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**'Language becomes the only "home" to inhabit when all else is lost':
censorship, exile, and identity in the works of Haifa Zangana**

Fatima Seedat

**A thesis submitted by the University of Huddersfield in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters by Research.**

11 January 2022

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Abstract

This thesis explores the themes of exile, identity, and censorship in Haifa Zangana's literary work, the first sustained analysis of her literary oeuvre. This includes a memoir, *Dreaming of Baghdad*; a novel, *Women on a Journey*; an Iraqi woman's account of war and resistance, *City of Widows*; a chapter she wrote in an edited collection against the Iraq occupation called 'The Torturer in the Mirror'; and, finally, a collage titled *Map of Destruction*. A postcolonial theoretical framework is used to scaffold my reading of these texts and is nuanced by the use of Michel Foucault's theory of biopower. This approach to the context of Zangana's work has facilitated an exploration of the exertion of systemic power over the people of Iraq. This thesis highlights how Zangana's literary work offers critique of Saddam Hussein and the US occupation of Iraq, and their role in exile, identity, and censorship, which in turn produces collective memory and mourning. This thesis concludes that Zangana's writing amplifies the collective voice, which has been suppressed due to the weaponization of the Iraqi identity; her work helps us understand how ordinary lives have been uprooted in the fight for freedom.
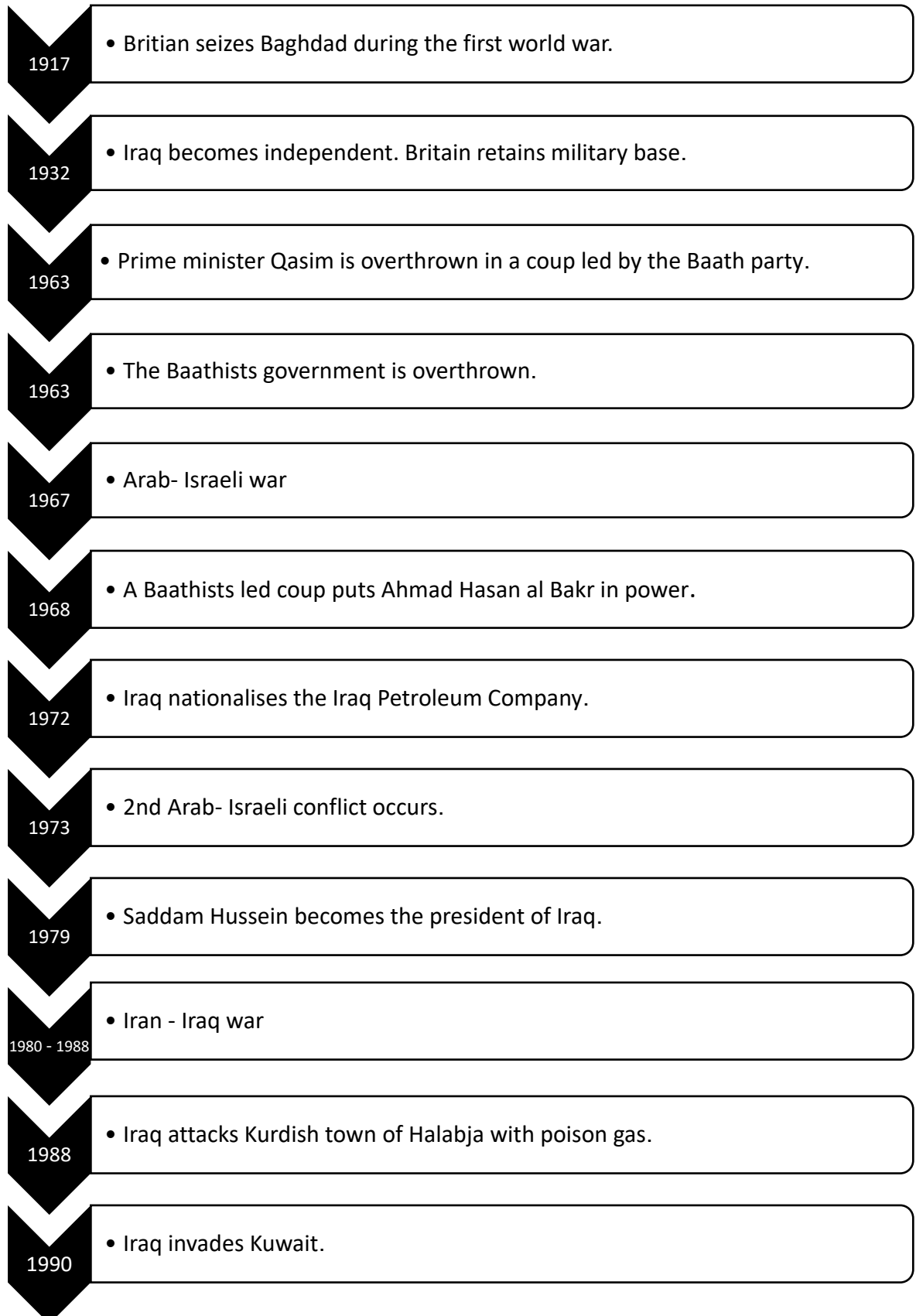
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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

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1963
- The Baathists government is overthrown.

1967
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1968
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1972
- Iraq nationalises the Iraq Petroleum Company.

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1979
- Saddam Hussein becomes the president of Iraq.

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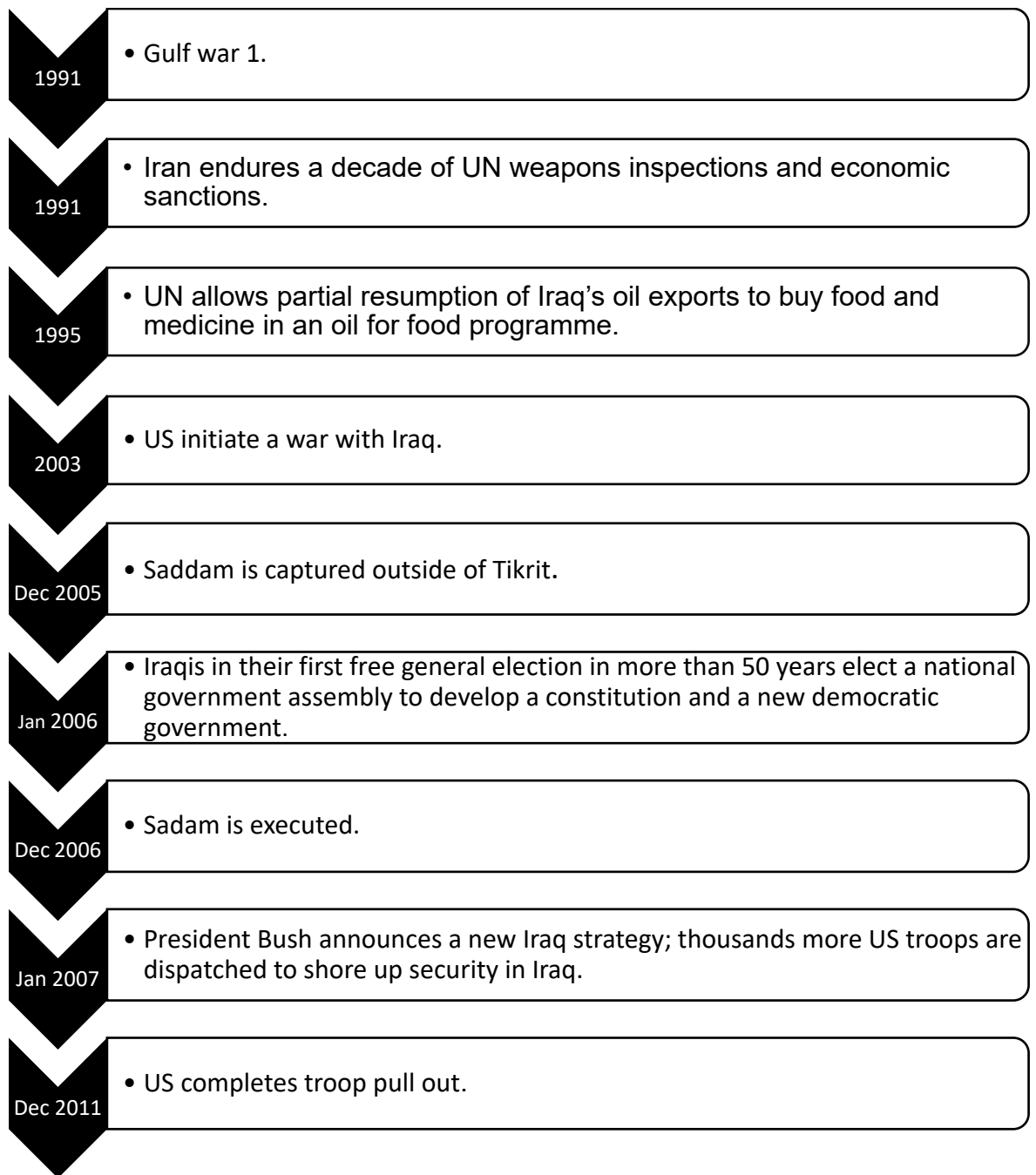|	
1991	• Gulf war 1.
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2003	• US initiate a war with Iraq.
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Jan 2006	• Iraqis in their first free general election in more than 50 years elect a national government assembly to develop a constitution and a new democratic government.
Dec 2006	• Sadam is executed.
Jan 2007	• President Bush announces a new Iraq strategy; thousands more US troops are dispatched to shore up security in Iraq.
Dec 2011	• US completes troop pull out.

Figure 1: Brief history of Iraq

Introduction:

Our message is clear: Iraqis did not struggle for decades to replace one torturer with

another (Zangana, 2009, p.11).

Once known as the cradle of civilisation, Iraq has undergone over fifty years of violent

struggle, from secularisation wars, a lengthy period of a tyrant in power, to U.S.

occupation. For Haifa Zangana, these wars and occupation not only shaped the

borders of her country but defined her whole existence. Zangana was 'born in 1950 in

Baghdad, the third child of nine' (Tahira Yaqoob, 2012). Her father is Kurdish from

Kirkuk, whilst her mother is an Arab from Karbala. Zangana was eight years old when

Iraq was freed from British colonial rule. This led to her living through one of the most

open societies of the Middle East, until 1968 when a coup brought the Baath party to

power. The two key figures of the party, Ahmad al Hasan al Bakr and Saddam

Hussein, secured their dominance by instituting a 'reign of terror' (Phebe Marr, 2017,

p.110). In 1974, 'Zangana graduated from the school of pharmacy at the University of

Baghdad' (Jane Eldridge Miller, 2002, p.358). In her writings, Zangana expresses her

parent's insistence that she focuses on her university studies. However, during the

1970s a group of activists, united by their shared dream of a better Iraq, joined the

Communist Party; Zangana was amongst these resisters. Zangana's role in the

Communist Party was distributing leaflets in the university. Her political role saw her

being captured, imprisoned, and tortured in the notorious Abu Ghraib, Qasr al Nihaya

and Al Zaafaraniya prisons. After her release, Zangana completed her studies and

graduated in 1974. She then began working for the Palestinian Red Crescent's nascent

pharmaceutical unit in Syria. Zangana was eventually forced to leave Baghdad due to

her political past, the impending threat of imprisonment again forced her into exile.

She initially moved to Syria where her work with Red Crescent continued. 'In 1976,

she left for London where she still lives and works in journalism' (Miller, 2001, p.358).

Zangana has written for *The Guardian, al-Quds, al-Ahram weekly* and *Middle East*

Monitor on a range of political events and contexts in the Middle East, mainly

focussing on Iraq. In addition to her written work, she has 'contributed collages to

Memoth, Freedom Surrealist (London), *The Moment. Le Desir Libertaire* (Paris), *Kayak,* and

Dream Helmet (US). In 2005, she was an 'advisor for the UNDP Report Towards the

Rise of Women in the Arab World' (Middle East Monitor, 2021). Zangana's more

recent work heavily focuses on Palestine and the Palestinian fight against the Israeli

occupation. She is now the head judge for the Palestine Book Awards. As part of a

'transnational justice process' Zangana currently also works 'with former women

political prisoners in Tunisia to write their own experiences' (Middle East Monitor,

2021). Given the political environment Zangana grew up in, her written work as well

as her artistic work are against the backdrop of politics, exile, imprisonment and, most

importantly, events in Iraq. Whilst the 2005 invasion of Iraq occurred, Zangana was

an active commentator in *The Guardian* as the situation unravelled, heavily

condemning occupation forces entering Iraq and highlighting the flaws of invasion.

Zangana uses writing as a liberating tool to painfully articulate the impact of American-led occupation on the life of ordinary Iraqis, as well as bringing to light life under the torturous regime of Saddam Hussein. In the epilogue of *Dreaming of Baghdad*, Hamid Dabashi articulates: 'through documentary, in essence, Zangana's mode of writing liberates the text from the confines of the specific and globalizes the experiences' (2009, p. 9). In this dissertation, I explore Zangana's work in relation to exile, censorship, and identity. The literature I will be concerned with by Zangana include: a memoir named *Dreaming of Baghdad*; a novel titled *Women on a Journey*, an Iraqi woman's account of war and resistance named *City of Widows*; a chapter published in an edited collection against the Iraq war and occupation called 'The Torturer in the Mirror'; and, finally, a collage titled *Map of Destruction*. Zangana simultaneously condemns the occupation and highlights the moral corruption the country suffers. In her writing, Zangana dreamed of an imagined homeland. On returning to Baghdad, she found her homeland not only burning with the fire of invasion but the indignities of occupation and the horror of sectarian violence. This chapter introduces my analysis of Zangana's work by summarising the literary work used in this thesis, the relevant history of Iraq, by situating this thesis in existing critical work and the theoretical framework I use, and by laying out the structure of the chapters.

A summary of Zangana's literary work:

The following section contains a summary on each of Zangana's literary work which will be analysed in subsequent chapters around exile, censorship, and identity.

Dreaming of Baghdad is a memoir which was originally published in Arabic in 1990. In 2009 it was translated from Arabic by Paul Hammond. The memoir is a collection of diary entries from Zangana's time in prison and excerpts from exile. The memoir brings forth loneliness, despair, and guilt but above all the yearn to see Iraq free from dictatorship. Zangana equally criticises the Saddam regime and the US occupation to draw attention on how Iraqi lives, and right to represent themselves has been lost. In this account, she covers the process of writing from memory and the trauma which colludes us to forgetting. When reviewing the book, Jacqueline S. Ismael (2009) states, 'in this powerful narrative, Zangana weaves a rich tapestry that portrays the repression, torture and resistance in Saddam's Iraq against a complex social landscape'.

Women on Journey was written whilst Zangana was in exile in London. The Arabic version was originally published in 2000, it was later translated into English in 2007 by Judith Cumberbatch. *Women on a Journey* is Zangana's first fiction piece of work. Located in London 1990, the novel follows 5 women from different political and social backgrounds navigating exile, their common Iraqi identity binds them together whilst their backgrounds represent the diversity within Iraq. Iqbal is a single mother, pregnant with her English boyfriend. Um Muhammad is a Kurdish mother wrapped

in her religious beliefs, her son refuses to speak Arabic and outwardly expresses his anger towards Iraqi Arabs. Adiba's past casts a shadow of her present. Sahira lives in the shadow of her husband who 'lives in the shadow of a dying ideology' (Zangana, 2007, p.7). Majda is a widow of a Baathist official, through her character Zangana states she was able to liberate herself from the 'complexities of hate and fear' (Zangana, 2007, p.13). The novel sadly ends with the death of Adiba, a powerful symbolism of exiles who yearn for a better life away from the homeland ends in tragedy.

The City of Widows: An Iraqi Woman's Account of War and Resistance was published originally in English in 2009. No Arabic translation of the text is available. Here, Zangana lays out the current and historical context of Iraqi women's experiences. In this account, women are at the forefront; Zangana explains the misconceptions surrounding Iraqi women, reflecting on the history of political and social participation of Iraqi women. In reviewing the book, the *Feminist Review* (2009) praised the 'power of internal perspective and history' offered by Zangana.

