

**Negotiating Art and Mortality: Aesthetic Resistance in War-Torn Baghdad in
Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer***

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Abstract:

This study explores aesthetic resistance in Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer* through the clash between artmaking and the care of corpses in wartime Baghdad. It claims that Jawad's halting career as a sculptor is not only a personal tragedy but also a significant barometer of the material conditions that are being taken away by long-term war, occupation, sanctions, and sectarian violence, which make art possible, beautiful, and cultural continuity possible. The idea of aesthetic resistance is explored in the context of sculpture, the body, the corpse, the mghaysil and the ruined city, as these various sites are interconnected. Jawad is a trained artist who can mould matter into forms that celebrate life, but history requires him to wash the bodies of those violently reshaped by war. This enforced shift from the studio to the corpse-washing bench transforms the aesthetic into the mortuary and retains a vestigial aesthetic of form, touch, and attention. The study also argues that Antoon is not representing an art that is independent of political violence. Instead, art lives on the margins of acts of witness, memory, and the reclaiming of dignity from the wounded body. The paper explores, through close textual analysis, how aesthetic resistance, initially expressed as opposition, becomes a precarious form of cultural survival in the novel. The main contribution of its centrality is the manner in which it is read as the failure of art, but also as the displacement of aesthetic practice to acts of embodied care. The novel thus redefines resistance as the preservation of the human form, memory, and value in a context organised by mass death and ruin.

Keywords: aesthetic resistance; sculpture; war-torn Baghdad; embodied care; cultural survival

Introduction

War ravaged not only human lives in physical infrastructure, and political institutions but also reshaped the temporal and spiritual structures that organise everyday existence. In addition, it eradicates the environment that is conducive to artistic activity. Artists need time, safety, materials, institutions and a level of attention. The prolonged

violence has a detrimental effect on each condition and alters what art is for. *The Corpse Washer* by Sinan Antoon tells of this destruction in the life of one artist, one life is interrupted. Jawad aspires to leave behind his family's trade as a sculptor. He washes and shrouds the dead in Baghdad, as his father did. Jawad believes that sculpture is another way to life and self-direction. That way is steadily closed by history, and history is driving him back to death.

The novel is thus a blend of artistic yearning and physical destruction. It also adds to the loss of private property with the loss of national property. This study explores the conflict through the concept of aesthetic resistance. Here, aesthetic resistance is the maintenance of the human value through form, attention and memory. It is not about direct action or organised political action. It presents itself in the eyes of a trained attention to the bodies and materials of Jawad. Sculpture helps him to learn about shape, weight, surface and proportion. Considering the human form is necessary when washing dead bodies. The two practices are still fundamentally different in terms of ethics and feelings. However, they are regularly subjected to the same body plane in the novel. Jawad shifts from figure making to taking in broken bodies. Once his hands formed things to create life, he could imagine. Later on, violence had already formed these hands and clean bodies. The change is the main issue in the novel. However, art is not completely eradicated in this movement. It lives on in other practices.

It is a movement that is inevitable in the course of history. Jawad's life experiences multiple moments of nationwide violence. These are war times, times of sanctions, times of invasion and occupation, and times of sectarian killing. Every stage undermines normal life and restricts personal choice. The city of Baghdad turns from a cultural city into a dangerous landscape. Safety and continuity are also lost within artistic institutions. This added to the damage to Jawad's Academy of Fine Arts. Therefore, his private ambition is not a private affair, but a public one. The artist connects with the forces harming the city. When you get exposed to those forces even more directly, Antoon can make both types of damage visible through Jawad's experience.

Several significant methodologies and studies are identified and feasible in the novel, as established in previous criticism. The study of trauma, destitution, violence, and the politics of survival has been studied. This novel can also be connected to ecological violence, as Sathikulameen et al. (2025) argue that it operates through gradual processes that reshape memory, identity, and resistance. Hameed and Sathikulameen's (2025) study, which examines how crisis narratives negotiate mortality, survival, and cultural memory from a techno-ecocritical perspective. This novel can also be considered in terms of how it demonstrates the silencing of marginalized voices through dominant ideological structures, drawing on Spivak's concept of the subaltern (Subhashini et al., 2025). The destruction of culture and loss of public life have been explored in other studies. The readings illustrate the

diminished agency and the normalcy of bodily loss in wartime. They also demonstrate the novel's resistance to the distance of accounts of Iraq. Antoon's focus is on the lived experience of the Iraqis, grounded in personal recollection and in daily hardships. However, in these studies, art is a discredited profession. In the present study, art is considered an ongoing way of perceiving. After formal sculpture ceases to be possible, Jawad's artistic training continues. This argument follows the ones of cultural destruction and wounded subjectivity (Motyl & Arghavan, 2018; Yebra, 2021).

