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**POWER AND RESISTNCE DURING SADDAM HUSSEIN REGIME’S RULE IN  
SELECTED CONTEMPORARY  
IRAQI NOVELS**

**SAAD ZAATI SHAMKHY**



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## ABSTRACT

The aim of the present research was to analyse political oppression and brutality during Saddam Hussein regime's rule in Iraq based on fictions by selected Iraqi writers. The main objective of this research is to show how the regime abused its power to subjugate the Iraqi population as depicted in the contemporary Iraqi novels. The selected novels for analysis were *An Iraqi in Paris*, *Dates on My Fingers*, *Ijaam*, *Saddam City*, *The Scattered Crumbs*, and *The Corpse Washer*. Using Michel Foucault's concepts of sovereign power, surveillance, and resistance as the theoretical framework, the study shows how the Baath Party's stranglehold on power adversely affected the lives of Iraqis. The selected novels highlighted oppression, inequality, and restrictions on freedom during the regime's rule. They were also emblematic of the Baath Party and its tyrannical domination of Iraqi society. *Scattered Crumbs* and *The Corpse Washer* describe the effect of war on Iraqis. The texts also included different forms of resistance to power of Saddam Hussein's rule. The findings of the study indicate that sovereign power was not used to help Iraqis but instead adopted for political purposes of control. The findings also show that the mechanism of surveillance was exploited by the regime to restrict the freedom of the populace. The study concludes that there were three forms of resistance applied by the Iraqi people against the regime's political control, namely; tactical reversal, aesthetics existence, and violent resistance. The findings also show that the selected novelists employed real situations and experiences in order to expose the tyrannical power of Saddam Hussein regime's power over the Iraqi people. The implication of the study reveals how power can be abused for maintaining control of a population and how resistance can be developed in many guises in order to break the political control.

**Keywords:** Authoritarianism, theory of power, dictatorship, ideologies, resistance





## KUASA DAN PENENTANGAN SEMASA PEMERINTAHAN REGIM SADDAM HUSSEIN DI DALAM NOVEL-NOVEL KENTEMPORARI IRAQ

### ABSTRAK

Tujuan kajian ini ialah menganalisa penindasan politik dan kekejaman semasa pemerintahan regim Saddam Hussein di Irak berdasarkan karya fiksi oleh karyawan terpilih Irak. Matlamat utama kajian ini ialah menunjukkan bagaimana rejim tersebut menyalahgunakan kuasa untuk menundukkan rakyat Irak sebagaimana yang terdapat di dalam novel kontemporari terpilih Irak. Novel-novel yang terpilih ialah *An Iraqi in Paris*, *Dates on My Fingers*, *Ijaam*, *Saddam City*, *The Scattered Crumbs*, dan *The Corpse Washer*. Dengan menggunakan konsep kuasa berdaulat, pengawasan, dan penentangan oleh Michel Foucault sebagai kerangka teori, kajian ini menunjukkan kesan menyeluruh cengkaman kuasa parti Baath yang membuatkan rakyat Irak hidup sengsara. Novel-novel pilihan tersebut menyerlahkan penindasan, ketidakadilan dan sekatan terhadap kebebasan rakyat Irak. Novel-novel ini juga menjadi lambang kepada kekejaman kerajaan rejim terhadap rakyat Irak. *Scattered Crumbs* dan *The Corpse Washer* menjelaskan kesan perang terhadap rakyat Irak. Teks tersebut juga menerangkan pelbagai jenis penentangan yang digunakan terhadap pemerintahan Saddam Hussein. Dapatan kajian mendedahkan kuasa berdaulat tidak digunakan untuk kebajikan rakyat Irak tetapi lebih untuk tujuan kongkongan politik. Dapatan kajian juga menunjukkan mekanisme pengawasan digunakan oleh regim tersebut untuk menyekat kebebasan rakyat. Kesimpulan kajian ini ialah terdapat tiga bentuk penentangan oleh rakyat Irak; taktikal kebelakang, kehadiran estetika dan penentangan secara kekerasan. Kajian juga mendapati para karyawan menggunakan pengalaman dan situasi sebenar untuk menulis tentang kekejaman regim Saddam Hussein terhadap rakyat Irak. Implikasi kajian mendedahkan bagaimana kuasa boleh disalahguna untuk tujuan mengawal rakyat dan bagaimana penentangan dalam berbagai cara boleh terbit untuk melawan kuasa tersebut dan menjadi bebas dari cengkaman politik.