The Torturer in the Mirror is a collection of three essays published in 2010 demonstrating that 'when one of us tortures, we are all implicated in the crime' (Zangana, 2010). The first essay is written by Zangana and titled, 'A Pyramid of Naked Human Rights: An Iraqi View'. This is followed by 'Torture, the Cruelest of All Human Acts, Is a Crime in America' by former US Attorney General Ramsey Clark. The third and final essay is titled, 'Lawyers, Torture, and Aggressive War' by

professor of sociology Thomas Ehrlich Reifer. This thesis considers only the essay written by Zangana, though there is the potential for further discussion of the interplay between the essays. In her essay, Zangana describes systematic torture under the Saddam regime, and under the US occupation of Iraq, meaning, for her, that both regime's bankrupt Iraq of democracy and human rights. She uses events which occurred after the 'liberation' to demonstrate racist policies and practices adopted by the occupation forces. Zangana uses her personal experience of torture under the Saddam regime to illustrate the psychical and mental effect of torture on the human psyche and its lasting scars.

History of Iraq:

The history of Iraq begins with Ancient Mesopotamia, a civilisation that developed writing and science. In the second half of the twentieth century, Iraqi artists and poets began to draw on this heritage in paintings and literature, while the government turned its attention to propagating the motion of a Mesopotamian heritage as an integral part of Iraqi tradition. The Arab Islamic conquest of the seventh century is another key event in Iraq's history. During this period, Arabic became the predominant language of Mesopotamia, while Islam became the dominant religion in the region. 'It is mainly to the Islamic conquest of the seventh century that most Iraqis look for the source of their identity and the roots of their Islamic culture' (Marr, 2017, p.2). Later, the Ottoman empire governed Iraq for four centuries. During this reign, 'the seeds of Sunni dominance were sown. When it first conquered Iraq, the Ottoman empire was at the peak of its power and were able to give Iraq a stable government' (Marr, p.3).

The state of Iraq has only existed since 1921, when three provinces of the Ottoman empire were merged under the British and a mandate from the League of Nations. It took four years for the British to impose their rule. Historically, the region that became the Iraqi state lay in the heart of an ethnically, religiously, and geographically complex area. 'Before the British mandate, there was no Iraq as a cohesive political entity; after it, a new state with the beginnings of a modern government had come into being' (Marr, 2017, p.17).

It is important to note in her work that Zangana goes against western academic sources which argue that 'Iraq is an artificial entity concocted by British colonialism'. She argues: 'this is simply not true [;…] from ancient times, Iraq has been a country straddling two rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates'. She states: 'the land making up the current country has been called Iraq in the languages of the ancient cultures of the region'. When listing the popular cities of Iraq, she points out 'foremost among [the] capitals since its foundation in 762 A.D. is Baghdad itself' (2009, p.25).It is important to acknowledge Zangana's perspective is a minority view which is not widely shared in Iraq.

The three pivotal historical moments to this thesis are: Iraq under the Baath party, the reign of Saddam Hussein and the US invasion. In 1917 the Baath party came into power; the party took up pan-Arabism and sought to challenge western imperialism with neighbouring Arab nations. The coup of July 1968 bought the Baath party to power. The two key figures of the Baath party were Ahmad Hasan al Bakr and Saddam Hussein. Phebe Marr in her book *The History of Iraq* writes about the important mechanisms used to achieve Baath dominance:

There was a series of trials that not only eliminated real or potential opponents, but also cowed the political classes by introducing a reign of terror. The convictions demonstrated the ruthlessness of the regime and made clear that no attempt to overthrow Baath rule would be tolerated (2017, p.110).

The socialist Baath party was secular; it was tyrannical and oppressive. In an article for the *National Broadcasting Company*, Zangana (2010) describes the reign of terror: 'You are fine as long as you don't say no to anything by the Baath party [;…] If you have the courage to oppose the regime, there is torture, there is execution and disappearances'. Over the first few years, Saddam became a key figure in the success of these tasks via an extensive intelligence and security apparatus. The latter, Marr explains, led to 'numerous conspiracy trials and executions, and the establishment of a large patronage system'. The Iraqi Petroleum Company was nationalised amidst rising oil prices in the mid-1970s, which created 'enormous' revenues for the state (Marr, 2017,112).

Around this time, there was a shift in power from Al Bakr to Saddam, and a cultish mythology began surrounding him. Saddam's speeches and pamphlets quickly grew to become the 'new ideological guide and a symbol of collective Iraqi identity' (Marr, 2017, p.133). After eleven years of helping the Baath party, Saddam became the president of Iraq, 'the first peaceful transition of power in over two decades' (Marr, 2017, p.139). Ironically, says Marr, '1979 was also the beginning of the US tilt towards Iraq'. Saddam thus ruled through the Iran-Iraq War, two Gulf wars, and a decade of UN sanctions before he was removed from power in 2003 (2017, p.139).

On March 2003, under the pretence of Saddam acquiring WMDS (Weapon of Mass Destruction), the invasion of Iraq began, and within a few weeks the US 'destroyed the infrastructure of Iraq' (Paul Surlis, 2003, p.601). Saddam was captured

and later sentenced to death. In an article for *The Guardian,* Archbishop Desmond Tutu (2012) writes that the invasion by the US and Britain was 'premised on the lie that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction and polarised the world to a greater extent than any other conflict in history'. On May 16th, 2003, Paul Bremer of the CPA '(the US organisation responsible for transitional governance in post-invasion Iraq), issued an order that called for the 'de-Baathification of Iraq' (Ryan Pavel, 2012, p.1). The main goal of this was to prevent the Baath party ever returning to power. However, in *City of Widows*, Zangana writes,

> Bremer failed to understand that those who occupy a country can never reach
>
> the deep foundations of the people whom they are defending and protecting,
>
> at such a high cost (2007, p.62).

The worst consequence of De-Baathification was heightening the Sunni/Shia sectarian divide. In an article for *Al-Jazeera,* Miranda Sissons and Abdulrazzaq Al-Saiedi (2013) argue that 'the process was dysfunctional and counterproductive and intensified social, sectarian and political divisions'.

Many Iraqi citizens were led to believe that the new Iraq would be orderly, liberal, and secular; however, the reality was far from this. In an interview for the *National Public Radio* (NPR), Nijm al-Jabouri (2018), the Governor of Mosul in 2003, reflected: 'we thought we would breathe freedom, we would become like Europe, instead, we returned to the Dark Ages.' Similarly, Jane Arraf (2018) reports Qathem Sherif al-jabouri, who spent 11 years in prison whilst Saddam ruled, thought that

the country was better off in those days. The majority of people before did not like the regime, but many people, when they compare between the situation under Saddam Hussein and now, find maybe their life under Saddam was better.

Literature review

There is no simple reading of any of the conflicts which have taken place in Iraq. Whilst a majority of Iraqis opposed Saddam, at the same time they did not want the US and Britain to invade. The theoretical framework which scaffolds my reading of the texts is postcolonial, enhanced by Michel Foucault's theory of biopower. Foucault's approach helps decipher the overt recurring element of the state's power over citizens which is prominent in Iraqi history and Zangana's work.

The term biopolitics was coined by Michel Foucault in 'the late 1970s in order to name and analyse emergent logics of power in the 18th and 19th centuries' (Alexander Means, 2021). From the 18th century John Marks states, 'a new politics emerges which relates to what it means to be a living species in a living world: biology is drawn into the domain of power and knowledge' (2006, P.333). Biopolitics consists of excessive exertions of state control over the functionality and processes of life. Biopower is the enforcement of power by the state, whereby citizens are forcibly governed within an oppressive regime that applies restrictions upon every aspect of society. Therefore, biopower is the name used to describe how biopolitics is shown in society. In *The Will to Knowledge,* Foucault writes of a power which he later defined as biopower, '[A] power that exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavours to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations' (Foucault, 1978, p.137). For Foucault, life is understood as an object and influence of political strategies rather than biological forces or factors outside of political processes.

Therefore, the term biopower signifies a new form of 'productive power'. Michael Lawrence (2016) goes on to state,

> Biopower is both individualizing and collectivizing: it intervenes through disciplinary technologies in order to control and manage individual bodies while it also intervenes at the level of the population conceived of as a social or biological corpus defined by its own characteristics and processes (i.e., birth rates and death rates).

Furthermore, Kasper Kristensen states, 'Foucault developed the idea of biopower to capture technologies of power that address the management of, and control over, the life of the population' (2016, p.18). Thus, biopower engages with 'multiple life related phenomena' that impact how human life forms and different ways it 'can be modified through interventions' (Kasper Kristensen, 2016, p.19).

During the Saddam regime, the concept Foucault describes was prominent as the regime governed and had power over the citizens in every aspect of their life. In an interview, Zangana (2007) states, 'there is no other option. Had I not kept silent I would have died. I couldn't continue writing fiction either because it needs the luxury of stability and space for thinking' (Wen-Chin Ouyang, 2007, p.449). Ranging from the brutal dictatorship of the Baath party and Saddam to the US invasion of 2003, Foucault's theory of biopower is key in analysing Iraqi literature. Building on this, Ikram Masmoudi writes,

Censorship was total and so effective through sheer terror that in effect there was nothing to censor: writers did not dare in the first place to write something that would have needed to be censored by the regime's cultural agents. Nor was exile a license for free expression (2015, p.2).

It is helpful to understand Zangana's work in the context of critical responses to the War on Terror. After 9/11, Iraq became a key target of George W. Bush's foreign policy. Iraq was labelled a terrorist state and President Bush went on to declare Iraq the major front of the global War on Terror. Reid calls the War on Terror a 'return of a form of imperialism grounded in an old-fashioned conception of state sovereignty' (2013, p.62). To return to a Foucauldian reading, it is also 'a biopolitical war underwritten by a commitment to the defence of a liberal conception of humanity' which, Reid says, actually 'exceeds and challenges the boundaries of traditional forms of state sovereignty' (2013, p.62). Furthermore, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue that 'war has become a regime of biopower', not only controlling the population but 'producing and reproducing all aspects of social life' (2004, p.13). This was the case in Iraq. Indeed, the violence Hardt and Negri observe is established within the photos and testimonies of detainees released from Abu Ghraib, countless revelations of US and British troops raping Iraqi citizens - women, men, and children - were soon published. Torture and violence under the US occupation had targeted the majority of the population in Iraq. Zangana writes: '90% of the security detainees being held at Abu Ghraib were just innocent' (2010, p.14).

Furthermore, civilians who are living through a war are soon desensitised to the damage which comes alongside it as it embeds into their daily life. Majia Holmer Nadesan, in her book *Governmentality, Biopower, and Everyday Life,* quotes Reid (2006) who suggests, 'destruction and annihilation occur when war becomes perceived as the condition for life' (2008, p.209). In *The Torturer in the Mirror,* Zangana writes about the days straight after liberation and the beginning of the degrading treatment of Iraqis by the US occupiers. 'On April 25th 2003, four suspected thieves were arrested by US soldiers, who burned their clothes and paraded them naked in the streets of Baghdad with Ali Baba written on their chest' (2010, p.9). Amongst various incidents similar to the above, this was the start of the abuse to follow in the name of liberation. Zangana notes, this was 'a clear indication of the occupier's racist policy, the growing hatred felt by the occupied and subsequently one of the many reasons many Iraqis would join the resistance' (2010, p.10).

Building on this, in an article titled *The Concept of Biopower: The Use of Terror as a Political Technique of Controlling and Governing Citizens,* Preechaya Kittipaisalsilpa states, 'biopolitics can explain the ways in which the living bodies have become objects of government and have been strategically integrated into power relations in modern society' (2017, p.90). In chapter 3, I use this approach to explain how the US occupation tarnished the Iraqi identity by instilling separate distinct group identities for Shia, Sunni, Arab Kurd and Christians through the use of ID badges and remote surveillance. Similarly, Foucault states, 'biopolitical wars are no longer conducted on

behalf of the old form of sovereign. Instead, they are now "waged on behalf of the existence of everyone"' (1978, p.137)

In regards to viewing war on terror as a biopolitical war, Reid compellingly argues, 'The biopolitical states of this war are embellished particularly in the characterisation of an enemy distinguished in terms of pathology and inhumanity' (2006, P.62). On the other hand, Jean Bethke Elshtain argues,

> The perpetrators of terror are nothing more than a verminous form of life, and that to search for an understanding or explanation for the contemporary resurgence of violent resistance to the global liberal order is to be unwilling or unable to peer into the heart of darkness and recognise the reality of evil (2004, p.8).

However, the problem with this can be seen not only through Zangana's writing but various Iraqi accounts. The soldiers in the Saddam regime and the US occupation who were responsible for the suffering inflicted on Iraqis had similar views to the description given by Elshtain. This resulted in the death of thousands of innocent civilians caught in a crossfire for the power struggle. In contrast to this, the Foucauldian position allows us to view the War on Terror 'in an inverted light: a war waged not in defence of an essential form of humanity from its pathological inhuman, or an animal expression of life' (Reid, 2013, p.63). Thus, Foucault allows us to understand the normal people who, in the context of this biopolitical war, are under

threat. In her work *Precarious Life,* Judith Butler argues against the notion Elshtain uses of telling the story of 9/11:

> By starting from the event of the attack itself and excluding the prehistory of imperial subjugation of Islamic people by the United States and other liberal regimes as a source of explanation for the attacks on the United States, that these attacks would be impossible without the horizon of imperialism within which they occur (2006, p.60).

However, to understand terror, it is important to understand the historical, social, and political conditions upon which the perpetrators of terrorism are formed. Butler argues, 'we would be making a mistake if we reduced their actions to purely self-generated acts of will or symptoms of individual pathology of evil (2004, p.16).

Furthermore, Biopower is a concept developed by Foucault (1978) to describe 'the process by which the state regulates people within a certain territory'. Reid writes, 'The invasion that took Iraq by storm in the spring of 2003 was a complex amalgam of forces combining the sovereign power of the USA with the biopower of a range of deterritorialized actions' (2005, p.246). Michael Welch quotes Burchell & Stenson (2005) who state, 'by doing so the overarching form of power systematically makes populations thinkable and governable through professional expertise' (2008, p.258).

Subsequently, exile and its impact perhaps singularly define diasporic Iraqi writers. Said (2000) writes about exile and the sense of 'unbelonging' it brings. In *Reflections on Exile and other Essays,* Said quotes Wallace Stevens who describes it as 'a

mind of winter in which the pathos of summer and autumn as much as the potential of spring are nearby but unobtainable' (2000, p.186). Muhsin Al-Musawi (2006) in his book *Reading Iraq* writes,

> For many exiles, there is no homecoming, and the poem becomes a new homeland searching for a cultural context shared by exiles, rather than the receiving milieu and its culture.

The Iraqi poet Fawzi Karim has no qualms about this as a fact for, in *The Scent of Mulberry*, he only raises rhetorical questions that tend to ease his tension:

> Which one of us knows to whom we belong:
>
> We to you with this wrinkled face?
>
> Or you to us, we the patrons of no-return roads?
>
> Or do both of us, O Baghdad,
>
> Belong to the hangman? (The Dreaming Machine, 2020)

Furthermore, In his book *Reflections on Exile and other essays*, Said summarises the emotions of the diaspora and exiled:

> The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever [;…] exile is a jealous state. What you achieve is precisely what you have no wish to share, and it is in the drawing of lines around you and your compatriots that the least attractive aspects of being in exile emerge (2000, p.178).

Building on this, Shima Shabazi notes,

Zangana's political activism comes through writing, and her weapon is her pen. Her vision is intersectional, taking into account Iraqi women's social location when looking at their resistance against homegrown and external colonial oppression (2019, p.579).

Similarly, in an interview Zangana (2007) states, 'writing and political activism is my way of maintaining my sanity and of trying to be useful to these people. It is the least I can do' (Ouyang, p. 454). Furthermore, when speaking about her fiction work, she remarks, 'in my novels, I was interested in creating a rich world that did not deny you access to the past and that gave you power to decide the future'. Moreover, Said connects memory to exile and explains, 'by definition exile and memory go together; it is what one remembers of the past and how one remembers it that determines how one sees the future' (2000, p.28). Equally, in the introduction for *Women on a Journey*, Zangana notes, 'writing in exile is characterized by the dominance of memory; uprooted from one's country, the writer relies on memory as a vital tool, enabling him or her to recreate everything that happened in the past and preserve it intact' (2007, p.7). In her memoir, like many Iraqis, she yearns to return to Baghdad; the title of the memoir aptly summarises the state of exile: *Dreaming of Baghdad.* When speaking about exile, Said (2000) often highlights the sense of 'unbelonging'. However, Sara Ahmed (2010), in her book *The Promise of Happiness,* celebrates this notion, explaining how she will not forget home and will always be in some way displaced.