Jawad's battle starts with his refusal to accept his inheritance. His family hopes that he will continue in the old tradition of mourners washing corpses. He desires a new relationship with bodies, matter and form. Sculpture provides that relation and assures self-selected work. His decision also brings a clash between his responsibilities to his father and his family's memory. His imagination is against the washhouse, the studio. One location offers the possibility of creation, movement, and future. The other place is where ritual, obligation, and the recurrence of death reside. This contrast is at first glance an easy and uncomplicated one. Over the course of the novel, the stability is gradually disrupted. War comes in the studio as it enters the washhouse. It makes their border, which Jawad is trying to keep up, break. This collapse is already announced in the first nightmare. A marble washing bench is exposed in the landscape, and Reem is lying on it. There, desire and death are indistinguishable, as are rain and violence, and ritual. The nightmare is a fusion of erotic memory and this threat to the body and to washing. It also demonstrates that Jawad has been unable to distinguish between sleep and mortuary work. Later, he talks about death as an active part in everyday life:

Death is not content with what it takes from me in my waking hours; it insists on haunting me even in my sleep. Isn't it enough that I toil all day tending to its eternal guests, preparing them to sleep in its lap? Is death punishing me because I thought I could escape its clutches? (Antoon, 2013, p. 3)

In this passage, death is not just physical; it is the force of death. Labour, thought, sleep, memory and imagination are threatened by death. Jawad is unable to keep it in the washhouse. He is also unable to get away through art, love, and movement. In this novel, death is thus an entire state of being. This condition alters the way artists pay attention without completely taking it away. This reshaping process transits to the body. Sculpture starts with the intentional focus on shape, form and body. Jawad's research focuses on understanding surfaces' ability to retain movement and human presence. In addition to washing corpses, they must also come into contact with bodies in their Corpse Washing routine. However, those bodies come after the violence. Bullets and explosions, torture and decay are marks on human form. The dead body is a witness to political history. It also becomes an item that needs to be taken care of before burial. Jawad is between these two definitions. He views the body as "damaged matter" and "singular human remains. The

double perception is honed by his artistic training. This tension leads to an embodied care reading of this text. Embodied care is practical care (touch and body). The act of washing corpses is not beautiful nor redemptive, as the term does not imply. Jawad is prone to tiredness, dismay, fear and breakdowns. The work also ensnares him in a way of life he had spurned. However, even with careful washing, the dead cannot be neglected entirely. Restores order in the wake of violent disorder. It also adds to the restoration of the body's identity for bodies which have been treated as expendable. This process is important in the context of an urban environment, where many casualties are anonymous. More recently, there has been a critique of repeated trauma and culturally specific suffering (Salam & Abu Shomar, 2024). This study focuses attention on the bodily movements that respond to that suffering.

Baghdad is about more than history, either. The city is another body that is hurt. Repeated losses of streets, institutions, museums, libraries, statues and homes. These damaged spaces are now a part of Jawad's artistic identity. This is evident in his memories of the Academy. The damage to cultural institutions reduces the space for the future of art to be created. It also degrades the shared memory. Jawad's crisis is thus part of a cultural crisis. His broken sculpture reflects the broken life of Baghdad. A spatial reading of the recent has been linked to shifting notions of belonging and perception (Al Hamdany et al., 2025). The following paper builds on that insight regarding artistic survival. The statues in the novel have this broader meaning, and it is most emphatically pronounced. Jawad believes monuments are a component of the battle between history and memory. They are created, torn down and given new meanings by political power. In war, even things that are meant for eternity are not spared. Jawad tells his deceased father about this turbulent past: History is a struggle of statues and monuments, Father. I will not have a share in all of this, because I have yet to sculpt anything important. Even Saddam's huge statue in Firdaws Square was brought down right after your death. I thought I would be happy since I detested him so much, but I felt I'd been robbed of the happiness. (Antoon, 2013, p. 103)