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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION



#### 1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the topic of this research and lays out the groundwork of the study and the problem that requires investigation. The chapter also defines the research objectives and questions, the significance of the study, and the scope of the study. It also presents a brief explanation of authoritarian regimes. The researcher also explains



violence, and how it influences the political and social life of people in Iraq as analysed in the selected Iraqi novels. More specifically, the political violence and how it is performed by the Iraqi ruler and his political party (Ba'ath Party) with the support of the secret police to conquer the Iraqi society.

## 1.2 Background of the Study

Political violence and the use of authoritarian power is an age-old strategy used by those in power to maintain their hegemony when they feel that their hold on power is threatened. From the tyrannical regimes' perspective, it is considered as the best method of maintaining power. Authoritarian governments are not a new phenomenon; they have dominated the world's political scenery for hundreds, and even thousands of years. Historically, autocratic regimes are abundant. They can be traced to the era of the pharaohs of ancient Egypt, the Emperor of Rome, and also to sovereign kings of Europe. Dictatorships are not confined to the past. In the contemporary world there are many authoritarian regimes that repress the people's desire for democracy. In 2007, a study pointed out that seventy of the world's 194 countries were dominated by autocratic authorities (Frantz, 2008).

Thus, despite the rapid advance in technology and the spread of democracy and human rights, there are some parts of the world in which life is dominated by

repression, tyranny, and violence. Violence in some countries has occupied almost all aspects of life, and regrettably, it has been used to settle disputes instead of giving people a space for critical and constructive dialogue. Thus, the idea of accepting others regardless of their nationality or religion almost does not exist in some countries, including Iraq. And this is especially the case during the Saddam Hussein rule between 1979 to 2003.

Political oppression means the use of physical force in various ways to inflict harm on others. According to Krook and Sanín (2016), political oppression refers to the use of power and threat to harm the people, whether this occurs psychologically, physically, or sexually for political purposes. It is used for humiliating and restricting any event which affects the state (Krook & Sanín, 2016). Garcia-Ponce and Pasquale (2013) have noted that the main purpose of using political oppression is usually to support the rulers (typically tyrannical rulers) to stay longer in power. Thus, the repression which is carried out against the opposition groups is for the benefit of dictatorial governments.

Recently, one of the main obstacles experienced by some Islamic countries is that their rulers and decision-makers do not benefit from the experiences of history. Thus, even if they understood the history and learned about its experiences in managing power in a tyrannical way, the darkness of the veil still dominates their eyes and hearts. It is because of the advantages of power and wealth for their personal or ideological benefits. Therefore, such regimes resort to the use of repressive methods, such as



imprisonment, detention, torture, and execution to keep them in power.

Michel Foucault discusses the meaning of political oppression and how power is exploited to oppress people. He explains the different techniques of power used by governments or states to control the people. For instance, in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1995), Foucault starts with describing the historical shift of power and punishment practices from the mid-eighteenth to the mid- nineteenth century. To him, power is chronologically divided into three major kinds: sovereign or juridico-discursive power, disciplinary power, and biopower.

Indeed, much of Foucault's work on power is allocated for the purpose of articulating the emergence of the later forms of power from earlier ones. For example, his discussion of disciplinary power as a new form has been beneficial for later scholars to understand the nature of power (Lynch, 2011). Sovereign power is a form of power that is practiced violently. It was widely used in the past. Sovereign power usually restricts and punishes certain behaviors that might endanger the state. The king, with his sovereign power, is able to force his subjects to be submissive to his rule. An execution, extreme pain, and violent mistreatment, are examples of punishments. Sovereign power is the full right of controlling without any outside interference (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014). The ruler is able to control his people and ensure loyalty through his claim of sovereign power. Thus, in sovereign power, all the people are subjected and subjugated to the king's wishes.





The concept of sovereign power plays a vital role in Foucault's philosophy. For example, in *The History of Sexuality*, more specifically, at the end of its first volume, Foucault elucidates the theme of sovereignty and how it has been practiced across history. The typical means used by this type of power is murder and terror. The execution was the king's reaction to anyone attempting to resist his will and law. In other words, the right of life and death was based on oppression and injustice. Therefore, Foucault states that "the old power of death that symbolized sovereign power is now carefully supplanted by the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life" (Foucault, 1978, pp. 139- 140).