Said explains, 'there is an interplay between nationalism and exile that creates a sense of us and a sense of the outsiders' (2000, p.178). Zangana uses her life

experience and translates this into her fiction work by using her characters as a mouthpiece. Whilst her characters are alienated and 'outsiders' from society and have no patriotic ties to the country, they unite with one another by their fear of loneliness and isolation that exile brings. Said states, 'borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prison and are often defended beyond reason or necessity' (2000, p.185). Whilst London was a safe haven for Zangana in comparison to war-torn Baghdad, the confinement of a new border bought new struggles and a sense of alienation into a new culture.

Moreover, Iraqi writers turned to fiction to narrate the destruction taking place in Iraq, the fiction is 'suited to keeping pace with troubling realities in Iraq' (Shakir Mustafa, 2008, p.13). To globalise the narrative, Iraqi anglophone writing allowed Iraqi experience to reach a western audience. After 9/11, Arabic to English translative texts increased: Musa Alzghoul reports the Arabic language is 'considered a threat to the American national security' (2018, p.18). Whilst Said was once told by a US publisher that Arabic is a 'controversial language'. Iraqi writer Sinan Antoon states 'the act of translation for Iraqi writers is also an act of mourning, in that the demand of Iraqi literature (in the US) seems predicated on war and violence.' (Ruth Abou Rached, 2018, p.21).

Furthermore, Rached points out that 'the relationality of Iraqi writer integrity to publication contexts in the 1990s [;…] emerged as a key factor for Iraqi women writers first publishing in English translation'. She pinpoints three strategies they used: 'self-

translation, co-collaborative correspondence and self-publication' (2018, p.37). The novel *Through the Vast Halls of Memory* (1990) by Zangana had its 'first beginnings [;…] (in) individual chapters published in two Arabic diaspora journals: *Literature in Exile* between 1986 and 1989, then *The Woman Writer*'(Zangana, 1995 p. 136). The initial 1990 English version was translated and edited by Zangana; Peter Wood, who is a surrealist artist, aided her in completing the translated copy.

Jumana Bayeh (2017) writes, 'Arab diaspora writers also juxtapose urban spaces, utilising particular narrative techniques to highlight that a full appreciation of Arab cities and spaces relies on a transnational framework'. This can be seen in Zangana's work *Women on a Journey*, which is situated in London, however, the backdrop of the novel is heavily influenced and situated in Iraq. Each character's experience of exile is clouded with the memories of Iraq. Similarly, Dalal Sarnou writes 'due to their cultural blending and linguistic tapestry, these writings offer Western readers an authentic portrayal of the Arab world, and Arab Muslim woman, away from a false representation transmitted to them through manipulated media channels' (2014, p.17). Whilst media outlets portrayed Iraqi women as helpless victims whom the Americans saved, Zangana's texts showcases the resilience and determination of Iraqi women, which chapter two demonstrates.

Further on the topic of literary texts written by Arab women and translated in English, Dalal Sarnou discusses, 'scholars noticed an important new hybrid literary phenomenon in the writings of Arab Anglophone women' (2014, p.41). She goes on to

stating these texts 'fuse foreign linguistic background with Arabic cultural context also (contributing) to the reshaping of bridges of cross-cultural and trans-cultural dialogue away from political, geopolitical and socioeconomic arenas' (2014, p.41). Indeed, Zangana's showcases the Arabic cultural context to describe women's role in Iraq. Though she accepts the Arab and Muslim world hold 'traditional patriarchal values', she discusses how this equally restricts men and women, yet protects and leaves 'women revered as mothers, daughters and sisters to a much greater degree than a modern western society'. She recognises the patriarchal society subordinates women and thus she raises points on why 'women need an active civil society to delineate and protect their rights' (2009, p.33).

When discussing Iraqi anglophone writing, scholars often focus on the East and West cultural bridges these translative texts bring forth. However, as Anna Ball writes, this literature also brings forth 'the experiences of loss, belonging, survival and creativity which are integral to diasporic communities all over the world, as to human experience in general' (2011, p.157). Furthermore, Jumana Bayeh (2017) draws up a similarity between world literature and Anglophone Arab scholarship, she states both 'absorb all spaces of its production into one and maintains a kind of hierarchy of space, even while professing to dismantle such hierarchies that prioritise certain literary geographies over others'.

There have been a number of existing studies of women's writing in the Middle East. Rached notes 'Iraqi women's literature foregrounds gendered and regionalised

perspectives as a challenge to the diverse dynamics of patriarchal political authorities operating inside and outside of Iraq' (2018, p.11). Similarly, Rached writes, Farida Abu-Haidar, An Iraqi literary critic argues, 'Iraqi women writers have worked within diverse literary and political contexts to situate their writing beyond political and social restrictions to make their voices heard throughout the Arabic-speaking world' (2018, p.13).

Chapter Three delves into Judith Butler's book, *Frames of War, When is Life grievable?* In relation to the US occupation dehumanising Iraqis, Hannan Hussam kashou argues,

> The writings of Iraqi women help dispel the concerns Butler raises by presenting an image of a humanized illustration of Iraqis. These Iraqi characters are real people [;…] with real sufferings, and only when one reads their stories and understands their suffering will one feel the empathy needed to break the dehumanized perceptions Butler discusses (2013, p.85).

Zangana's writing eliminates the concerns Butler discusses by presenting a humanised portrayal of the Iraqi being and struggles.

To offer an in-depth analysis on the framework used by Iraqi women writers, Ferial J Ghazoul writes, 'Many of the narrative texts written by women are didactic and moralizing, which may be related to women's childbearing role and the domestic order in Iraqi society', however, each writer differs: 'some adopt a nationalist framework, others a Marxist framework (or an) Islamic perspective, but

despite their ideological differences, they all agree on the centrality of women's role in building society' (2007,192).

Overall, this review demonstrates how biopower and aspects of post-colonial theorists are necessary when situating the Iraqi war and Zangana's work within three elements - censorship, identity, and exile - and how writing is essentially a new form of home to the diaspora.

Overview of chapters:

The following chapters explore several research questions in order to draw conclusions about Zangana's representation of exile, identity, and censorship: How does Zangana figure collective memory and mourning? How does her work offer critique of both Saddam Hussein's regime *and* the US occupation of Iraq? Methodologically, how is the Foucauldian notion of biopower a useful tool for interpreting Zangana's representation of power in Iraq? How does Zangana use writing to give power to Iraqi women's voices?

Chapter one, *Standing on Al-Atba- Exile*, will examine the notion of collective memory, paying particular attention to how memory is a form of refuge for Zangana and shaped her experience of exile. This chapter provides insight into how she uses fiction to understand and humanise the Baath regime. Zangana's core struggle was the constant guilt of leaving her comrades behind in a war-torn country; however, to return home in these circumstances paradoxically makes one an 'other'. I will show the creation of the 'other' identity on return to the homeland, and how this deepens the exiled Iraqi's wounds and furthered her survivor's guilt. To compliment my findings, I will use Edward Said's work on memory and exile to explain how the image of Iraq clouded Zangana's memory. Furthermore, this chapter considers the ways in which art is used to bridge communication. To interpret Zangana's visual work I use theories of collage, assemblage, and bricolage to connect Zangana's visual output with her written works.

Chapter 2, *The Notion of Being- Identity*, I will address the critical uproot of ethnic and political Iraqi identities as well as the intersection of nationalism and gender. I will illustrate how, together, Saddam and the US created a deep division within the Iraqi people by politicising the different facets of Iraqi identity, generating a power struggle that they used to justify an increase in surveillance. I will examine the cult of personality around Saddam, in order to investigate how he attempted to embody his leadership in relation to Mesopotamian history. I assert that the cultural vandalism that took place during the US invasion further erased Iraqi roots. A biopolitical approach will be used to show how the biometric identification the US applied strengthened the systemic division of sects. Using Zangana's memoir, I argue that Iraqi women's voices are key components to understanding an unfiltered eastern perspective on the torn fragments of identity. I unravel how female identity is both abused and reused by the military, to suit the agenda of dehumanising Iraqis.

The final chapter, *The Untold Story- Censorship*, unravels the iron grip Saddam had on writers, highlighting that censorship continued under the US occupation to serve a pre-determined agenda of uprooting the Iraqi state. I assert that the result of trauma, leads to a censored literary archive. A central investigation of this chapter will explore the weight of the written word to Saddam. I reason that, due to the polysemous nature of fiction, it can be used to undermine propaganda, a significant mode of protecting Saddam's cult of personality. The final section will highlight the flaws of the invasion. I explore the Iraqi 'brain drain' in relation to censorship.

The conclusion, *Writing Iraqi Wounds*, ties together the three main chapters by shedding light on the recurring images of Mesopotamia; I answer the research questions set out in the introduction through highlighting the ways in which the Saddam regime and the US occupation continually used Mesopotamian sites to serve a particular narrative. Furthermore, I examine the key cross over within the chapters: torture. I lay the crossover of torture and dehumanisation, and how this silences the collective memory of Iraqis. I answer how Zangana offers an equal critique of both Saddam's regime and the US occupation of Iraq by underlining how both regimes destroyed the Iraqi identity through cultural vandalism. Lastly, I demonstrate how Foucault's theory of biopower is key to understanding the impact of totalitarianism and occupation on everyday lives. To understand the three themes: exile, identity, and censorship, I summarise how biopower enabled me to expose how torture was used to regulate citizens.

Chapter 1- Standing on al at-aba: Exile

By mid-2007, Haifa Zangana writes, 'one in eight Iraqis had left home to become refugees, with up to 50,000 Iraqis leaving their home each month' (2008, p.11). Over the last 30 years, a convulsion of imperialist military invasions and political upheaval, alongside the actions of the repressive Baathist regime, not only disfigured the nation but displaced thousands of Iraqis from their homeland. The fall of Saddam with the US invasion and occupation of Iraq saw news outlets reporting countless stories with shots of mutilated corpses, horrific acts of violence and bloodshed. In an article for *the Guardian*, Suzanne Goldenberg (2003) reported, 'as many as 5,726 Iraqis were killed in the US assault on Baghdad [;…] the streets of the[;…] capital were strewn with the bodies of people trying to flee the fighting'. Yet, amongst this conflict, there was a story going almost untold: the tale of mass population displacement. Like countless Iraqis, Zangana was forced to leave due to her political activism in refuting Saddam and the Baathist regime. This was in 1974, and it would be 30 years before she would make a return visit. Many Iraqis were forced into exile to escape political persecution due to their ideologies, political activities, or their disenchantment from the Baathist regime. Assmaa Naguib argues that 'the growing number of Iraqi writers in exile, coupled with the long history of oppression in Iraq, gave rise to a generation of Iraqi writers that is very critical of the concept of the nation' (2011, p.193). Iraq, unsurprisingly, became a central theme for Zangana's work, a direct result of the

conflict and oppression in the country. Naguib states these are issues which Said has argued, maintain the exiled author's 'continued preoccupation [;…] as members of a collective national experience regardless of the ideological centrality of the nation itself' (2011, p.193).

Indeed, the most significant issue that has faced Iraqi writers in exile has not been the nation as an ideologically central focus, but has, rather, been their orientation towards a political movement. Many of them were ideologically allied to the communist party and spent their youth as communists involved in direct political action. Zangana is amongst several authors such as the likes of Najem Wali, Hassan Blasi, and Iqbal al-Qazwini whose work is centralised around exile. Consequently, the collapse of the Soviet Union catalysed an extreme sense of loss, which was further emphasised through leaving their country. They found themselves in a 'sudden and dramatic ideological and social void' (Zangana, 2007, p.10). Through her writing, Zangana lends a voice to the exiled Iraqis. She represents her home city of Baghdad in the form of fiction, non-fiction, and visual art. The years following the US invasion were characterized by intense insecurity. The US invasion death toll surpassed 100,000 and left millions displaced. However, prior to the invasion, the turbulent past of Iraq meant many Iraqi citizens and writers were already living in exile like Zangana and experienced the invasion helplessly second hand. When writing about exile, Zangana goes beyond violence and oppression under Saddam to shed light on the guilt she felt when leaving her comrades in a war-torn country, and the yearning she had for home.

This chapter, using Edward Said's critical work around exile and belonging, investigates the mental and emotional consequences of exile and return. I examine the effects of exile in relation to memory. How does the return home make one an 'other' where one has previously belonged? For Zangana, the past is reconstructed through her writing to make sense of the trauma she endured and the conflict her country underwent. I unveil how the torture she endured in Iraq psychologically affected her everyday life as an exile. Furthermore, it is often argued when words are unable to translate the torment inflicted on one's being, art translates the message. Using collage and bricolage theory, I similarly propose that visual art bridges communication through investigating Zangana's collage titled *The Map of Destruction*. Lastly, this chapter demonstrates how Zangana draws on the common definition of exile as 'unbelonging.'

In the introduction to her novel *Women on a Journey*, Zangana touches on the importance of memory to an exiled writer. She states: 'memory is a vital tool, enabling (the writer) to recreate everything that happened in the past and preserve it intact' (2007, p.14). The preservation of memory is vital to Iraqis as Iraq's legacy was being tarnished by the oppressors, the reality of Iraq was upheld by the memories of Iraqi people and the words they write. For Zangana, memory became a form of refuge. Her memoir, *Dreaming of Baghdad,* is part of a 'collective memory' (2009, p.5). Zangana's survival under the Saddam regime, from resisting dictatorship to living with the torment of survival in exile, is not a singular Iraqi experience; it was a collective ordeal,

etched in the memory of countless Iraqis caught in the crossfire of power. Thus, it was important for Zangana to document what she witnessed in Iraq and what occurred when a dictatorship is opposed, in order to form a collective voice. In turn, writing about her traumatic experience is an essential way of giving a voice to the 'collective' Iraqi wounds. In a reminiscent passage of Iraq from *Dreaming of Baghdad*, she states, 'will we ever return to live with the people we love, the ones whom we lost? Here there is much harshness, little love' (2009, p.8). The repetitive 'we' deep roots the sentence in the collective experience of the yearn to return, through the sentence 'the ones whom we lost', Zangana mourns the loss of her people due to Saddam's regime's oppression whilst simultaneously showing even in death they could not be close to them. In *Dreaming of Baghdad*, she painfully writes about the memory of leaving her comrades behind, the distressing memory of seeing their mutilated faces to the lingering memory of the magical streets of Zino filled with Arabic poetry. She writes about the 'memories, people, and places [;…] as interchangeable, permeable, and merging in a way that precludes their actual existence' (Ferial Ghazoul,2007, p.194). Memories being 'permeable' depicts the past is a present force in Zangana's mind. The haunting memories of existence under the regime casts a shadow of mourning which translates in her work, this is further elaborated in chapter 2. A regular method of forcing confessions out of prisoners under the Baath regime was to show prisoners the tortured bodies of their fellow comrades, which were often so disfigured that they were described as a 'mass of flesh' (Zangana, 2009, p.46). Zangana reflects upon this using the example of when she was taunted with the body of her fellow comrade

Foud, 'I tried now, as I have tried in the past, to forget his mutilated features as I saw them at our final meeting' (2009, p.46). The Baath regime seized many elements of Zangana's life from her, this included the freedom of remembering her comrades in a positive and sentimental manner, instead, she writes,

I only want to remember his relaxed face with its smile directed at his comrades, his friends, his country [;…] instead I am left with the image of a young man transformed in ten days into a mass of unseeing, unhearing flesh (2009, p.46).

Foud being turned into an 'unhearing flesh' benefits from Giorgio Agamben's description of 'bare life'. He argues sovereign power reduces 'subjects to a form of 'bare life', a simple biological life stripped of both political and legal representation' (John Nagle, 2020, p.407). Agamben captures this status of 'bare life through the image of *homo sacer*. In Roman law, *homo sacer* represented a figure banned and stripped of rights and who can be killed by anyone without fear of justice' (Nagle, 2020, p.407). Thus, Foud being reduced to 'flesh' and 'mass' reflects 'bare life', the dehumanisation procedurals led to his undignified death, similar to the roman law *homo sacer*, any unethical procedures can be carried out against him. The description of a fleshy mass not only highlights the brutality of the regime, but also reveals the consequences of revolting against the dictatorship of Saddam: brutal and inhumane punishments. Sadly, Foud's case was not a singular one, rather something which happened to many Iraqis under the Saddam regime. The regime often punished those who spoke of the atrocities they committed, 'unseeing, unhearing' emphasises this aim. The image of

an 'idealistic, beautiful dreamer' was now etched with the image of a man 'disfigured by torture'. Whilst memories like those she had of Foud taunted Zangana, exile gave her the space needed to process these emotions and the opportunity to put it down on paper, as a contribution towards the collective memory of Iraqis.

