlife of war is mediated by access to memory, continuity, and inherited relationships to the past.

This study employs a qualitative textual analysis of Sinan Antoon's *The Baghdad Eucharist* (2017), *The Corpse Washer* (2013), and *I'jaam: An Iraqi Rhapsody* (2007). These novels were selected because they span different historical moments in modern Iraqi experience, including Ba'athist authoritarianism, the Iran-Iraq War, sanctions, and the post-2003 period, while consistently engaging with questions of memory, loss, displacement, and survival. The novels were analysed through close reading using the psychoanalytic and memory-oriented framework outlined above. Particular attention was given to representations of memory, dreams, ritual practices, domestic spaces, interpersonal relationships, and recurring symbolic patterns. The analysis focused on how characters access, preserve, suppress, or reinterpret the past, and how these differing relationships to memory influence their responses to violence and loss. Through this approach, the study examines the mnemonic, relational, and cultural resources available to characters as they negotiate the psychological aftermath of war. In doing so, it seeks to illuminate why the consequences of violence are experienced unevenly across generations despite being rooted in a shared historical landscape.

ANALYSIS

Across *The Baghdad Eucharist*, *The Corpse Washer*, and *I'jaam: An Iraqi Rhapsody*, Antoon repeatedly places younger protagonists alongside older family members who have lived through earlier historical periods. These elder figures are not presented as untouched by violence. They have experienced war, authoritarianism, bereavement, and social upheaval. Yet the novels consistently portray them as possessing forms of continuity that remain available despite these losses. What distinguishes them from the younger generation is not the absence of trauma but access to symbolic and material structures such as memories of a pre-war world, ritual practices, domestic routines, and inherited systems of meaning, that enable suffering to be situated within a broader historical framework.

MEMORY, RITUAL, AND CONTINUITY: THE ELDERS' INHERITED STRUCTURES

In *I'jaam*, Furat's grandmother embodies a practical form of survival rooted in accumulated historical knowledge and an absolute immersion in domestic and religious spaces. Her response to state violence is neither ideological resistance nor passive submission but the cultivation of everyday strategies for living under surveillance, preserving an uninterrupted baseline of domestic rhythms—from preparing afternoon tea to adhering strictly to her lifetime liturgical commitments at the Church of the Sacred Heart (pp. 18, 51). Her insistence on hanging the Leader's portrait beside the Virgin Mary "for protection" (p. 51) illustrates this adaptive logic. This gesture is highly calculated; she privately notes that she keeps the image "so we didn't give the sons of bitches a

chance to report us," effectively neutralizing the state's invasive authority by telling an interrogating Ba'athist agent, "I put it with Maryam for her to protect him" (p. 51). The gesture does not signal belief in the regime but an understanding of how power operates. Similarly, her warning that the authorities would "cut out his tongue" (p. 4) functions as inherited knowledge rather than dramatic exaggeration, transforming political danger into a rule of daily conduct. This defensive literacy is fundamentally tethered to past bereavement; having already lost Furat's parents to earlier catastrophes, her maternal warnings combine personal panic with political realism: "Please be careful, my son. For my sake... these people don't even fear God. They fear nothing..." (pp. 4, 9-10). Through such scenes, Antoon portrays survival as a form of practical wisdom grounded in memory and experience. The grandmother's relationship to fear is mediated by routines and habits developed over time, allowing danger to be managed without becoming the sole organising principle of life.

A similar pattern emerges in *The Corpse Washer* through the figure of Jawad's father. As a *mghassil*, he encounters death on a daily basis, yet the narrative repeatedly emphasises his ability to integrate this proximity to mortality into ordinary existence. Jawad observes that his father could leave the washing room and return to everyday life as though he were "merely moving from one room to another and leaving death behind" (p. 32). What appears remarkable to the son is not the father's lack of grief but his capacity to contain grief within meaningful structures. Ritual washing, prayer, and religious language provide continuity between the living and the dead, transforming death from a source of chaos into a recognised part of communal and spiritual life, an order maintained through a rigorous somatic choreography where the water is systematically infused with lotus leaves (*sidr*) and camphor (*kafur*) to reconstitute the desecrated flesh until the corpse resembles "a newborn in swaddling clothes" (pp. 29, 32). His repeated invocation of "There is no power save in God" and his continuing conversations with his son's photograph (p. 21) suggest that memory remains active without becoming overwhelming. Photographs, prayers, and ritual labour function as mediating structures through which loss can be acknowledged while remaining integrated into the rhythms of everyday life, a traditionalist endurance explicitly framed not as commercial trade, but as a multi-generational ancestral legacy and sacred duty: "My father, my grandfather, and his grandfather all did it" (p. 89), practiced so "that the hearts of the living be not hardened" (p. 34).