Michel Foucault (1995) explains that disciplinary power is another form of power. It provides a useful account of how government institutions, such as schools, prisons, hospitals, armies, asylums, and factories are exploited for the benefit of authoritarian regimes. Foucault elucidates that applying this kind of power helps the governments to keep in constant control of everything. In this respect, disciplinary power has become the general formula of domination in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Foucault, 1995). Therefore, such a form of power enables the authoritarian regime to make its people very obedient to its orders by employing the public institutions as a means of monitoring the populace. Foucault states that "disciplinary power strives to make the body more obedient" (in Hoffman, 2011, p. 28). The concept of disciplinary power is redefined to target individuals rather than groups. It makes the individuals "as objects and as instruments of its exercise" (p.28). In Foucault's words "We are never dealing with a mass, with a group, or even, to tell the truth, with a multiplicity: we are only ever dealing with individuals" (in Hoffman, 2011, p. 28).







Biopower is another modern form of power in Foucault's philosophy. It emerged later in the eighteenth century. Foucault explains in one way or another that the two modern forms of power, disciplinary and biopower share the same characteristics. However, the latter form focuses on the population rather than the individual. Disciplinary power again, as mentioned, works through institutions, such as schools, prisons, hospitals to subjugate the people individually, while biopower works through the state to control the population on a group basis (Taylor, 2011).

Iraq is a country that has witnessed a wave of political violence and oppression through history. Most of the Iraqi rulers (authoritarian regimes) have taken the route of political violence to reach and achieve their goals. They resorted to all kinds of political means available to legitimize their practices and perceptions to achieve their goal of keeping in power. One might become well-aware of how these aforementioned lines mean if he reads the history of Iraq between 1980 to 2003, and how the Iraqi people suffered a period that was full of wars and violence. Thousands of people were killed, tortured in prisons, exiled, disappeared and marginalized, either because of the wars or due to arrests carried out by the tyrannical authority of the Baath-Party government.

The invasion of Iraq by the US and its allies has also had an impact on Iraqis. Although it has ended Hussein's regime, it regrettably ruined the country. This study aims to analyze the political violence, its causes, its representations, and its effects on the Iraqi people during Saddam Hussein's regime. The study will focus on four Iraqi novelists; Sinan Antoon, Mahmoud Saeed, Muhsin Al-Ramli, and Samuel Shimon.



The study, as mentioned above, will discuss the difficult conditions experienced by Iraqi citizens (especially the innocent ones) during the hardship periods of Saddam Hussein's regime and his dominating system. Saddam Hussein's regime is an exemplar of this kind of regime that used such powers to impose his authority. Hussein followed the policy of violence against anyone who did not support his policy and his government, the Baath party, which was Saddam Hussein's political party, was considered the most violent party in Iraqi history. It was also the source of all violations committed against Iraqi people.

Divine (2001) explains that authoritarianism has been part of the Iraqi political landscape for a long time in its history, but the most violent and harsh oppression was the period of the regime of Saddam Hussein. Hussein had committed his various crimes against innocent Iraqis that even included his family members; he had ordered summary executions not only of people who risked their lives to protect of his own family. The crimes committed by President Saddam Hussein have been considered a violation of human rights. Iraqi people suffered during his rule that lasted for about twenty-four, from 1979 until the fall of Baghdad with the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Interestingly, the violations committed against Iraqi people were not merely confined to special groups or sects, but they were extended to include all Iraqi and non-Iraqi societies, including the neighboring countries like Kuwait and Iran.

Today, the Arab world is experiencing severe crises which have prevented the realization of a minimum level of well-being in life, such as unity and freedom. Those crises have led some Arab nations to fail to govern efficiently and justly for the benefit of the people in many aspects of life. Recently, the so-called Arab Spring protest is the best proof of this issue: The Arab Spring is mostly seen as popular uprisings motivated by a groundswell of discontent and a desire for freedom, dignity, and equality (Vericat, 2014). In fact, the main reason behind this failure and collapse revolves around the practices of the authoritarian regimes that came to power by force and/or money. These regimes controlled its people illegally, and they maintained tyranny and existence by using violence and oppression. One can say that the silence and indifference of Arab people to those political defeats can be considered the main reason behind the rule of these oppressive and authoritative regimes. The lack of freedom and acceptance of the other is the main characteristic of these authoritarian governments.