Zangana writes from a distance in time and place, describing her embattled country and the process of remembering and forgetting what she once loved and feared, in turn revealing the emotional consequences of exile. She moves between first and third person as a narrative device, perfectly capturing the dissociative nature of trauma and her split thoughts in exile. In *Dreaming of Baghdad,* she writes,

> what I do now is recall the joyfulness of early days, full of colour [;…] what I do now is look at my face in the mirror and see its pale, exhausted reflection, its skin which has lost its elasticity and which rarely smiles' (2009, p.43).

The physical 'elasticity' indicates life is unchanged, she is unable to move past the trauma she endured in Iraq. Although she is away from physical exhaustion of surviving under the tortuous regime, her exhaustion now lies in surviving exile and dealing with the past, that which translates to her physical appearance. Said states, 'the concern with the past conflict creates a situation where migration is a source not of acculturation and adjustment, but rather of volatility and instability'(1993, p.113). For Zangana, the concept of time is always distorted, which explains her losing her grasp on reality. In *Dreaming of Baghdad*, she writes, 'I look at the past as it approaches, falling on me, enfolding me, though in layer upon layer of concrete' (2009, p.43). The

objectification of her past here showcases how it is an important force in her life, as well as showing her passiveness as it engulfs her and falls on her. Through the extended metaphor of the concrete walls, she is demonising them as a dark force that devours her entire brain, not just her memories. This reflects the intensity of the regime and punishment she endured. She is suffocated and lives in complete torment. The connotations of concrete are that of something absolute and unchangeable, suggesting so is her past. The idea of helplessness is similarly echoed when she narrates the way her 'scream has become a whisper', the utter powerlessness here defines her mental battle. The description highlights the dichotomy of pain and suffering: she once was tortured and screaming, now she is forced into a state of silence and vulnerability. By writing in exile from a distance, she is able to give a voice to her pain, whilst the content of her writing conveys a feeling of powerlessness, the act of writing allows her to regain a sense of power and dealing with the emotional consequences of exile.

Whilst *Dreaming of Baghdad is* a combination of politics, Iraqi culture, and diary entries from Abu Ghraib, Zangana uses fiction as a recovery method. For her, writing becomes a fusion of analysis, healing, and soldering, hence the personal and political is intertwined. She states: 'I maintain that it is very difficult to separate the personal from the political when both are directed at the same immediate objectives' (2007, p.15). Iraqi authors saw fiction as a way of reproducing the reality of life. Writing fiction allowed her to construct the journey of her characters by narrating Iraqi life

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experiences and the struggles of exile they faced. In *Women on a Journey*, Zangana finds

a different kind of solace to that provided by memoir, she reflects on her experience

in Iraq through her characters. The novel documents the lives of five exiled women

from different backgrounds with different political affiliations, a major element in the

division between Iraqis In Iraq. Majda is a former Baathist member, whilst Um

Muhammad is a practising Kurdish Muslim woman, with a son who struggles with

his Iraqi Kurdish identity and the Arabic language. 'Sahira lives in the shadow of her

husband who lives in the shadow of a dying Baath ideology' (2007, p.15). Iqbal with

her English boyfriend is the most liberal character in the novel, and Adiba constantly

struggles with the demons of the past and visits a doctor to seek help. However, in

London the shared exiled element binds the women together and provides a false

sense of security, 'they stand metaphorically on 'al- at-aba- (the threshold), unable to

return to their country but at the same time unable to settle in the new one.' (2007,

p.14). The threshold they reside is heavily casted by guilt and sorrow, for the diaspora,

the future brings unease and instability. The growing tensions in Iraq in 2003 meant

the dream of returning to a better Iraq was now turning into a distant memory as they

watched their homeland turn to ashes, not only with the fire of invasion but the

indignities of occupation and the horror of sectarian violence.

Perhaps the most critically significant aspect of Zangana's fiction is the way she

uses this form of writing to imagine, and subsequently understand, the psychology

of the Baath regime - something she was unable to explore in her memoirs. For

Zangana, Majda was a painful character to accept as an author. She writes: 'like many of my readers, I only met Baathists when they were in power [;…] they were the tools used by the dictatorship to create a climate of fear and control' (2007, p.15). Initially, the Baathist doctrine was largely secular; once in power, they used religion to their advantage, to counter the growing political opposition, resulting in the death and torture of countless innocent Iraqis. In her memoir, Zangana ironically notes that her torturers were also tortured and executed later. Similarly, Majda's husband was sentenced to death by his own party when he was caught speaking to political dissidents. Understanding Majda and writing about her, liberated Zangana from the 'complexities of hate and fear' (2007, p.12). In an extract from *Women on a Journey*, Majda mourns her husband Said's death, 'Said's face, in particular, was now hidden behind a black cloud that, after extinguishing his poetry, had chocked him physically [;…] she sighed out loud. Now everything had been reduced to ashes. Love. Home. Country. And it was all their fault' (2007, p.15). Said's death also resembled the death of her former self, everything she was familiar with was 'reduced to ashes'. For Zangana, to imagine Majda and accept her as a Baathist allowed her to gain control over her torturer and the party responsible for the ordeal she underwent in Abu Ghraib, thus relieving a fraction of the emotional trauma she carried in exile. The power of being allowed to dictate how Majda's plot would unravel, liberated her from grief, anger, and fear, a key element in dealing with the mental anguish of exile.

Furthermore, Adiba's story depicts the struggles the exiled have on grasping onto a past which overshadows their future, in turn conveying the impact guilt has on exile. The struggle of reconciling the past and the trauma Adiba goes through, is reflected through her dialogues with her psychologist. Much like Zangana's guilt in *Dreaming of Baghdad*, Adiba feels the same deep sense of shame of surviving. She reports of her torture, stating that she was forced to stand naked in front of her interrogators, whilst being beaten with metal rods. Nakedness is a recurring theme in Zangana's work when discussing torture. It is a key image of shame which echoes the 'laying bare' of a past and emotions that writing enacts. During one of her sessions with her psychologist, Adiba abruptly leaves. When Dr Hawkins asked her why, she replies

> I felt ashamed [;…] my people are hungry and under siege [;…] my case is not unique among Iraqis, every refugee has been imprisoned and tortured, or forced to flee their country. Many of them suffered much worse than I have (2007, p.138)

The comparison Adiba makes between her case and the other refugees as well as those who were still under siege depicts a recurring picture amongst exiles, that they often felt unworthy to seek help for the persecution they faced. Whilst they escaped the war, Iraqis living in Iraq were still suffering under the same siege and thus escaping did not liberate them; instead, it riddled them with self- doubt, guilt, and feelings of inadequacy. After the collapse of Saddam's regime, countless Iraqis came forward with their stories of torture. Like Adiba, many Iraqis who suffered at the hands of the Baath regime had no documents to verify their accounts, only the scars on their

bruised bodies corroborated their stories, whilst surviving casted a shadow of guilt during exile. Building on this, Marcia Schuback asserts, 'exile describes a disruption that does not only disrupt all of existence and its concrete conditions but that disrupts, above all what it means to exist' (2017, p.176). This disruption resides in survivor guilt. Abida's recollection echoes are heard in Zangana's memoir, 'I miss the past. I feel unfulfilled by my body, with wounds deeper than scars can heal' (2009, p.34). Medically, wounds heal as scars, once scars are healed, they do not cause physical pain, however for Zangana, the scars of the past are not simply scars serving a mark of the wound, they are still wounds causing her pain, they are imprisoning her mentally, unable to move forward she is stuck in a trance of reliving the guilt.

Figure 1: The destruction of Maps (Flickr, 2008)

Figure 2: The destruction of Maps (Flickr, 2008)

Migration and assimilation explain why many Arab writers write in English, however often the choice of language used by writers is also politically determined. For Zangana, the choice of language, or rather using a different form of media, was more than a political intent; it was a combination of trauma and self-expression. When language becomes political and words cannot translate pain, collage offers a new way to engage, interweaving visual output with her written work. Whilst spoken language often differs between borders and cultures, the ambiguity of the collage makes its language universal, thus allowing it to contribute to the collective voice. For many Iraqis, language became a political barrier after the war. English was the coloniser's language whilst Arabic was the regime's language. In an interview, Zangana (2007) explains how collages allowed her 'to cut old pictures and rearrange them in a new way, to take old elements and present them in a new picture'. In exile Zangana attempts to begin a new life however she is unable to forget the past; the medium of collage reflects this and allows her to achieve both elements; make something new

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whilst embracing the past. The two main techniques of collage, selection and arrangement allowed her to be in control of her narrative. The base of Zangana's collage is a map showing the route Alexander the great took to conquer Egypt, Mesopotamia, Persia, and Bactria. The figures overlap one another whilst they invade the map, they all hold a weapon or a shield suggesting colonial violence.

For the exiled, to convey the level of resistance inside from the outside they must find a unique path; art is one form of achieving this and can be resistance in itself. A common thread in Iraqi art completed by exiles is to return to their homeland through their art. Works from artists such as the likes of Hanaa Malallah and Mahmoud Sabris, demonstrate that Iraqi culture can survive despite the geographical dispersion of its people. It reveals that diasporic Iraqis still bleed the same way Iraqis in Iraq did when the occupation invaded their homeland. The American invasion of Iraq had major implications of the ethics and notions of image creation. Elizabeth Dauphinee argues,

> [T]he logic of the visual image risks the final obliteration of the human subject whose world is already undone by the experience of pain. Even within projects intended to politicize the immorality of suffering, pain is fetishized in the drive to make visible what is essentially unimaginable (2007,p. 140).

Therefore, according to Dauphinee, there is no ethical avenue to circulate the images; they are a 'kind of pornography' (Sue Tait, 2008, p.3). The carefully choreographed photographs which emerged from Abu Ghraib, the human pyramids toppled on one

another, men blindfolded naked as dogs attack them whilst the American solider is photographed pointing and smiling widely, were felt not only through the news media, but in the international world of art. Exiled Iraqis pursued art to make sense of the dehumanisation of their fellow Iraqis; where words did not suffice, collage and art did. The horror was seen from all perspectives.

Furthermore, the medium of collage exposes a different modern twist to narrating a key element, in this case the key element was how torture was reported in exile. Davis Banash emphasises 'the cut, ripped, and fragmented, the way in which collage marks a violence that is so often not made back into a seemingly organic whole but instead, emphasizes the fragmented and readymade status of each element (2013 p.41). The figures of men on camels with weapons can be linked to the US soldiers using weapons on Iraqi prisoners, thus signifying the violence Banash writes about.

When the US invasion of Iraq began, in order for the heinous crimes to take place, the dehumanisation of Iraqis began. The composition of the figures overlapping one another can be seen as a direct link to this torture now embedded within Iraqi heritage. The significance of embedding this in collage meant Zangana could highlight this aspect respectfully: writing reveals overtly the dehumanising process, whilst collage reveals this in a more humanised manner. Writing about torture directly reveals the implicit details however collage leaves the subtle details to the viewer to decipher. In *Dreaming of Baghdad*, Zangana narrates an extract where she is taken aback when a girl asks her, 'why don't you paint what represents your heritage'? Didn't she see the

human being head bent, with limbs amputated, surrounded by walls? I replied, heritage is a coffin we are forced to carry on our shoulders' (2009, p.15). The function of a coffin is to be buried, yet the connotation of burial is juxtaposed by the coffin constantly being on her shoulders, thus cementing the notion of an everlasting burden. Furthermore, the chaos of multiple invaders highlights the multiple conflicts Iraqis endured, long after these atrocities, Iraqis did not forget the humiliation, rather it is engraved in their collective memory. These wounds have a deeper layer of trauma that started decades ago. It is marked by Baath Party and the mass graves it created, the war with Iran, and the international sanctions of the 1990s after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. These traumas still resonate with Iraqis. Thus, the multiple layers of the collage resonate with the layers of Iraqi trauma and history.

Whilst many Iraqis fled their country seeking refuge in other countries, many were refused entry or killed in the country they fled to. The lines drawn on top of the map, places emphasis on the fact that borders are man-made, that separate one nation from another in turn stressing the inequality humans create. Exiles carefully cross these borders to escape persecution in their homeland, yet their new home is not a guaranteed safety net. Zangana depicts this in her fiction. The novel tragically ends with the death of Adiba, who on her journey home from her travels translating for an Iraqi family is attacked by man with a knife. Through fiction, Zangana shows other unexpected troubles Iraqis may face in exile in a foreign land, as exile does not necessarily mean they are protected from death. In fact, she highlights that death in a

foreign land is a great harrowing fear and tragedy for a person in exile. Building on this, in *Dreaming of Baghdad* she states, 'how tired are we of moving from country to country, endlessly choosing between submission and submission' (2009, p.11). To describe Iraq under the Saddam regime/US occupation and exile simultaneously as 'submission' depicts inequality was inescapable, leaving Iraq did not solve the problems Iraqis were facing in Iraq. Repetition of a key word is a trope of Zangana's work which shows the readers key features which are fixated in her mind long after they took place. The collage is fragmented, cut up, stuck together, symbolic of how exiles live: their lives are fragmented.

Moreover, whilst exile is dominated with the memory of returning home, sadly the dream of returning home was short lived. Helia Zarzosa states, 'the nostalgic notion of home is only maintained as a strategy to survive in exile' (1998, p.193). The patriotic drive to defend their homeland has always been there for exiled Iraqis, returning to Baghdad was returning to their dreams, hopes and wishes - however, the reality was different. Although Saddam Hussein's iron-fisted rule was no longer there, there were bigger problems. Years of oppression had changed the country and its people. The futility of return derived from the isolation they received from their nation upon return, in turn creating a sense of unbelonging in relation to identity. Zangana highlights this through one particular recurring dream:

the person asks, why are you back? why did you leave? Why didn't you come back before? [;…] who are your friends, your family? your relatives? I am so

frightened I cannot answer so the crowd becomes aggressive, believing I am

refusing to cooperate. (2009, p.13)

The questions shed light on the difference between the Iraqis left to fend off the

occupation, and those that were exiled. The question 'why didn't you come back

before' challenges the notion of belonging and speaks of guilt. The illusion of

returning to the same homeland is contradicted upon return, as the belonging tied to

the homeland is snatched away when the exiled returns. Hector Maletta argues that

the exile's return is a 'modified reality [;…] the country is no longer his or hers since

the exile was not present [;…] nor was affected by the events as they occurred' (1989,

p.197). This resonates with Zangana's recurring dream, the crowd's aggression

towards her is deeply rooted in the notion that the exile did not stand in solidarity

when the occupation began tearing apart Iraq's stability, in turn creating another loss

for the exiled.

Furthermore, Said argues, 'just beyond the frontier between us and the outsiders

is the perilous territory of not belonging, this is to where in a primitive time peoples

were banished'. (2002, p.193). The 'perilous territory' is the new identity boundary the

exile is resided in. In *Dreaming of Baghdad*, through the form of diary entries, Zangana

inhabits that territory:

We creep back to our country quietly, one after the other, imagining the people

are the same as when we left them, that the places are the same as we left the

[;…] and even the silence is the same [;…] the children of this country of soldiers

and the dead fix me forever with their gaze (2009, p.10).

The guilt Zangana previously describes, which overshadows her exiled experience, is now being carried with her to the homeland. The term 'creep' indicates guilt and an acceptance that they are not the same as those who remained in the homeland. The people of Iraq are no longer solely residents: whilst she returns as an Iraqi citizen, *they* are Iraqi soldiers fighting for their country's freedom. The 'gaze' of the living and dead who view the exile as a traitor communicates abandonment. Similar to the gaze of the 'dead', for Zangana homecoming resembles the death of her former self which is tied to the homeland. The mythologised memories of the streets of Zino and the sweet scent of roses is now replaced with rubble and death. The returnee might return to the same 'spatial environment' with familiar aspects, but the familiar has also become the unknown (Maletta, 1989, p.200). Adorno's ethical maxim, 'it is part of morality not to be at home in one's home' summarises the exile's return. For Zangana and many others, while they left Iraq, Iraq never left them; the Iraqi returnee will not be at home in Iraq.

Chapter 2: The Notion of Being- Identity

For Iraqi citizens life under Saddam's draconian rule was followed by the US occupation. In these new conditions, to exist and to write was resistance once more. Socially and culturally, 'Arab writers, intellectuals, and poets used writing as a way of expressing new ideas for change and to search for national identity' (Zangana, 2007). This chapter investigates how conflict affected the representation of a multifaceted Iraqi identity. I show how Zangana's testimonies and fiction depict the intersection and conflict between gender and nationalism, the effect that the downfall of Saddam had on Iraqi identity, and how the US occupation threatened identity and the idea of cultural resistance. Using Judith Butler's *Precarious Life* and the concept of biopolitics, I demonstrate Zangana's reconstruction of identity, and how she gave power to Iraqi women's voices.