In *The Baghdad Eucharist*, Youssef's continuity is sustained primarily through memory. Unlike younger characters whose recollections are dominated by violence and rupture, Youssef retains access to a longer historical horizon that precedes the conflicts of contemporary Iraq. This perspective is evident in his refusal to reduce present events to simple sectarian explanations. While his niece Maha views their immediate reality as an inescapable "booby-trapped snare full of car bombs, brutality and horror" (p. 3), Youssef counters this reactionary pessimism by nesting modern shocks into macro-historical rhythms, stubbornly insisting that "as soon as things settle down, life will be good again... that's the cycle of history" (p. 16). During his disagreements with Maha, he repeatedly insists that events are "more complicated than who's Christian and who's Muslim" (p. 13), situating contemporary violence within broader social and historical contexts. His relationship to the past is similarly reflected in his attachment to photographs, family memories, and especially his garden. Rather than treating his photo wall as a vault of trauma, he actively navigates it to reconstruct a vibrant, multicultural pre-war Baghdad, "coloring in the details" for the youth via "stories laced with sighs of pleasure or with laughter that were lodged in my memory" (p. 2). Through this deliberate oral history complemented by intimate domestic rituals like keeping his deceased sister Hinna's bedroom window open to ensure her spirit still

peacefully coexists with the living (pp. 11, 76), he protects his personal relationships from being erased by the tides of war. The garden functions not merely as a symbol of nostalgia but as a living practice that connects past, present, and future through seasonal cycles. His reflection that "sometimes things need to die before they are born again" (p. 75) reveals an understanding of loss that does not depend upon recovering what has disappeared. In Boym's terms, Youssef's orientation resembles reflective nostalgia, which preserves the emotional significance of the past without demanding its restoration. Memory remains a source of continuity rather than a site of perpetual injury.

Across the three novels, Antoon repeatedly associates the older generation with structures that preserve continuity amid disruption. Whether through the grandmother's inherited survival knowledge, Jawad's father's ritual engagement with death, or Youssef's cultivation of memory and historical perspective, these characters possess symbolic and material resources that allow suffering to be interpreted within broader frameworks of meaning. Their endurance derives not from immunity to trauma but from continued access to memories, routines, relationships, and narratives that connect personal loss to a larger historical and cultural horizon.

DISRUPTED MEMORY AND BROKEN CONTINUITY: WHAT THE YOUTH INHERIT

If the older generation in Antoon's fiction retains access to memories, rituals, and inherited structures that provide continuity across historical upheaval, the younger generation frequently encounters a different inheritance. Rather than inheriting stable frameworks through which violence can be interpreted and contained, younger characters often inherit the aftermath of their collapse. Their experiences are shaped by disrupted attachments, damaged domestic spaces, fractured futures, and memories already saturated by loss. Consequently, violence appears not as a rupture from an earlier stability but as the condition through which reality itself is understood.

In *The Baghdad Eucharist*, Maha's relationship to the past is marked by the destruction of spaces that once sustained belonging. Unlike Youssef, whose memories remain connected to a longer historical horizon, Maha repeatedly encounters the past as something violated and irretrievable. The transformation of the family garden from a site of childhood security into a paved and diminished space symbolises this rupture, a structural violation forced by economic decay where she and her sister "no longer had a garden in which to run around and be free as birds" (p. 95). What survives is not continuity but longing. Her recurring nightmares and persistent return to memories of loss suggest an attachment to a past that can no longer provide shelter in the present, an internal breakdown that traps her subconscious in a "pitch black darkness" where a car bomb explosion and the disembodied cries of her lost baby perpetually recur (p. 84). As violence accumulates through the deaths of family members and the increasing precarity of Christian life in Iraq, culminating in a devastating midnight blast that inflicts a visceral miscarriage, leaving her to recall that "death itself was moving through me looking for my son to strangle in my womb" (pp. 104-105), memory ceases to function as a stabilising resource and instead becomes a reminder of what has been taken away. Unable to locate continuity between past and present, Maha increasingly interprets the world through narratives of threat, exclusion, and irreversible decline, ultimately dismantling her uncle's historical optimism with the sharp generational indictment: "what history for God's sake! You're just living in the past, Uncle!" (p. 17).