Some Arab novelists have been able to express these political turmoils through their literary works. Literature is considered as the most fitting way of expressing what is prohibited in other ways. The novelist Alaa Al Aswany is, for instance, one of the most prominent Egyptian novelists to write about these tyrannical regimes, including that of President Hosni Mubarak's regime. The Youcoubian Building is his prime example of President Hosni Mubarak's tyrannical regime, by which he became the most famous Egyptian novelist of his time (Vericat, 2014).



Historically, Iraq has witnessed many occupations and invasions, and most importantly, the British occupation in 1920. During this period, Iraq became a state under the rule of the British Empire. In 1920, the Iraqi people took to the streets to revolt against the British occupation to achieve independence. However, the revolution failed to achieve its objectives of real independence, and only some victory was achieved (Marr, 2012).

Consequently, in the contemporary reality the theme of political violence and the use of authoritarian power are clearly described in the Iraqi novel, especially in these novels: *Ijaam* (2004) *The Corpse Washer* (2010) by Sinan Antoon, *Saddam City* (2004) by Mahmoud Saeed, *Scattered Crumbs* (2003) *Dates on My Fingers* (2009) by Muhsin Al-Ramli, and *An Iraqi in Paris* (2005) by Samuel Shimon. For example, in the novel *Ijaam*; the narrator-protagonist gives a clear picture of the political violence during Saddam Hussein's regime. Furat, the protagonist of the novel, was arrested and put in jail because he criticized the Ba'ath party.

Similarly, the novel *Saddam City* (2004) by Mahmoud Saeed was also about political violence. *Saddam City* tells the story of a teacher whose name was Mustafa Ali Noman. He spent most of his life in prison. It is for trivial reasons that Noman was put in jail for long periods. The moving of him from prison to prison makes him suffer countless scenes of torture. Therefore, the prison has emerged as a clear example in all the selected novels to show the political violence of Hussein's regime. Though, it was very little is known about the Iraqi novel during the Saddam Hussein era, it is given a priority as a means of exposing the authoritarian regimes after the fall of Hussein's





regime in 2003. Accordingly, the Iraqi novelists utilize the novel as the most appropriate means by which they can portray the past sufferings of Iraqis.

In terms of theoretical approach, Michel Foucault's theory of power will be utilized in this study to explore the political violence and its effects as given in the selected Iraqi novels of the study. The notion of power allows us to discuss the methods that were used to control people during Saddam Hussein's era based on some contemporary selected Iraqi novels because the president and his political party (The Ba'ath Party) used violence that was very similar to that of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Foucault (1995) explains in detail exactly how the torture was practiced from seventeenth to nineteenth centuries in his text *Discipline and Punish* (1995). Likewise, during his rule, Saddam Hussein resorted to all kinds of violence against the Iraqi people, including torture, monitoring of movements, marginalization, and forced migration. Foucault's philosophy of power, as mentioned above, indicates that there are different types of power, such as sovereign power, disciplinary power, and biopower. Each type of power can be used either positively or negatively. This thesis tends to explore how power was taken up by the authoritarian government in Iraq to control people's behavior and suppress them. The concepts that the researcher will address are sovereign power, the illegalities and torture in prison, resistance and surveillance.

In general, the Iraqi literature lacks critical studies that deal with political





violence, irrespective of the fact that there are many Iraqi intellectuals whose novels have played a vital role in portraying the painful scenes of Iraq, although they received little attention. This lack in these studies might be due to the need of translating their literary products. In addition, the number of novels which have been translated into English is very few. If they were compared with the number of translated works in other Arabic countries such as Egypt, it will be found that the Iraqi book market of the day is still modest, particularly when compared with the more developed Arab countries such as Egypt (Caiani & Cobham 2013). The translation has been usually confined to the speeches and conferences of the Iraqi president, as well as the literary works that support his system.



The study analyses six Iraqi selected novels by contemporary Iraqi novelists to address the topic of the study. These works were translated into English, and they narrate the suffering of the Iraqi people during the Ba'ath Party rule, where the theme of political violence is very distinct in these novels. The study explores the concepts of sovereign power, illegalities, and torture in prison, surveillance, and resistance as outcomes of this violence by using the Michel Foucault's theory.