Whilst the modern state of Iraq is a 'relatively new twentieth-century creation, brought into existence by politicians' the area is home to some of the oldest civilisations, and knowledge of this heritage has shaped later Iraqi national identity (Marr, p.110). I suggest that the three key elements of the past which have acted as an influence in forming a conscious collective memory are: the civilizations of ancient Mesopotamia, Arab Islamic heritage, and the legacy of the Ottoman Empire. On 27 August 1921, Faisal I bin Al-Hussein bin Ali Al-Hashemi was crowned as Iraq's first king, and as the monarch he was intensely aware of the need to the need to appeal to different ethnic and sectarian communities amongst his subjects. He recognized the

challenges in creating a unified national Iraqi identity given the country's tumultuous history. Twelve years into his role, he noted with sorrow that there was still 'no Iraqi people but unimaginable masses of human beings, devoid of any patriotic idea, imbued with religious traditions and absurdities, connected by no common ties'.

Since then, the appointed Iraqi government have tried to build a cohesive identity; however, sectarianism and tribalism has halted the progress of creating a united society. Sherko Kirmanj conceptualises, 'Iraqi identity as a clash among three competing nationalisms: pan Arabism, Iraqi and Kurdish' (2010, p.43). Zangana epitomises a mixed, rather than clashing, Iraqi identity. In his book *International Relations in the Twentieth Century: a Reader* Marc Williams quotes John Plamenatz who states that nationalism emerges when national identity is threatened; 'nationalism is the desire to preserve or enhance a people's national or cultural identity when that identity is threatened, or the desire to transform or even create it when it is felt to be inadequate or lacking' (1989, p.43). In Zangana's fiction, four women with diverse personal relationships and Iraqi identities are the focus for gender-based struggles, whilst simultaneously emphasizing Iraqi women's resilience. Her work focuses on the multiplicities of stories, mixed identities, and hybridity. In doing so, Zangana highlights that the relationship between gender and a nationalism that asserts a singular national narrative which often reaffirms traditional power structures, including patriarchal ones. Spike Peterson explains that 'nationalism constructs group identity' [;…] domination has always meant "men/masculinity over

women/femininity. (1998, p.47) In her memoirs, Zangana skilfully interweaves the rich and shared history of Iraq with personal life writing to bring to light the problems of simplified narratives of what Iraq was and is, and what constitutes an Iraqi people. Fiction and life writing – makes the culture more familiar by allowing readers to experience a variety of everyday human conflicts.

Saddam used the notion of identity for his own political interests, whereby every aspect of public life was infiltrated with his leadership. Phrases such as 'Abu-l-Iraq al-jadid' (the father of new Iraq) and 'Baba Saddam' (Father Saddam) became common references to Saddam and quickly became key images in Iraq. This contrasts with western traditions of conceptualising the nation as female, pertinent to an author who not only writes to reclaim diverse female Iraqi experience following a long period of censorship, but does so in English, a language tied into this representational tradition. Her work, as I go on to show, refuses any straightforward conception of the nation as simply masculine or feminine, additionally it emphasises the plural and hybrid aspects of the Iraqi people. When referring to nation from the 18th century, 'the image of nation as a woman, is widespread in European iconography' (Kirsten Stirling, 2001, p.1). When writing about the emblematic status of a nation, Marina Warner notes, 'the female form tends to be perceived as generic and universal, with symbolic overtones'. She goes on to assert, 'we can all live inside Britannia or Liberty's skin, they stand for us regardless of sex' (2010, p.48). In contrast Robert Cohen (2003) argued that Saddam saw 'the country as an extension of his ego'. 'Baba Saddam'

masculinised the nation as he portrayed himself as protector and defender; creating a representation of himself as the ultimate embodiment of Iraq.

In his book *War Beyond the Battlefield*, David Grondin states 'echoing Foucault, David Nally argues that 'the emergence of the era of bio-power is facilitated by the ability of government to seize, manage, and control individual bodies' (2017, p.33). For Saddam, a key notion of controlling individual bodies began with indoctrination. In *Women on a Journey*, Zangana shows the psyche of a staunch Saddam supporter, Majda, a faithful Baathist and the widow of an ex-Baathist minister. Like an indoctrinated cult member, her following of Saddam supersedes everything:

> She was face to face with a legend incarnate and a moment in history that epitomised the fulfilment of centuries of mankind. His manhood. His magnificence. His trimmed moustache [;…] she crooned to herself: what a marvellous man our leader is (2007, p. 120).

Majda's experience of a face-to-face meeting with the father of the nation elevates his leadership as 'the fulfilment of centuries of mankind' but quickly descends to an appreciation of his trimmed moustache, from the timeless to a moment in time, from all of mankind to one man's face. This moustache became a key facial feature for Iraqi men during Saddam's reign. The infamous moustache became 'ubiquitous during the Iraq-Iran war. Young conscripts were urged to grow Saddam like facial hair partly in homage to Saddam' (Brendan Koerner, 2003). The Iraqi youth mirroring the physical features of Saddam continued and emphasised the idea of 'Baba Saddam'.

Furthermore, this styling amplifies the effects of Saddam's view of incarnation. Through purposefully selecting particular components from ancient history, Saddam placed himself next to figures of great empires of the past, creating myths about himself that he was a direct 'descendant of two of the most famous figures in Iraqi history, the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar and [;…] king Saladin' (Robert Jones, 2021). By implying direct bloodline, he portrayed a 'whimsical image of (him) as the latest manifestation of a great line of Mesopotamian heroes' (Kamyar Abdi, 2008, p.3).

Saddam saw himself as the nation's metaphorical father, and under his rule women were seen as both literal and cultural reproducers of the nation. Nadje Ali notes that 'women were asked by the regime of Saddam to produce future soldiers' (2005, p.741). Zangana shows how this allegiance manifested within the lives of female party members in a surprisingly contradictory way. Majda's infatuation with Saddam and the party resulted in sacrificing what some would argue was a significant part of her femininity; by choosing not to have children she was able to devote herself wholly to her leader. Yuval Davis explains that the most 'natural' way for women like Majda to 'participate in national and ethnic process is the biological reproduction of the nation' (1997, p.66) However, For Majda, this was not the 'natural' response. Her infatuation with Saddam came above all other relationships, including her marriage. Whilst speaking to friends she states that she and Said 'know that we are bound together by something much stronger than a child'. She winks, 'alluding to the strongest ties of all: her affiliation with the party, and her personal acquaintance with

his Excellency, the president' (2007, p.107). Majda's projection of Saddam has become an intrinsic part of her identity; her fascination with Saddam makes everything else in her life meaningless, even the production of new Baathists for Saddam. Through Majda's obsession, Zangana reveals the impossible position of a woman within a paternal cult of nationhood.

In contrast to Majda's sacrifice of motherhood for Saddam is Zangana's character Um Mohammad; a Kurdish woman who navigated exile with her son. The word 'Um' in Arabic translates to mother, which further strengthens the notion that her entire existence is tied to motherhood. Whilst the four women of the novel are bound to one another by their common Iraqi identity, Um Muhammad's son refuses to acknowledge his Iraqiness. His anger towards Iraqi Arabs lead to his refusal to speak Arabic. When asked why he states: 'on the day the bloody Arabs destroyed our homes [;…] I don't want to see Arabs; I don't want to hear Arabic spoken' (2007, p.38). The trauma of exile and the murder of family members leads him to view being Arab as a curse. The silence around Um Muhammad's husband implies he has been killed; probably a reference to one of the massacres against the Kurds committed by Saddam's regime. In an attempt to calm her son down, Um Muhammad explains to him that their past trauma is a test from Allah. She recites to him Surah Al-Baqara from the Quran 'be sure, we shall test you with something of fear and hunger and some loss in goods [;…] but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere' (2007, p.39). Um Muhammad's reference to Islamic scriptures shows how she seeks shelter

in religion; for her, everything is centred around her religion, even her identity is tied to it. Although in recent times Iraq has been a secular country, where a majority of citizens ostensibly identify with their national identity; 'initially religion was a marker of identity' (Marr, 2017, p.130). And thus, Um Muhammad's character represents the religious component of Iraqi identity in addition to Kurdishness; she is also the mother of a child who refuses to reproduce a sense of Arab Iraqiness.

In addition to the personal, family stories Zangana uses in her work, 'it is important to consider the role academics played in mobilizing the masses politically and socially through their publications and writings' (Hanan Hussam Kashou, 2013, p.61). Iraqi intellectuals searched for an aspect of their Arab heritage that all members of society could relate to and identify with. They did so by revisiting their 'pre-islamic Mesopotamian heritage after the fall of Saddam' (Kashou, 2013, p.62). After many years of Baathist rule, identity division and challenges between Iraqis strengthened. In the *City of Widows*, Zangana revisits history to consider these shared roots and their potential for shared identity and community in the present. She comments that it is,

> almost impossible not to see history as a living tradition and a component of our national identity when we grew up among thousands of archaeological sites, as children we visited Babylon (2400 B.C) in today's Babil province, fifty miles south of Baghdad on the Euphrates: we have family picnics near the arch of Ctesiphon (2009, p.24).

The ancient city of Babylon Zangana refers to was once ruled by Hammurabi; rebuilt by Nebuchadnezzar; was then conquered by Cyrus; the city is at the heart of Iraqi identity. Under Saddam's rule, the Iraqi government began to reconstruct specific elements of the ancient city. This included one of King Nebuchadnezzar's palaces, which later became 'a symbol of nationalist identity in post-independence Iraq' (Hadani ditmars, 2019). The living tradition Zangana identifies had been co-opted by the despot. As noted above, Saddam considered himself a national father and the inheritor of Nebuchadnezzar. Ditmars (2019) explains how he also exploited another aspect of history; the Persian conquest of Babylon, 'to rally citizens against Iran, and to justify his heavy-handed reconstruction of the site as a kind of resurrection after its destruction'. Saddam manipulated Iraqi identity with such vigour and intent that each tile at these archaeological sites was engraved with his initial, therefore a key element of Iraqi identity was being manipulated. Paul Cooper (2018) argues that Saddam's strategy was 'an idealisation' of history for the purposes of the cementing of the legitimacy of the regime's presence', rather than the shared 'living tradition' that Zangana describes. To further cement his mark, Saddam used the reconstruction of Babylon to celebrate the first anniversary of the invasion of Iran, 'with officials using the slogan, yesterday Nebuchadnezzar, today Saddam Hussein (*Nebuchadnezzar al-ams Saddam Hussein al-yawm*) (Cooper,2018). By adopting tropes of Nebuchadnezzar's military succession in line with his own wars, Saddam continued to situate himself next to Assyrian kings. Furthermore, the 'family picnic' Zangana alludes to places emphasis on the symbolic value of comfort and familiarity. Family being uprooted is

echoed in the way these structures have been destroyed. The emphasis on Babylon being a key element of Iraqi national identity represents a loss or lack without it. The destruction of the site tarnishes the collective memory and shared bond Iraqis hold. Therefore, academics intentionally revisiting and writing about ancient Mesopotamia as Zangana describes allows them to make links between the past and present, consequently giving Iraqis the opportunity to re-establish a common identity.

The destruction of Babylon did not stop with Saddam's vision, however, Babylon, a city renowned for its rich heritage was deliberately chosen as the site for a US military base in April 2003. A helipad was built among the ruins and Saddam's castle was transformed into their command centre. The graffiti scrawled by the occupation forces still remain on the walls, serving as a reminder of the physical and cultural damage the occupation forces caused. Before the invasion began, over a thousand academics protested to ensure the military take precautions to protect the archaeological site. They argued that it was 'the only access that future generations have to ancient Mesopotamia [;…] once destroyed, that link to humanity's past is lost to us and to our descendants forever' (The Guardian, 2003). This act of vandalism was a deliberate targeting and destroying of Iraqi culture, historical collective memory, and their national identity. The erasure of identity directly links with the erasure of being, as these sites are connected to a person's identity and memory. Once history is destroyed it is in danger of being rewritten by the coloniser, thus losing its authenticity and what made it meaningful. After years of colonial looting, coupled with Saddam's

rebuilding and the US invasion, the ancient city of Babylon that Zangana fondly writes about has almost vanished. Ahmed Ibrahim (2014), an archaeologist working on the site writes about the effect this will have on the future of Iraqi identity:

> Our present is joined with our roots and roots means the lion of Babylon. If we lose these roots, we will lose our present, if the next generation does not find anything from their past, they will say we are not Iraqis.

Ibrahim's concern highlights Zangana's micronarratives as key to keeping history and collective memory alive. These historical sites 'are the Mesopotamian historical patrimony of all Iraqis' – though Ditmars falls into using a masculinist language of the nation (Ditmars,2019). By attacking the country's history and 'collective memory', Zainab Bahrani (2008) argues that 'the US sought to undermine the unique national identity of Iraqis'. By writing about the rich heritage the historical sites once held, allows the retainment of collective memory for Iraqis in Iraq and in the diaspora. Therefore, Zangana's work, and that of others like her, is needed more than ever to provide a national epistemological narrative for those who stayed and those who were forced to flee.

In *Women on a Journey*, Zangana uses covert motifs to keep historical traditions alive. When reminiscing about past singers whose works would have been in a museum to celebrate Iraqis' rich artistic history, Adiba reflects on:

''the songs about a Kurd playing a flute and an Arab playing a Rebaba (Bedouin lute), about mountains and lakes [;…] it pulls at the heartstrings. Oh, how can I

have forgotten it?'' It seemed absolutely necessary to remember and repossess them. The words, locked away in her memory, clamoured to be let out (2007, p.121)

The act of reminiscing tugs at her 'heartstrings' reflecting how deeply engraved Iraqi history is embedded within her. Adiba's frustration in forgetting the song and the desperation in her tone, reflects a sense of urgency in holding onto any memory which all the women can relate to, as this collective memory creates a connection between the four of them. Similarly, in her memoir, *Dreaming Of Bagdad*, Zangana reminisces about almost-lost cultural reference points. Jaume Aurell notes the way that 'texts that blend life writing and history [;...] allow us to examine our access to both individual and collective pasts' (2019, p.504). The relationship between these two elements is what Zangana delineates in the following passage, in turn allowing the western reader to understand the extent of the damage, and for an Iraqi readership keeping alive the memory of their country before it was occupied. Zangana writes:

> Zino was a long muddy road [;…] the main road was narrow [;…] owing to the shopkeeper's persistence in displaying half their wares outside, thus sacks of rice, wheat [;…] together with heaps of old magazines, religious and Marxist's tracts in Arabic' (2009, p.18)

The disposable abundance of popular reading material brings to mind the fact that after the invasion, libraries, particularly the central library in Baghdad, were targeted. The sacking of libraries is precisely the kind of destruction to cultural

property that the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict was designed to prevent after the second world war. Furthermore, it has been debated that library are 'pivotal institutions for the life and identity of the modern nation state' (Julia B Edwards & Stephan P. Edwards, 2008 p. 331). In 2007 it appeared that American soldiers in Mosul had taken a 400-year-old Torah out of an abandoned building and arranged for it to be smuggled out of the country. Books and artifacts like the 400-year-old Torah are part of the Iraqi collective memory which work as a component of identity. Erasing 'history such as books and documents that serve as a written reminder of what was once part of a nation's identity' is another tactic employed by the US occupation to vandalise Iraqi culture (Farzana Qureshi, 2009, p.65). As a writer in exile, Zangana is able to preserve significant historical traditions through her work.

After the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the country fell into a state of chaos. The value of an Iraqi state fell, as there was no established central government and the increase in civil war. Occupation forces implemented a 'biometric identification system and database' (Tom Hobson, 2017). Hobson (2017) argues that the very occupation and reconstruction of Iraq was predicated on a logic of biopolitical knowledge which categorised bodies and controlled their movement. He goes on to state,

The coalition forces sought to command detailed knowledge of Iraqi life in order to manage it. However, the particular form of knowledge that was

prioritised is also key. In forcing the predominance of identity verification solely on the basis of physiological characteristics.