A similar pattern emerges in *The Corpse Washer*. Although Jawad inherits his father's profession, he does not inherit the symbolic structures that allow his father to integrate death into a meaningful framework, instead repeating ritual supplications he admits he does "not entirely

believe in" (p. 13) while converting his artist's sketchbook into a grim "notebook for the faces of the dead" (p. 150). Instead, he repeatedly experiences mortality as an overwhelming presence that narrows rather than enlarges his possibilities. His abandoned artistic ambitions, disrupted relationships, and recurring encounters with mutilated bodies contribute to a shrinking sense of futurity a distortion of his training at the Academy of Fine Arts where his early affinity for Giacometti's mummy-like statues (p. 53) mutates into nightmares where cold stone figures are wrapped in burial shrouds, pleading for water (p. 137). The marble bench, the Humvee, and the persistent intrusion of death imagery function as reminders of a future repeatedly interrupted by violence, with the military occupation forces looming like a "mythical animal intent on devouring us" (p. 78) and his subconscious replacing the manual *ghusl* with an industrialized, automated "white conveyor belt" where the faucets run dry (p. 87). Unlike his father, whose ritual practice situates death within a broader spiritual order, Jawad struggles to locate a framework capable of transforming loss into meaning. As a result, his horizons become increasingly constricted, and the possibility of imagining a life beyond survival gradually recedes, a paralysis symbolized by the courtyard pomegranate tree that drinks the runoff fluids of the washed corpses, leaving Jawad to accept that his own heart has "become a shrivelled pomegranate beating with death" (pp. 77, 205-206).

In *I'jaam*, Furat's inheritance is marked by a different form of rupture. Whereas his grandmother possesses practical knowledge for navigating authoritarian rule, Furat confronts a world in which surveillance has entered consciousness itself. Language, memory, and interpretation become unstable as political power increasingly shapes what can be spoken, remembered, and understood, a cognitive infiltration that forces him to draft his secret prison manuscript in a destabilized, "undotted script" to evade censors (p. 8) while utilizing the typographic notation "(t)here" to manifest his profound psychological splitting (pp. 8, 26). The uncertainty that permeates the narrative is not merely external but epistemological. Words become unreliable, meanings fragment, and the distinction between reality and representation grows increasingly uncertain, leading him to catch his own mind mid-thought and realize he is actively "practicing self-censorship" as the panoptic state successfully occupies his internal monologue (pp. 28-29). If the grandmother's generation developed strategies for living within systems of control, Furat inherits a condition in which the mechanisms of control infiltrate the very processes through which reality is interpreted. This absolute violation of interiority culminates when his sacred, romantic recollections of his girlfriend, Areej, are violently hijacked by the somatic intrusion of prison torture and assault, completely shattering his psychoanalytic defence mechanism to "flee [his] body" and escape state terror (pp. 21, 26). What emerges is a collapse of interpretive certainty that leaves him without stable coordinates through which experience can be organised.

Across the three novels, Antoon consistently portrays the younger generation as inheriting violence under conditions of disrupted continuity. Their difficulties arise not simply from greater exposure to trauma but from the erosion of the symbolic, domestic, and historical structures that enabled earlier generations to situate suffering within broader frameworks of meaning. Gardens become paved, futures are interrupted, language loses stability, and memories become increasingly associated with absence rather than continuity. Through these figures, Antoon suggests that the consequences of war are shaped not only by what individuals endure but also by what remains available to them for understanding, containing, and remembering that endurance. The younger generation therefore inherits violence not as a rupture from stability but as the condition through which reality itself is experienced.

CONCLUSION

This study has argued that Sinan Antoon's fiction challenges homogenised understandings of Iraqi trauma by portraying the psychological aftermath of war as unevenly distributed across generations. Through a comparative reading of *The Baghdad Eucharist*, *The Corpse Washer*, and *I'jaam: An Iraqi Rhapsody*, the analysis has shown that characters inhabit the same historical landscape of violence, loss, and displacement, yet possess markedly different relationships to memory, continuity, and the past. The distinction proposed here is not one of resilience versus weakness, nor does it suggest that older characters suffer less than younger ones. Rather, Antoon's novels repeatedly draw attention to differences in the symbolic, mnemonic, and cultural resources available for interpreting and containing suffering.

Across the three texts, elder figures retain access to memories of a pre-war world, inherited rituals, domestic routines, and historical perspectives that help situate personal loss within broader frameworks of meaning. By contrast, younger characters frequently inherit disrupted attachments, damaged spaces, fractured futures, and memories already saturated by violence. What they encounter is not simply trauma itself but the erosion of the structures through which trauma might be understood, narrated, or integrated. As a result, the younger generation experiences violence less as a rupture from stability than as the condition through which reality itself is perceived.

Viewed from this perspective, Antoon's fiction is concerned not only with what war destroys but also with what remains available after destruction. Memory, ritual, domestic continuity, and inherited forms of knowledge emerge as crucial mediating structures that shape how individuals negotiate loss and historical change. The psychological consequences of violence are therefore determined not solely by exposure to traumatic events but also by access to the mnemonic, relational, and cultural resources that give those experiences meaning.

By foregrounding these generational differences, this study contributes to scholarship on Antoon, Iraqi war literature, and trauma studies by offering a more differentiated account of how violence is lived, remembered, and negotiated across time. Antoon's novels ultimately suggest that the legacy of war lies not only in the wounds it inflicts but also in the unequal inheritance of the memories, attachments, and continuities through which those wounds are endured.

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