### 1.3 Statement of the Problem

The suffering that was experienced by the Iraqi people during Saddam Hussein's regime and his political party (the Ba'ath Party) has been narrated in many literary novels and works. Some of them have been translated into other languages such as in English. This study is an investigation of the pain and hardship of Iraqis under The Ba'ath Party domination. It will analyze the oppression and subjugation of the Iraqi citizens in the prisons and outside to reveal the nature of brutality suffered by those opposed to the regime. Further, the use of novels to narrate the political violence during Saddam's regime has increased especially after the fall of the above- mentioned system. This development is pertaining to the downfall of the regime and the seeming achievement of democracy in Iraq in the year 2003 and onwards. In these periods Iraq witnesses a unique political situation characterised by freedom of writing and freedom of speech unlike Saddam's regime where different forms of surveillance were imposed on literature and freedom of expression was illegal.

There has been little attention given to these works and the Iraqi literature in general. To date, there is an evident insufficiency and neglect in the current studies of Iraqi novels, particularly the political oppression as depicted in the contemporary Iraqi novels, so this thesis problematizes such neglect, hoping that an examination can help in retrospection of these works. The study attempts to examine the suffering of Iraqis as portrayed in these novels. It explores the ways used by Saddam Hussein's regime and

his political party (Baath Party) to dominate the population in Iraq based on the selected novels. The study also explores the forms of resistance used by individuals to confront such an autocratic regime. The study is important in the sense that it helps to create awareness about the causes which led the regime to commit crimes against the populace. In addition, this study could be considered as a helpful resource of literary criticism for scholars, teachers, and students of literature in discussing how contemporary Iraqi novels describe the political violence during the Saddam Hussein era.

As far as the analytical framework is concerned, Michel Foucault's theory of power has not been utilized by the researchers to examine such worthy topics like political oppression. This theory tends to be comprehensive and appropriate to analyze this type of literature. As such, the present study aims to address those gaps using Michel Foucault's theory of power and resistance to examine the mechanisms and nature of power and to know both the causes behind it and the individuals' resistance to give voice to the Iraqi wounds. The other aim is also to reveal the works of these Iraqi authors in conveying the nature of political violence to other cultures.





Thus, the research focuses on the major theme of the effect of tyrannical regimes on Iraqi society. The Baath party is an oppressive party that was established by Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Dine Bitar in Syria in 1943. Using this party, Saddam Hussein ruled Iraq between 1968 and 2003. The philosophy of this party is the practice of violence and horror against anyone that refuses its ideology. In addition, the emergence of such party and its construction of dictatorship led Iraq to two devastating wars; the Iran- Iraq war, and Iraq- Kuwait war. Moshaver (2003) as cited in (Al Sabah, M. 2014, p.41) has argued that the Iran- Iraq war has been described as the 'Third World First Great War.' A great number of lives were lost in the war. Estimates suggest that 1.2 million persons were killed, with a further 2.2 million wounded. In addition, 157 Iranian towns with inhabitants of more than 5,000 were destroyed during the war, and also some, 1,800 border villages were wiped off the map. Among the writers whose works documented the political violence and the brutality of the Ba'ath Party government are Sinan Antoon, Mahmoud Saeed, Muhsin Al- Ramli, and Samuel Shimon. They focus much of their literary works to explore the ideology of this party, and the means that were used to subjugate the population. Besides, they are very popular authors both in the Arab region and outside world. These writers are credited with discussing political issues. Their novels were specifically a rich genre for their unique characteristics.



## 1.4 Objectives of the Study

In light of the literature gap given in the previous section, the study aims to investigate political violence in Iraqi selected novels. More specifically, the study aims to investigate the following:

1. To examine how the Iraqi novelists depict the sovereign power of Saddam Hussein regime in selected Iraqi texts.
2. To explore the concept of surveillance and repression in prison as reflected by the characters of the selected Iraqi novels.
3. To analyze how the authors depict resistance to Saddam Hussein's authoritarian power based on the selected novels.

## 1.5 Research Questions

In relation to the above objectives, this study has three research questions that are formulated as follows:

1. How is sovereign power of Saddam Hussein's regime depicted in the selected Iraqi texts?

2. How do the concepts of surveillance and repression affect the Iraqi people based on the selected Iraqi novels?
3. How do the characters of the selected novels resist the sovereign and surveillance power of Saddam Hussein's regime?