Biometrics were used to decide if an individual was safe or dangerous, which also had the effect of disavowing a heterogenous sense of Iraqiness: the occupation instilled separate, distinct group identities for Shia, Sunni, Arab Kurd, and Christians. These groups were also assigned the roles of victim and victimiser, creating fear and mistrust and weaponizing the notion of 'being Iraqi'. In the *City of Widows* Zangana describes how the carrying of ID badges and biometric screening splits formerly intermingled communities 'into gated communities, potentially controllable by remote surveillance' (2009, p. 12). This micromanagement of Iraqi human lives, using tracking devices to split communities, aligns with Foucault's assessment of the critical role that 'violence plays constituting a population, producing a citizen body, and asserting its need for protection' (Perveen Ali, 2011, p.23). Many Iraqi lives were deemed as a threat by the occupation forces, who viewed them as terrorists: their deaths were equated with security. Here, 'war is justified as a means of defending the biological existence of the population' (Ali, 2011, p. 23). The biopolitical method of dividing communities created a new, 'manufactured identity' crisis, in a YouTube video *titled Iraqi IDPs Fragmentations of National and Cultural Identity*, Zangana expressed her concerns of the new problems arising from the occupation to divide the Iraqi identity, she states the division in community meant the occupation forces were 'erasing our collective memory and rewriting history in order to divide and rule' (Zangana, 2016)

These questions of ethnicity, language, identity, and nationhood in a state of war are intersected by those of gender. The systemic use of biopolitical tools by the US regime to assert power and inflict violence was also adopted by Saddam's regime through various torture methods. In her text, fluctuating through memory, Zangana writes about her prison ordeal. This key feature distinguishes Zangana to other Arab writers in the Middle East as she writes openly about what occurred during her time in prison. 'What do you do if you have inside you a wound as big as yourself?' she asks. 'What do you do if the wound inside you is your existence?' (2009, p.14). An open wound leaves the victim in severe pain due to risk of infection; metaphorically Zangana's wound torments her as she is forced to relive the memories. Literature allows her to recount the humiliation and powerlessness she underwent. During her time incarcerated, she was the only female political prisoner. She transgresses norms of speaking about the intimate and physically personal. In *Dreaming of Baghdad,* one significant flashback Zangana writes about is a scene when one of the prison guards under Saddam's regime saw her bruised, torn and battered state: 'one of the torturers felt sorry for me when he saw both of my legs and skirt covered in menstrual blood. He gave me an old shirt which I cut into pieces and put between my legs' (2009, p.31). The guard sees her as a genderless being until he sees the blood. The bruises inflicted are normalised and they elicited no visceral reaction. The bruises on her body do not allow her to be different to the male prisoners. However, menstruating femininity awakens his sympathy; once he sees her as a woman, he is able to see her as a human. He is lifted from his complicit ignorance and acceptance.

In her novel, *Women on a Journey*, Zangana includes snippets of Adiba's psychiatry session in the form of a case study. Similar to Zangana she was also a victim of Saddam's notorious regime. There is a therapeutic component to the combination of writing and sharing: the act of healing. An important element of psychiatry is narrativization; narrativizing one's experience to make sense of the trauma endured. The parallels between these fictional pieces and the torture stories unravelled in Iraq from sufferers of the regime are analogous, thus depicting how Zangana is using fiction and writing as essentially a cure. On the topic of narrative therapy, White and Epston examine the 'problem-saturated story that requires deconstruction, externalization, and later reconstruction forming a new co-created story' (1990, p.24). The psychiatrist narrates, 'undressed three times and made to stand naked once in the interrogation room in the presence of interrogators and twice in the courtyard of the centre' (Zangana, 2007, p.90). The imagery of a naked female body with the presence of a violent male gaze shows that Adiba's femininity is vulnerable in the eyes of the prey. Building on this, the passage can be interpreted through a cultural lens; in Islam a female's body is hidden from a male's gaze unless of marital status. Adiba's religious values have been violated as well as her female body being used to shame her. As the narrative progresses, Adiba becomes increasingly frustrated with the sessions and visiting past wounds. She anguishedly tells the doctor the guilt she carries of surviving the ordeal:

If I had fought back, if I had resisted like the others did, then I would not have stayed alive [;…] how do I calculate the years of humiliation and silence? It is like a heavy corpse; whose weight increases with the passing years (2007, p. 90)

Adiba questions whether she would have found solace in death rather than living with the memories. Memories, portrayed as a heavy corpse, are a burden weighing her down as if she is carrying a dead version of herself. Rather than healing as time passes, the memory gains weight and thus significance in her life. This passage draws parallels to one from *Dreaming of Baghdad* which effectively shows the merging of different narrative forms to demonstrate epistemology can be shown through fiction and non-fiction. Zangana's personal torments are translated in her fiction via Adiba's character; in the epilogue of *Dreaming of Baghdad* Zangana writes about forgetting a comrade named Haider. She says: 'Why had I not written about Haidar? Had I really forgotten about him in the fog of recalling others? Or had I been in denial, trying to rid myself of the memory of his short tragic life, the last chapter of which I had witnessed?' (2009, p.152). The despair of remembering forgotten comrades displays elements of memory loss, a symptom of trauma victims, but also remembering forgotten elements shows a sense of hopelessness of surviving the trauma. In his work on testimony in the context of Auschwitz, the Italian philosopher Agamben (2002) argues the impracticality of being a true witness:

The true witness is the absent one, the one who has touched bottom and who will never return to tell his story. Thus, at the root of the testimony there is an

essential lacuna which can be seen as the absence of the true witness, but also

as the space between the language and the actual unspeakable event itself.

(Masmoudi, 2010, p.5)

Haider, a voiceless character, represents what Agamben (2002) names the 'true witness'. Zangana is unable to fill the void he leaves as he experiences the torment to its true extent. Moreover, the 'essential lacuna' can be applied to the survivor's testimony too; it is exemplified in the structure of Zangana's memoir. The lack of linear narrative, switching both time and place references, is part of her strategy for writing that involves various defence mechanisms whereby the full impact of the brutal details can only be signposted to in different sections.

Whilst Zangana's fiction draws on her personal experience which makes her fiction appear true to life, it is important to note the differences between a survivor's testimony and a fictional account. Zangana's fiction work in comparison to her memoirs showcase life-writing genre's ability to overlap, yet distinctions between the two remain. A life-writing account, for example, *Dreaming of Baghdad*, is read as something close to a factual document by the reader. The writing is solely a narration of Zangana's own experience translated via memory. In regards to memory and life-writing, Gunnthorunn Gunmundsdottir highlights, 'the statement "I remember" has an unimpeachable status, others can challenge facts, not memories; thus, making life-writing a unique genre' (2003, p.12). Whilst the memory Zangana uses in life-writing is often translated in her fiction, the key difference between the two genres is that in

fiction the truth can be manipulated to fit the narrative structure – and the reader expects such manipulation. The art of fiction is layering history: past and present can all be merged to tell a story; the overlapping allows fluidity of different perspectives. The navigation of trauma affects choices about literary form, dependent on how much refraction the author needs. An example of this is Primo Levi, a survivor of Auschwitz. He writes: 'to be saved is to be partial', he splits the camp members into two categories, 'the drowned and the saved' (Primo Levi, 1986) Levi sees himself as saved, therefore, he cannot be a complete witness of the camp atrocities. He distances himself from the 'muselmann who occupy the extreme pole of the drowned, whose inability to survive is brought about by the experiment of Auschwitz' (Richard Carter-White, 2012, p.296). Levi maintains in his life-writing, he has a duty to only deliver what he has experienced, however in his fiction, he is able to showcase trauma that was inflicted on other camp members. Carter-White states, 'it is only in an institutionalised and self-acknowledged work of fiction could Levi manage to narrate an unambiguous category of the saved' (p.294,2012). Furthermore, Birgitt Flohr writes about what bridges the gap between the two, he states, 'the self and the self's perception of life are intrinsically connected to fiction' (2021, p.4). Therefore, the relationship between memory and events occurring manifests into fiction. In the introduction for *Women in a Journey* Zangana touches on the personal and political interweaving, she states 'I maintain that it is very difficult to separate the personal from the political when both are direction at the same immediate objectives (2007, p.13). Similarly, Gudmundsdottir notes, 'the author has forged a unique conjunction between their own memories and public

events and [;...] that connection impinges on the borderline between fiction' and life-writing (2003, p.13).

Furthermore, through the linear narrative, Zangana shows how detainees were humiliated and brought to physical and mental weakness, Zangana is effectively able to do this by crossing cultural/religious boundaries and breaking the silence surrounding the topic of nudity. This novel is a 'testimony of ongoing psychological damage done by imprisonment, the terror of dreams and nightmares that persist years after confinement' (Nawar Al-Hassan Golley, 2007, p.193). Physical torture was a punishment for not giving into false confessions or a way to force the prisoner into giving more information. Zangana painfully describes the beatings, lack of privacy and the torment of repeatedly undergoing questioning. In *Dreaming of Baghdad*, she writes, 'things happened so fast; I didn't have time to think. An exhausted looking man came and began kicking me in the groin. My underwear was wet with blood and urine. Then someone kicked me in the head' (2009, p.29) Degradation, pain, and humiliation is reflected from the vicious attack she portrays. Here Zangana effectively illustrates the main effect of torture is the stripping of one's dignity, 'exhausted' portrays the oppressor in a humane light in contrast to the inhumane treatment she received, this in turn makes the acts of violence more unbelievable and shocking as he is a human like the reader and the oppressed. M K Chandra Bose (2012) argues, for Zangana the notion of putting her personal experiences into words whilst simultaneously sharing the shame she went through is a 'cathartic release'. The

element of 'cathartic release' is further shown through Zangana's dream analysis of torture never leaving her body. She states, 'here is my recurring dream: all of a sudden, I find myself in the airport I left years ago. I panic and feel sick. Here is my body recognizing images of torture, stored in memory but in my body's cells' (2009, p.44). 'Body cells' emphasises how torture has been interweaved into her body. From a bio political perspective torture at a cellular level demonstrates the preoccupation of the body. Suvendrini Perera argues,

Foucault traces in the centralisation of the body a preoccupation with both 'submission and use' and 'functioning and explanation'. Torture encompasses these same preoccupation by harnessing a profound knowledge of the body's functioning-knowledge that allows the body to be captured through the calculated infliction of pain. In this way, the body is made the surface on which the larger social project is inscribed' (2014, p.310).

The imperative recurring further cements the notion of torture being a 'lifelong scar', for Zangana, she cannot seek peace whilst sleeping as the imprint is always there.

In a reversal of some of the experiences described above, Zangana signposts to how occupation forces used women in the military to humiliate Iraqi men and attack their cultural values. For instance, Lynndie England was an American soldier whose humiliation tactics came to light through images from the notorious Abu Ghraib prison. The infamous image of England smoking away as she joins triumphantly in dragging an Iraqi male by the collar whilst her male counterparts watched,

exemplifies her identity being manipulated to shame Iraqi men. The abuse of power and gender had religious implications as it was serious breach of Muslim values to be naked in front of unknown females. The Iraqi prisoners are usually shown stripped of clothing; this is undoubtedly an important part of their humiliation. They are usually hooded and bound as seen in *The Guardian* (2011) 'images of a masked Iraqi from Abu Gharib', this conveys the loss of identity through costume and clothing, Nancy Snow argues that,

> making the prisoners wear uniforms as in the case of those in Guantanamo Bay,
>
> and hoods covering their faces, adds to the process of dehumanizing the
>
> individuals, stripping them of their identities' (2009, p.558)

The masks are symbols of oppression, by covering their eyes and features unique to them, in turn removing their identity. By restricting eye contact, they are further depriving them of the ability to show pain and emotion, thus the black hood masks their humanity as they become an anonymous heard of beings.

Judith Butler highlights the importance of establishing an identity for the victims of war, and the notion of writing one's identity, provides a platform on which the victims can begin to heal from the mental wounds inflicted by the experience of their physical torment. 'A faceless unknown people become prey to a dehumanised construction; therefore, violence against them is more readily justifiable' (Butler,2010, p14). The key issue of the other being shown as inferior as well as nameless is that it

is easier for the conscious mind to accept the dehumanisation and atrocities committed onto the other. The 'other' shown as inferior and nameless becomes an issue as it is easier for the conscious mind to accept the dehumanisation and the atrocities committed onto the other. The separation of you and I when writing about victims from a secondary perspective opens the fears Butler presents. However, Zangana's writing eliminates the concerns Butler discusses by presenting a humanised portrayal of their being and struggles. Telling stories of the past within her novel is an attempt to preserve the collective Iraqi identity during a time when she had no control of her being.

The lives of Iraqis are faceless when war crimes are discussed, however, the Iraqi narrative that Zangana writes portrays the victims in an ordinary manner who fell victim to the heinous crimes of Saddam and the US occupation. She reveals the pain and suffering they underwent, shedding light on their identity. Zangana writes about gender-based violence in the *City of Widows*, in fact the book was written in memory of Abeer Qassim Hamza al-Janaby, the 14-year-old Iraqi girl who was 'gang raped and set on fire by the US troops [;…] in the south of Baghdad, on March 12 2006' (Zangana, 2009). This begs the question, which lives become worthy of recognition? Butler gives example of how Americans have been able to justify violence onto the 'other'. She questions this justification by asking 'to what extent have Arabs, predominantly practitioners of Islam, fallen outside the 'human' as it has been naturalized in its western mould by the contemporary workings of humanism'.

(Butler, 2003, p.32) Iraqi lives being faceless and nameless makes it difficult for them to be humanised and identified, thus difficult to mourn. The countless undocumented rape cases emphasise Butler's concerns, however through writing, Zangana deciphers and sheds light on the human rights violations committed by the US occupation in the name of liberation. In the *City of Widows,* Zangana simultaneously creates a face of the victim and closes the binary of us and them and the East and West. Writing allows her to gain back this lost identity and give the 'other' an identity.

Chapter 3- The Untold Story, Censorship

The 'Iron grip of authority in Iraq' covered all aspects of cultural life and was not exclusive to matters of state, as is customary in a totalitarian regime (Ikram Masmoudi, 2015). As noted in the introduction, censorship is a key assertion of biopolitics, 'Censorship was total and so effective, through sheer terror, that in effect there was nothing to censor: writers did not dare to write something that would have needed to be censored by the regime's cultural agents' (Masmoudi, 2015). When the Baath Party took the helm in Iraq in 1968, censorship priorities dramatically shifted as the new regime imposed full control on the media and printing houses. Not a single word was published without prior consent from the 'Directorate of Censorship on Publications'; the Information Act 39 and rules from the 1968 Press Act prohibited publication on twelve specific topics. This 'included those detrimental to the president, the Revolutionary Command Council, and the Baath party' (UNHCR, 2001). Censorship was used by the Baath regime as one of the effective means of achieving its political objectives and controlling the opposition. In order to achieve control over publications, Saddam used 'all methods and instruments available to silence his oppositions. He confiscated and burned books and created a hypothetical enemy that did not exist' (Pshtiwan Faraj Mohammed, 2015, p.19). Censorship thus played a significant role in the development of contemporary literature, style, and language in the Arab/ Iraqi world. Many stylistic characteristics of Iraqi literature derive from 'circumnavigation of censorship because allusions and metaphors are embedded into fiction in order to express political and social views' (Jennifer

Chandler, 2012, p.26). This idea is explored in this chapter through the works of Zangana, Hadia Hussein, and Dunya Mikhail. For Iraqi writers, Saddam's rise to power saw the demise of their free literary expression and the need to navigate a censored imaginative landscape.

This chapter moves beyond state political censorship to examine the ways in which trauma produces a form of psychical self-censorship, and how exile and 'brain drain' produces a censorship via absence. I explore why the regime was so threatened by literature and the subsequent importance of fiction and writing in a politically repressive context. The second section of this chapter thus explores how Zangana, as an Iraqi, understood and interpreted the US intervention because of its role in censorship and the 'Iraqi brain drain'.

Zangana's writing predominantly focuses on the very notion of memory; when reading memories from a victim of trauma, it is important to consider the relationship between self-censorship and trauma. The process of writing *Dreaming of Baghdad* took eight years altogether when Zangana (2013), 'was not able to deal with memories of what had happened (to her) in prison'. Writing allowed her to slowly make sense of the unknown; it was a way of cleansing the memories of Iraq, thus writing became a vehicle to explore the trauma. However, a veil of self-censorship masked her writing. Freudian literary criticism has explored this form of censorship, as Cathy Caruth notes: Freud used 'literature to describe traumatic experience [;…] because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not

knowing' (1996, p.3). These forms of voicing and silencing, knowing and not knowing, can be seen in Zangana's memoir:

> Writing about memories is an elusive process. It often begins with a good intention: to convey the truth. What happens in reality is that we only write down what passes through the censors' eyes. The censors here are the ambient time and space, social and political conditions [;...]. What one writes now is certainly not what actually happened. It is but a vague indicator [;…] a mixture of illusive and contracted images, a dream, or an act conditioned by either a denial or a desire to see past events shaped by what is yearned for in the present (2009, p. 153).