### 1.6 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is to describe the impact of authoritarian power, as represented by Saddam Hussein, on the Iraqi people in some of their contemporary novels. It attempts to provide the Baath party (Saddam Hussein's political party) activities with a clear analysis to uncover the actualities of Saddam Hussein's regime and to adequately detect the deception and cunning of his ideology. Consequently, it will benefit the community, the Iraqi state, and other governments. Exposing and shedding light on the tyrannical regimes, especially those who abused and utilized the power for their affairs can serve as a recovery of the deteriorating moral values of the regime.

The study will also help to create awareness about the causes which led the Baath party to commit crimes against the populace. In addition, this study could be considered as a helpful resource of literary criticism for scholars, teachers, and students of literature in discussing how Iraqi novels describe the political violence during the Saddam Hussein era.



Moreover, the thesis aims to refute the external views which claim that Saddam Hussein was fair and democratic. The current study introduces an analytical framework of postmodern theory, in which Michel Foucault's theory of power was utilized to analyze the Iraqi political novels to find out the reasons and the type of power that produced political violence in Iraq.

Further, the subject of political violence is important for a wide range of social sciences. Iraqi novelists such as Sinan Antoon, Mahmoud Saeed, Samuel Shimon, and Muhsin Al-Ramli have devoted much of their writing to the causes and nature of political violence as they lived in a climate full of political violence during Saddam Hussein's regime. They describe the impact of authoritarian power on the Iraqi people in some of their contemporary novels. The study, as noted, explores and provides a clear picture of this regime and how its authoritarian power suppressed the Iraqi people to achieve its target.

The study has selected this topic to show how the Iraqi novel portrayed the suffering of Iraqi citizens, on the one hand, and how it conveyed the people's pains to the world. In this respect, the study would take into account the texts that describe this subject in detail. The study, as previously mentioned, focuses on four Iraqi novelists: Sinan Antoon, Mahmoud Saeed, Muhsin Al-Ramli, and Samuel Shimon in light of Foucault's theory. The selection of the literary works of those novelists depends on their relevance to the topic of the study. The researcher used these texts because they



highlight the theme of political violence.

In addition, research shows that the previous studies on some of the selected novels only focused their attentions on the effects of wars. For example, in Sinan Antoon's' two novels *Ijaam* (2004) and *The Corpse Washer* (2010) the studies did not mention the characters' resistance to the authoritarian power and the methods used by the authoritarian power to subjugate the Iraqi people. Finally, this study is significant because it provides new insights into Iraqi literature, seen through the lens of Michel Foucault's theory of power by discussing some aspects of this literature, especially those that have not been investigated yet. The conclusion of the study offers effective points that could be useful to the current government to avoid political violence and

aspiring for peace.

### 1.7 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to the context of Iraqi novels because it highlights the theme of political violence in Iraq. The study tackles the theme of political violence and its representations, such as the use of sovereign power, disciplinary power, and surveillance on Iraqi people as depicted in some selected Iraqi novels. The primary texts discussed in this study include five Iraqi novels: *Ijaam* (2004) and *The Corpse Washer* (2010) by Sinan Antoon, *Saddam City* (2004) by Mahmoud Saeed, *Scattered Crumbs* (2003) and *Dates on My Fingers* (2009) by Muhsin Al-Ramli, and *An Iraqi in*



*Paris* (2005) by Samuel Shimon. These selected texts focus on the topic of the present study.

As far as the theoretical framework is concerned, the theory of power for the post- structuralist and postmodernist Michel Foucault was used to study the topic of political violence. The thesis focuses on the effect of authoritarian power on the Iraqi nation. This study analyzes the literary works of the afore-mentioned novelists. To the researcher's knowledge, no thesis has investigated the theme of political violence so far based on Michel Foucault's theory. The data in this study are limited to English-translated works, although the Iraqi novels that have been translated into English are very rare.



There are maybe many works that were conducted to criticize the behavior of authoritarian regimes in non-Iraqi literary works as documented in several books, articles that are available either in the marketplace or on the Internet. However, the resources about Iraqi literature in English are very few. In this respect, the researcher has to depend on Arabic and translated works that are related to the same issue.



## 1.8 Justifications for Texts Selection

One of the major issues of the six selected novels is the abuse of power and the control of the Baath party government in Iraq. The chosen texts examine the mechanism of power that affects the whole of Iraqisociety. The issues that the selected novels dealt with began when Saddam Hussein dominated the state in the period between 1979 and 2003. Furthermore, the selected novels share the theme of political oppression, mainly how the sovereign power, surveillance and the use of prisons were used by this party to subjugate the citizens on one hand, and how Iraqi people resisted this regime on the other hand. In addition, the selection of these novels is appropriate for this study not only because of the relevance of their content to the theme of political violence but also because of the appropriate context of the setting. Besides, the novelists of this study, who are themselves oppressed and thus are able to more realistically portray the experience of the Iraqi thus, making their literary works more authentic. Perhaps, it seems necessary to discern clear themes and meaning if the writers are a part of the society he represents in his/her literary works.

## 1.9 Definition of Terms

- Political violence refers to the use of power and terror to harm people, whether this occurs psychologically, physically and others. It is used for humiliating and restricting any event that endangers the state (Krook & Sanín, 2016). Garcia-Ponce and Pasquale (2013) have noted that the main purpose of using political violence (government- directed violence) is usually to support the rulers (typically tyrannical rulers) to stay longer in power. There is ambiguity in the precise definition of the word violence and its types, but physical violence is considered the most obvious type (Moore 2008). Violence has different types: domestic violence, political violence, social violence, economic violence, religious violence and so on. Violence is defined as the "use of physical force and is generally evinced by the destruction of property, the killing or wounding of people" (Hibbs, 1973. p.8).

- Disciplinary Power: it is that is coined by the French postmodern Michel Foucault.

It is a way of controlling and subjugating the movement of people in a constant way. It is a type of power used by the authorities to control the movement of people to impose their control (Escobar-Wiercinski, 2014)





- **Sovereign Power:** it is a form of power that is practiced violently. It restricts and stops certain behaviors. The king, in such type of power, makes people completely submissive to his regime. An execution, extreme pain, and violent mistreatment are examples of such kind of power. Sovereign power is the full right of controlling without any outside interference (Lilja and Vinthagen, 2014). The ruler humiliates his followers and enslaves them in the name of power. He has a great desire for sovereignty and despotism. Thus, in sovereign power, all the people are subjugated to the king's dominion (Foucault, 1995).
- **The Baath party:** it is an oppressive party that was founded by Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Dine al Bitar in Syria in 1943. Using this party, Saddam Hussein ruled Iraq between 1968 and 2003. The philosophy of this party is the practice of violence and terror against anyone that refuses its ideology. Thus, authoritarianism is the mechanism that is utilized by this party. The most important events for the Baath party during its control by Saddam Hussein were two devastating wars, between Iraq and Iran war, and between Iraq and Kuwait war. Besides, Iraq witnessed a time of severe sanctions by the U.S (Van Dam, 2011).



### 1.10 Summary

This chapter has presented a brief introduction to the topic of the study and has introduced the theme of political violence in some selected Iraqi novels. The chapter has also stated the statement of the problem and that the topic of political violence is a critical theme that has not been sufficiently studied in the Iraqi novel. As such, this study aims to investigate the theme of political violence in literary works written by famous writers such as Sinan Antoon, Mahmoud Saeed, Muhsin Al-Ramli, and Samuel Shimon.

The chapter has also explained the objectives of the study, and thus the research questions. Specifically, the study aims to focus on the Ba'ath party led by Saddam Hussein to understand how the theme of political violence was portrayed in the works of writers. The chapter has defined the scope of this research which is limited to The primary texts discussed in this study include six Iraqi novels; *Ijaam* (2004) and *The Corpse Washer* (2010) by Sinan Antoon, *Saddam City* (2004) by Mahmoud Saeed, *Scattered Crumbs* (2003) and *Dates on My Fingers* (2009) by Muhsin Al-Ramli, and *An Iraqi in Paris* (2005) by Samuel Shimon. Finally, the chapter has explained how this study can provide insights to the world literature in general and the Iraqi one, in particular. The study clarifies Saddam Hussein's regime and how its authoritarian power suppressed Iraqi people to achieve its goals. The chapter closes with a summary and definition of the key terms and concepts used through the thesis.