For Zangana, what she has written is not a chronological narration of her experience, but rather it is a representation through memory filtrations written down on paper. The process of narrating her experiences is not a process of writing every detail; instead, it is a representation of only certain aspects of the torturous ordeal she underwent. This was due to her repressed memories which were the direct result of trauma. Certain aspects are unable to be translated in writing, consciously or unconsciously, because the experience exceeds language. Whilst there is a distinction between self-censorship and irrepresentability, the result of this is a censored literary archive, in addition to the conscious and life-preserving self-censorship under Saddam's regime. Zangana recalls the events as a 'dream' and pins the censors to the 'eyes' and 'ambient time and space'. The allusions to wide, unfilled spaces imply gaps in her memory, demonstrating both 'suppression', 'the voluntary form of repression

proposed by Sigmund Freud' and unconscious repression of unwanted thoughts, memories, and emotions (Heather Berlin, 2009). Jennifer Langer writes, 'self-censorship of memory takes place through a sifting and purifying process' (2004, p.68). Thus, for Zangana the 'sifting' process takes place through piecing her narrative, primarily using 'contracted images' and 'dreams' since the psychological changes do not allow her to remember the ordeal without the sifting process.

Traumatic events that survivors do not want to speak about are linked with disassociation sometimes experienced by those with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. In *Through the Vast Halls of Memory*, the memoir is written in a non-chronological order through letter forms, flashbacks, and dream-like scenes. This, in turn, reflects forms of derealisation and de-personification, which are characteristics of a survivor dealing with traumatic experiences. The fragmented story telling signifies Zangana's state of mind after surviving torture under Saddam. When explaining her state of mind, she asks the reader rhetorical questions to explain her thought process: 'what about the whirling problems, the endless thoughts, the tedious noise of memory, the familiar voice[s] that shroud her nights'? (2007, p.128). Physically, Zangana has left the traumatic scenarios, mentally she is still experiencing it. Her memories are presented as dynamically out of control through the words 'endless,' 'tedious' and 'whirling,' almost as though they have their own separate voice. Rather than the act of writing drawing a singular, living, and present self together, this revisiting of a traumatic past fragments Zangana's work. The never-ending nightmare 'shrouds' her like a death-

like covering. Zahraa Qasim Habeeb notes that 'repeated flashbacks, recurring nightmares, and repetition in general are among the key devices of representing trauma, especially in its early stages: hyperarousal and intrusion' (2015, p.27). These flashbacks are a key element in Zangana's memoir: 'I look at the past as it approaches me, falling on me, enfolding me, as though in layer upon layer of concrete' (2007, p.43). The continual flashbacks establish her past as a present force in her life, with its own agency, suffocating her. For Zangana, hyperarousal is a surprising part of self-censorship, the 'mixture of illusive [;…] contracted images (and) dreams' within the 'elusive process' of writing memory highlights that Zangana is haunted by trauma.

Beyond self-censorship, where trauma hides in dreams, flashback and allusion, symbolism was used deliberately in Iraqi literature to navigate state political censorship. Ruth Abou Rached explains, 'the sheer directiveness of Iraqi Baathist state censorship often resulted in writers writing the red lines' (2018, p.65). This was due to strong surveillance in the public domain by the regime, which induced fear into writers, therefore affecting the form in which they wrote as 'they could not overtly use allegorical modes of writing' (Rached, 2018, p.65). The more complex effects of this can be seen in Zangana's work as she adopts a range of different techniques when conveying her story. For instance, in her memoir, she often refers to herself in first or third person which offers the reader a 'multi-dimensional panorama'. In a passage from *Dreaming of Baghdad*, Zangana narrates the use of literature in prison, the epilogue states:

Even though the women inmates are illiterate, the protagonist set out to teach the alphabet and recites to them the most popular Iraqi oppositional poet, Mudhafar al-Nawab, whose work is described by Barbara Harlow as manifesto nursery poem (2009, p.165).

By not elaborating on the poet's background, she was reciting till the epilogue, Zangana is distancing herself from the scenario; through an Iraqi censored lens this can be interpreted as 'writing between the red lines' as the poetry she mentions is barred in Iraq (Rached, p.65). Mudhafar al-Nawab is famous for his revolutionary poems and direct criticism against Arab dictators. To have it in written form, that she was teaching her fellow prisoners, is a transgressive move against the government because of the blasphemous tone he adopts to insult Arab leaders and the Saddam regime. His words are known to be 'so controversial that they cannot be printed officially in the Arab world' (Waed Athamneh, 2018). Similar to Zangana, al-Nawab joined the Communist Party, and as a result was arrested and tortured numerous times for his censored work. Al-Nawab was one of the few who publicly defeated the authority by uttering the word 'no'. The Baath regime said to him: curse the party. But he said: 'no'. They asked him to curse all parties. He said: 'no' (Youssef Sharqawi, 2020). This led to his imprisonment for twenty years. Al-Nawab represented thousands of communists who were forced into false confessions and, out of fear, were unable to say no, yet they were still imprisoned like Zangana. Al-Nawab's 'no' stood as a sign of resistance and defiance for the voiceless who were

silenced. In *Dreaming of Baghdad*, Zangana illustrates the scene of her forced false confession: 'was this to be the stage set for a rerun of the old play? [;...] when was this black comedy going to end'? (2007, p.98). Zangana often uses the stage as a metaphor; her dreams are narrated as a play, thus depicting literature performs the trauma. This dramatic analogy brings to light ideas of falsehood and truth, of acting and deceit, whilst also being part of her technique of depersonalisation. It is clear from this quotation censorship was so efficient under Saddam due to the sheer terror, which was instilled within the system - Iraqis with no choice but to procure to the rules. Therefore, I assert, through adopting the aforementioned writing techniques, Zangana effectively symbolizes the lengths authors needed to go to avoid affiliation with crossing censorship boundaries.

However, writing between the lines was not always successful in conveying political elements in literature. After repeated harassment from the Iraqi authorities regarding her writing, Dunya Mikhail, an Iraqi poet and author escaped Iraq in 1995. She eventually moved to America where she continued to write poems and novels about Iraq. She was placed on Saddam's enemy list for her literary work. In order to avoid censorship, Mikhail used metaphors and allegorical modes to conceal the political elements in her writing. In 1995, Mikhail published a book titled *Diary of a Wave Outside the Sea.* The book contained anti-war sentiments which were 'unacceptable by the totalitarian regime of Saddam Hussein because it did not take their side and it raised many question marks' (Meg Fowler, 2010). In an interview

with Fowler (2010) for *The Eagle* online newspaper, Mikhail stated, 'they expect from you to praise their side. Even if you do not take sides, that is a bad thing. You should take sides – their side'. Thus, I assert Mikhail's plight reiterates that writers could not escape censorship through silence as this translated into a threat. Active praise of Saddam was expected which in turn fuelled the propaganda.

There exists an important relationship between censorship and propaganda. Whilst they are two different entities, I argue that the textual void produced by censorship is filled with propaganda- censorship makes a space where propaganda is the only written perspective of an event available. Under Baathist censorship, a number of themes were banned, including communist literature, orientalists' scholarship on women's liberation, Shiite, Salafi, and anti-totalitarian literature. This thereby saw that all the literature in the public domain was written praising Saddam, ensuring that the propaganda and devotion around him grew. In *Women on a Journey*, Zangana includes a poem that Majda whom is a Baathist is reading:

The total darkness that engulfs me,

and behold

Saddam Hussein

trickles sun into my eyes (2007, p.113).

The sheer contrasting imagery here illustrates the power Majda believes Saddam holds over her, revealing the influence propaganda had over staunch Baathists. From

the darkness that is all consuming, hope and light trickles into her eyes with a different vision of the future. Structurally, 'Saddam Hussein' is introduced as a separate one-line paragraph which glorifies him; the separate line further introduces him as the hero that turned on the light. Severine Cazes reports on how widespread pro-Saddam material was: 'Iraqis are known to claim that there are as many pictures of Saddam Hussein as there are people in their country' (2003, p.2). In her fiction, Zangana touches on the kind of propaganda that saw the rise of Saddam as a cult personality and earned the devotion of countless Iraqis. Poetry was a key component in synthesizing Saddam as the father figure of the nation. During an event to celebrate the revolution of 17th July, when the Baath regime came to power, Majda's husband, Said, organises a group of poets to recite their poetry expressing their support for the revolution and Saddam - Saddam had expressed 'special interest' in Miad Al-Salim's poetry. Majda greets her and proceeds to ask her what her poem is called. She responds, 'Saddam the shining moon' and begins to read the poem:

Deep into our palm trees,

Our blood

And our eyes,

Into the water of the Tigris and Euphrates,

Assyria, Babel, and Sumer,

To the furthest reaches of the ancient texts,

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I descend

There I find

Saddam,

Saddam, the essence of our homeland (2007, p.119).

Saddam's censorship and propaganda machine were integral to his claim of power and allowed poets similar to Miad to be at the forefront of Iraqi culture. Mohammed notes, 'Saddam was paying court poets to compliment him and portray him as a leader who epitomized heroism and glory' (2015, p.21). Saddam's infatuation with Iraq's ancient history was ever growing, therefore, 'court poets' often used Mesopotamian history to glorify Saddam's status. The Tigris and Euphrates are the two defining rivers of Mesopotamia, that were thought to be the biblical Garden of Eden. To place Saddam's name next to biblical allusions and a main feature of Mesopotamia signifies how entrenched he was in its history. In order to reach the ancient texts, he emulated the way the powerful once ruled and used it to his advantage. The ancient texts he is placed amongst can be read to show how he imitated them during his reign of power. Umangh Harkhu (2005) quotes Kuhrt (1997) who points out that king Akkad (2340-2159 BC) ensured that royal presence was marked throughout the empire, as lifelike royal statuary set up in city shrines' (2005, p.55). Similarly, statues of Saddam were prominent in Iraq; he ruled by their playbook. The toppling of his statue in Firdous square is one of the most evocative images of the US invasion. It was denoted by 'political elites as emblematic of the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime' (Lesa

Hatley Major, 2005, p. 39), whilst NBC's Tom Brokaw compared the event to 'all the statues of Lenin [that] came down all across the Soviet Union' (2005, p.39). Literature was also used to 'underpin the position of the king', Harkhu quotes Kuhurt (1990) who writes, 'the reign of Tiglath-Pileser 1 (1114-1076 BC) saw the development of the Assyrian annals, which chronologically memorialised the achievements of the Assyrian ruler. In these, the king is depicted as pious, blessed by the god' (2005, p.56). Similarly, the Iraqi citizens were continually exposed to images of their fatherly leader, 'the photographs portray the leader in various heroic, leadership, and humanitarian roles just as the ancient kings portrayed themselves in their reliefs' (Harkhu, 2005, p.56). Whilst Saddam's cult personality encompassed visual culture, they could not escape covert messages which were censored as any graffiti on the images would result in death. However, whilst literature has the ability to be multi-faceted, it has the ability to hold covert meanings, thus allowing writing between the lines. Rached quotes Mariam Cooke (1996) who asserts that 'understanding Iraqi literature of this era is to appreciate that many aspects of their meaning-making are veiled or opaque' (2018, p.30). Therefore, reading amid the lines in Iraqi literature is to then 'understand that the lines of engagement are not always immediately visible or readable'. This can be seen through the poem discussed above - at first glance the poem is coated as Saddam propaganda. However, the author of those words is not the 'court poet' character, but Zangana. By lifting the veil, the poem can be seen as covert criticism to escape censorship, specifically in the following line: 'In the water of the Tigris and Euphrates, Assyria, babel and Sumer' (Zangana, 2007, p.119). Hanne

Kirstine Adriansen connects the belief of the Tigris and Euphrates being the biblical garden of Eden to Saddam. She argues, 'Saddam Hussein is responsible for the destruction of the garden of Eden (therefore) the reader is left with the impression that Saddam is the devil personified' (2004, p.14). Perhaps more relevant than Biblical imagery here is a socio-environmental reading of this space, in terms of the senseless damage done to the marshland's ecosystem between these rivers in the name of authority, and the displacement of marsh Arabs. Marsh Arabs are predominantly Shia Muslims who led a traditional life in the marshes. After the 1991 Gulf War, Shia militants who were accused of treachery during the 1980 war with Iran, sought refuge within the reeds. In yet another attempt to withhold power, Saddam drained the marshes in order to expose any rebels. Therefore, to understand the different facets encompassed within Iraqi literature, each line needs to be decoded to reveal political meanings.

Whilst censorship allows propaganda to flourish, it increases the importance of Zangana's work to portray life under the regime and brings the question, why was Saddam's regime so threatened by literature? Fiction and poetry are polysemous; they have the potential to suggest many meanings and therefore can be transgressive, undermining the regime propaganda. Under Saddam, a number of books and authors which included revolutionary spirits were censored. This included the likes of Muzaffar al-Nawwab and Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, who expressed revolutionary symbols and spoke against political repression. One key line from al-

Jawahiri's poem dedicated to his late brother became 'an icon of modern Iraqi poetry':

'Do you know, or do you not know that the wounds of the victims are a mouth?'

(Elizabeth Thompson, 2013). The direct address here reminds the reader that physical

wounds speak of truth that ordinary mouths do not dare. The consequences of

speaking out can be seen, for instance, in the case of Abdul Sattar Nasir, who

published a short story called *Our Master, The Caliph* (1975) parodying the power of a

dictator like Saddam and his regime. Whilst Saddam had not yet risen to power, the

fiction addressed the problems which lay within the Baath regime. The controversy

around the novel resulted in a year of solitary confinement for its author. To reiterate

the place of self-censorship: 'fear accretes inside the creator, limiting him, and in

return the characters of the novel are suppressed' (Hadia Hussein, 2013). The nature

of the novel emphasises the power the written word has to transgress against the

regime, in turn, answering why the regime were threatened by literature.

To overcome this self-censorship, authors inside Iraq often left to write what

occurs inside from the outside. As discussed in chapter one, Iraqis who were exiled

often turned to writing to show their resistance and solidarity to the Iraqis in Iraq. The

fiction they published often had autobiographical origins making it more threatening

to the regime, as their characters gave a voice to the silenced inside Iraq. Ikram

Masmoudi contends that in Iraqi literature, 'testimony and fiction is intertwined [;…]

fiction opens up the creative space to sustain the possibility of testimony in such a way

that the two [;…] seem inseparable' (2010, p.61). Through the authors' personal

experiences, fiction shows the gaps that were not allowed to be filled under the regime. For instance, in *Women on a Journey*, Zangana voices her opinions on the Baath regime as the encounter between Sahira's husband Kadhim and her father comrade Jalil which echo words from Zangana's memoir. Sahira's father remarks, 'the Baath party is like a snake. It is quiet at the moment but when it grows strong it will bite. They will take our flesh and leave our bones' (Zangana, 2007, p.73). They are predators waiting to attack their prey, consuming them down to their bones so that the only thing left to speak of what happened are bare bones. Skeletons, like wounds, speak horrible truths. In her novel *Beyond Love,* the narrator and main character, Huda, have fled Baghdad under a false identity, 24 hours after liberating herself with a 'no' on her ballot paper in the referendum for the president, she is left fearing for her life. Her Baathist neighbour leads her to believe she would be tracked after her handwriting is identified on the ballot by handwriting experts and states, 'Electronic machines will find the traitors. The punishment will be stronger than they imagine [;…] I fear an ill-fated end for you'. Hearing this, she seeks shelter in Jordon, stating, 'the most important thing is that I said "no". I wrote it stubbornly, as though extinguishing the dictator's last breath'. Any hostility towards Saddam in literature would have been a serious breach of law and would be met with imprisonment or execution. To vocalise thoughts of transgressing against Saddam, like Huda expressed in her fiction, would be seen as a form of symbolic violence. Here, fiction leans towards showing the reader how to oppose the dictator as well as shine a light on how stifled freedom of speech was in Iraq. In the context of governmentalized power, 'the biopolitical production of

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fear features off the population becoming the target of political strategies. As Foucault claims 'governmental agents always reproduce fear in order to establish control' (Kittipaisalsilpa, 2016, p.88). Huda becomes a body at risk; she must remove herself from Iraq to ensure that her 'no' on the ballot paper does not echo through her bones left behind. The fear does not come directly to her: it is produced in the population at large and is amplified by her neighbour.

Once Saddam's reign came to an end through the US invasion, Iraqis were initially given fresh hopes of a new liberated Iraq where censorship laws would be removed. However, this hope was short lived; with the US occupation under way, new problems arose, and censorship continued to repress the Iraqis and benefit the occupation. Many Iraqis who suffered under Saddam felt that life under the US was even more deplorable. In *The Torturer in the Mirror* Zangana dissects what went wrong with the occupation. At the heart of it lay the flawed foreign policy, which was exerted over the Iraqi citizens. She writes: 'some Iraqis who paradoxically regarded Saddam or the Baath as a creation of the US, have said that the puppet has been dispensed with and the master is now here in the flesh' (2010, p.12). To understand the extent of the damage caused by the occupation, Zangana strips Saddam, a once powerful dictator to a 'puppet'. This is further highlighted through the almost medical terminology 'dispensed', like a necessary tool, which reiterates Saddam was a pawn in the bigger game- he has been traded for another 'master'. This created new problems disguised under the notion of liberation. Zangana expresses the reality in a visceral and raw

manner, the element of 'flesh' makes the threat physical whilst also reminding the reader of the collective pain and suffering Zangana can relate to. As an Iraqi author writing about Iraq, she is able to translate first-hand the ambient struggles to a western audience whilst also giving voice to the Iraqis who, under censorship laws were unable to do so. It is a stark reminder of the flesh and bodies destroyed through the War on Terror. In the context of biopower, Foucault argues that the key notion of biopower is 'the power to foster life or disallow it to the point of death' (Foucault, 1990, p.138). When Iraqi 'bodies are no longer survivable' (Judith Butler, 2009, p.143) and reduced to wounded flesh and skeletons, the narration of destruction will outlive them to serve as a reminder of the collective mourning and suffering of Iraqis.

The US occupation's pivotal role in the 'Iraqi brain drain' meant that Iraq's intelligentsia were specifically targeted and censored when they spoke against the occupation. The occupation quickly recognised that academics would be part of their strategy to endorse the notion of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), whilst also causing a threat if they uncovered and wrote about the war crimes perpetrated by US forces. Zangana explores the problems arising with censoring academics in her memoir, and thus, I argue Zangana's interpretation of the US censorship is a crucial historical document, since she uses literature to give voice to the Iraqi collective memory, which is being destroyed by the occupation forces killing and exiling academics: their death equates to the direct destruction of the cultural voice of Iraq. In 1258, 'the siege of Baghdad' took place where the Mongol conquest invaded Iraq

which marked the end of the Islamic golden age. The libraries of Baghdad were global storehouses for knowledge, whilst the House of Wisdom 'adapted the intellectual richness to serve scholars, scientists and worldwide thinkers' (Ismail Ahmed, 2020). In an attempt to complete their quest of erasing Islam, the Mongols emptied the libraries by throwing countless books in the Tigris, destroying any sign of knowledge. Journalist Robert Fisk (2015) compares past historical invasions with that in 2003. He reports, 'the Mongols stained the Tigris black with the ink of the Iraqi books they destroyed. Today's Mongols prefer to destroy the Iraqi teachers of books'. The comparison of the occupation to the Mongols emphasises the systematic censor and cleansing Iraq of knowledge. Similar to the Mongols, the occupation forces directly censored the keepers of knowledge to extend their power without any counter forces. Zangana recognises the reporting of these crimes are being hidden in order for the occupation to carry out their heinous crimes without any counteraction. In the *City of Widows* Zangana states,

> Reporting of crimes against professionals and intellectuals have been scarce but here are some cases. Amongst a list of academics and journalists killed, Layla al-Saad, dean of law at Mosul University, was murdered in her home on June 23, 2004. (2009, p.126)

The list of blunt bullet points draws attention to the names of the victims, thus, Zangana humanises lost lives which went undocumented. The censoring of their

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voices to then suppressing the news of their death shows in the eyes of the occupation, Iraqis were simply disposable. Giorgio Agamben (1998) correlates disposable lives to power, he argues 'sovereign power can supress the living body [;…] and exclude it from legal order thus causing a state of exception where lives are not recognized'. In the state of exception lives become 'disposable in terms of legal discourse because they are not valued in their totality as life'. Agamben uses the example of Auschwitz and uses the term 'muselmann' as it was employed in the concentration camps to refer to disposable bodies. The muselman is only a 'bare life as a simple, inert body'. In this case the term can be applied to describe Iraqi academics supressed under the US occupation. The occupation viewed them as disposable bodies outside the legality - US soldiers could erase their lives with impunity because their lives were viewed as void, thus causing the 'Iraqi brain drain'.

Additionally, through literature Zangana directly uncovered what academics were attempting to do before being censored to death. They were specifically stopped from shedding light on the breaches of human rights and sexual abuses at the hands of the occupation forces. She takes the opportunity of being away from the homeland to unleash the lies within the occupation and reveals the colonial mindset masked behind the notion of liberation. For example, Zangana uses the case study of Abeer al Jasim, the 14-year-old girl who was ganged raped and set on fire by US troops. She argues the rape is not 'incidental nor aberrant' but rather,

it is part of a pattern that includes the behaviour of Abu Ghraib [;…] this pattern

serves as a strategic function beyond indiscriminate revenge; it fosters the

collective humiliation and terrorizing of Iraqi people, a classic colonial move

(2007, p.131).

Therefore, Zangana's work *City of Widows* counteracts the censorship as it navigates

the US crimes which were initially systematically covered by the US regime.

In order to portray the American soldiers as heroic forces and minimise

publicising American deaths, whilst also maximising the demonisation of Iraqis, the

Pentagon implemented the 'embedding of journalists as a superior strategy' in their

military plan, in turn practising media censorship (Heinz Brandenburg, 2007, p.1). The

'superior strategy', according to the American defence, was in place as 'our people in

the field need to tell our story' (Department of Defence, 2003). However, the

indoctrination which lay within the military meant Iraqis were censored purposefully

as the Pentagon discouraged journalists from going 'unilateral', thus, using the media

as a pawn. Zangana recognises the shields placed upon journalists and argues,

'silencing journalists has become the best guarantee to cover up crimes and violations

of human right' (2007, p.127). As a result, she effectively uses her memoir as a form of

journalism to counteract the staged broadcasts by shedding light on the underlayers

of Iraqi emotions induced through the bloodshed. In the *City of Widows* Zangana

explains how massacres were described as 'mistakes' and sums up the pattern, which

is used by embedded journalists. She writes they first 'kill, then they try to cover up

the crime, then issue a statement blaming it on the insurgents' (2007, p.123). By uncovering the journalist's tactics, Zangana is able to offer the uncensored version of the event using eyewitnesses and Iraqi sources. For example, she explains the Qa'im wedding massacre was initially reported by embedded journalists as 'a roadside bomb' which had 'been blasted killing 15 civilians', however surviving members from the wedding massacre stated the 'soldiers knocked on the door and began a shooting rampage' (2007, p. 124). By offering both sides of the story, Zangana is able to uncover the damage which is done by censoring the truth. In turn, by glossing the truth and censoring key elements of the scenario, the soldiers are able to carry on without any consequences. In a biopolitical context, Soldiers committing crimes with no legal implications allowed the cycle of bare life to continue, this meant 'Iraq emerged as a space in which the protection and guarantees of the legal order could be suspended, and violence was allowed to operate in the service of liberating the other, reminiscent of previous projects of civilisation' (Ali, 2011, p.19).

Zangana gives an insight into Iraqi emotions which occur after the senseless killing, by doing so through writing she is able to explain the torment Iraqis experienced. In an article for *The Guardian* regarding the Wiki leaks Iraq videos, Zangana reminisces about the area where the massacre took place. The place where her family members once resided had now been turned into a contested war zone. By establishing a setting and making familiar connections, she is able to directly connect with the collective loss Iraqis underwent. Places where they grew up and yearned to

return to have now been turned into rubble, they hold the ghosts of innocent souls tormented to death. In one piece of footage from Wikileaks, an American soldier is heard excitedly urging the pilots to 'light them all up', referring to the Iraqis on the street. From a bio political perspective, the footage demonstrates Foucault's argument of 'the critical role violence plays in constituting a population'; the video depicts how Iraqi lives were 'reified into a material object that had to be protected from the fears of danger posed to society by the individuals deemed to be terrorists, whose deaths were often the price of this security' (Ali, 2011, p.23). In an article for *The Guardian*, Zangana (2010) writes, 'As I watch the footage, anger calcifies in my heart [;…] the total numbness gradually grows into now a familiar anger'. The contrasting language here is a direct echo of Zangana's personal hell: she is in a constant cycle of vulnerability and numbness to rage and anger. Her heart softens and hardens with the pain and love for her friends. The anger is 'familiar' and repetitive, thus causing a cycle of turmoil with her emotions. Therefore, whilst the military strategically censored the news to fit a certain agenda, Zangana uncovers the Iraqi perspective and unravels elements which were not initially revealed. In doing so she is able to effectively communicate Iraqi emotions which were induced through these traumatic massacres.

Conclusion- Writing Iraqi Wounds.

'We did not suffer for years to replace one torturer with another one'.

This thesis has explored exile, identity, and censorship in relation to Haifa Zangana's literary work. This includes a memoir, *Dreaming of Baghdad*; a novel, *Women on a Journey*; an autobiographical work, *Through the Vast Halls of Memory*; an Iraqi woman's account of war and resistance, *City of Widows*; a chapter she wrote in an edited collection against the Iraq occupation called '*The Torturer in the Mirror'*; and, finally, a collage titled, *Map of Destruction*. A postcolonial theoretical framework has been used to scaffold my reading of these texts (particularly, Edward Said's work on exile) and is nuanced by the use of Michel Foucault's theory of biopower. This approach to the context of Zangana's work has facilitated an exploration of the systemic power which has stifled the people of Iraq. This has thereby allowed me to answer the research question posited in the introduction: how is the Foucauldian notion of biopower a useful tool for interpreting Zanganas representation of power in Iraq? A core aim of this dissertation has been to highlight how Iraqi voices, like that of Zangana, play a vital role in understanding how ordinary lives have been targeted and uprooted in the fight for freedom.

Chapter one, *Standing on Al-Atba- exile* examined collective memory, paying attention to how memory has become a form of refuge for Zangana and shaped her experience of exile. This allowed me to answer the research question posited in the

introduction: how does Zangana figure collective memory and mourning? Furthermore, she used fiction to understand and humanise the Baath regime and to make public the mental and emotional struggle that exile brings. Her core struggle was the constant guilt of leaving her comrades behind in a war-torn country; however, to return home in these circumstances paradoxically makes one an 'other'. The place which was once called home had been distorted by the occupying forces, new borders, and changed faces, thus, the notion of home and identity is challenged for the returnee. My intent was to show the creation of this 'other' identity on return to the homeland, and how this deepens the exiled Iraqi's wounds and furthered her survivor's guilt. Edward Said's work on memory and exile helped to explain how the image of Iraq clouded Zangana's memory; however, on returning to Baghdad, she found her homeland not only burning with the literal fires of invasion, but also the indignities of occupation and the horror of sectarian violence. To build on this, I suggested the notion of art as resistance for exiled Iraqis, demonstrating collective diasporic pain when US forces invaded their homeland.

Whilst Chapter 1 highlights the formation of the 'other' identity for exiled Iraqis, Chapter 2, *The Notion of being, Identity*, addresses the critical uproot of ethnic and political Iraqi identities as well as the intersection of nationalism and gender. My objective was to illustrate how, together, Saddam and the US created a deep division within the Iraqi people by politicising the different facets of Iraqi identity, ultimately generating a power struggle that they used to justify an increase in surveillance. This

policy of divide and rule led to an erasure of collective memory. I examined the cult of personality around Saddam in order to investigate how he attempted to embody his leadership in relation to Mesopotamian history, which I discussed via Babylon as a case study. I argued that Iraqi national identity was destroyed along with the destruction of a site which held collective memory and shared Iraqi bonds. Using the same case study and Zangana's memoir, I assert that the cultural vandalism that took place during the US invasion further erased Iraqi roots. A biopolitical approach here showed how the biometric identification that the US applied, strengthened the systemic division of sects. Using Zangana's memoir, I argued that Iraqi women's voices are key components to understanding an unfiltered eastern perspective on the torn fragments of identity. This enabled me to answer the research question I posited in the introduction: how did Zangana use writing to represent Iraqi women and give power to their voices? Furthermore, I unravel how female identity is both abused and reused by the military to suit the agenda of dehumanising Iraqis. Whilst this chapter examines different forms of identity, it could be further expanded in future work by deconstructing the Sunni-Shia split. This would offer an in-depth understanding of how de-Baathification tore down Iraqi cultural structures.

The final chapter *The Untold story- Censorship,* unravels the iron grip Saddam had on writers, highlighting that censorship continued under the US occupation to serve a pre-determined agenda of uprooting the Iraqi state. Whilst chapter one highlights how Zangana used writing to cleanse the trauma and memories of Iraq, in chapter

three, I assert that the result of trauma is a censored literary archive. A central investigation of this chapter was exploring the weight of the written word to Saddam. I reason that due to the polysemous nature of fiction, it can be used to undermine propaganda, a significant mode of protecting Saddam's cult of personality. The final section highlights the flaws of the invasion. Using Zangana's dissection of what went wrong with the occupation, I explore the Iraqi 'brain drain' in relation to censorship. My findings affirm Zangana's interpretation of the US censorship as a crucial historical document, particularly due to her use of literature to uphold and give voice to the opinions the occupation attempted to silence.

The three chapters are interlinked by the imagery of the ancient history of Iraq; Mesopotamia. The vibrant history is embedded within Iraqis - they are the proud store holders of the cradle of civilisation. However, to dismantle the Iraqi state, Saddam and the occupation forces continually used these sites to serve a narrative. Saddam, specifically moulded an image to place himself next to historical figures, claiming he came from the bloodline of Saladin and King Nebuchadnezzar; this saw the recreation of Mesopotamian sites. The occupation forces then invaded these sites leading to the cultural vandalism of Iraq. Zangana reuses these key images in different cultural forms to tie in exile, identity, and censorship, representing how each topic is ingrained with Mesopotamia; thus, my key ideas are shaped by the ancient history of Iraq. At the heart of it, Zangana's work allows me to delve deeper into the analysis of the

Tigris, Euphrates, Babylon, and Akkad to give a more nuanced understanding of my three overlaying themes.

Another key cross over of each chapter is the notion of torture. In the introduction, I posited the following research question: how does Zangana's work offer critique of both Saddam's regime *and* the US occupation of Iraq? I answered this question by showing how the Saddam regime and the US invasion were equally concurrently defined by abusing human rights. Zangana revisits the memories of torture and postulates the similarities between the two forces to explain the process of dehumanisation and the lasting effects of it. I argue that the campaign of dehumanising and demonising which derived from torture, led to the consequent and deliberate repression of Iraqi trauma by the occupation forces and the regime, which in turn silenced the 'collective memory' Zangana alludes to. The theory of biopolitics allowed me to expose how torture was used to regulate citizens by 'combining sovereign power of the USA with the biopower of a range of deterritorialized actions' (Julian Reid,2005, p.246). The theoretical approach enabled me to further examine how the war on terror became a 'regime of biopower' (Antonio Negri, 2004, p.13). Furthermore, I uncovered the female struggle with torture, which is often figured through a patriarchal lens and cultural censorship. The findings showed the extent to which the occupation specifically targeted cultural, and religious barriers to bring shame upon the Iraqi psyche. Fundamentally, Zangana's shift between past and

present, allows the reader to empathise with the author's experience of exploring traumatic and painful memories.

As an Iraqi woman, through both forms of fiction and memoir writing, interwoven with her experiences, Zangana poetically provides a vehement personal and political outlook on Saddam and the US role: tarnishing a country's legacy, which was once seen as the beacon of light in the Middle East. Whilst Saddam exerted power over the Iraqis, the torment they faced under the occupation on a unilateral level was unparalleled. Therefore, in this instance, literature sheds light on the unspoken implicit details.

Overall, this thesis has highlighted how Zangana's literary work offers an equal critique of Saddam, the US occupation, and their role in exile, identity, and censorship, which thereby supports the existence of collective memory and mourning. This thesis thus provides a more holistic approach to Iraqi wounds. It finds that writing can be a liberating tool to vocalise the collective voice, which has been suppressed due to the aforementioned weaponization of the Iraqi identity. At the heart of it, it shows war and occupation did not only shape the borders of Iraq, but defined Zangana's existence.

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