The passage draws a link between personal failure and national destruction. Jawad has never created enduring art forms as he had envisioned. Political changes are also destabilising public monuments. The artist and the statue thus have an ambiguity. Both are in history, which can efface form in no time. This instability complicates and deepens the challenge and need for aesthetic resistance. The meaning of preserving form is meaningful because destruction is normal. There must be limits to this argument regarding resistance. Jawad is a fighter who does not fight war with art. He does not renovate the city through sculpture. He also does not take the act of washing the dead bodies at random and make it art. Any more would be the romanticisation of compulsion and sorrow. His resistance is incomplete, weak and tainted. It is a continued development of the human form. It lives on in memory in times of damage to public culture. It also lives on by not disregarding the deceased. Resistance is thus the theme of preservation in the novel, not victory. Art is not

enough to save Jawad's brother, father, friends or lovers. It can have nothing to do with preventing invasion, occupation or sectarian killing. It can do nothing to save the Academy from harm.

However, when Jawad's artistic perception is altered, so is his understanding of destruction. He sees bodies as entities with pasts and selves. He sees statues as “unsteady bearers of political memory”. He observes the city of Baghdad as a “wounded cultural environment”. These perceptions keep the numbness from becoming complete, even if the numbness seems desirable. The first degree of aesthetic resistance, then, is the attention that remains. Through memory and care, it goes on. The paper thus asks: What happens to art when it is under prolonged lethal stress? It also poses questions such as: What happens to artistic perception when formal practice fails? The first question concerns sculpture, institutions, and historical violence. The second one is related to body, touch, memory and care. These questions are a combination of making beyond artistic failure. Jawad's forsaken sculpture remains an integral part of his later experience. It forms his perception of bodies and broken urban forms. His artistic self is not completely suppressed but is displaced. In this study, the following is argued: *The Corpse Washer* offers displaced aesthetic practice. This practice takes form and shifts from sculpture to witnessing and to caring. Jawad does not choose to move, and the movement is still painful. However, his training in art and the care in the graveyard keep coming together in the novel. The washhouse turns into an unappealing place for the body.

The dead body is a ruined document of the violence of history. Baghdad turns into a greater body, in which art and death are both included. Aesthetic resistance is the maintenance of form in this structure, in the face of forced anonymity. This distinction leads to the central claim. Jawad is not just an artist who is going to die. The place and role of his art shift. It moves away from the studio but remains present in the body contact. The process of mourning work becomes the painful locus of that changed focus. The act of grieving labour becomes the painful place of that changed focus. The movement does not compensate for war and forced inheritance. It shows how the perception and imagination of art are alive even in the face of damage. Art is thus exposed as fragile, exiled, and politically engaged in the novel. Art is fragile, exiled and ethically active. This study provides a targeted interpretation of this change. Violence and trauma have been proven to be important themes in the novel through the existing scholarship. This paper focuses on the cohesiveness of the attention of sculptural and mortuary care. It is contended that both practices include the use of the hands in Jawad's hands. These hands are first looking to make something, to form something. Later, they tend to form broken by history. The change is a central conflict of the novel. It also states what its toughest form of resistance is.

Methods

The qualitative literary analysis was used in this study to analyse aesthetic resistance in *The Corpse Washer*. This analysis was centred on the link among art, death, and caring.

The predominant approach to examining texts was close reading. The techniques studied were repeated images, settings, actions and contrasts in the story. The focus was on the change of artistic practice in the face of extended violence. The study did not take the novel as a historical document. It explored the representation of political and corporeal experience through literature. The analysis was thus based on text patterns rather than on facts. The study employed an interpretive design, which involved sustained textual reading. The passages chosen were relevant to the main argument. The following were given special attention: scenes of sculpture and artistic training. The scenes of corpse washing were also analysed. The study also depicted broken bodies and ruined urban landscapes. Analysis of dreams, memories, rituals and recurring objects. These elements have been analysed in terms of their function within the novel's aesthetic structure. The reading process alternated between micro and macro levels of the story. This approach enabled local information to guide the overall interpretation. The analytical process was divided into three interrelated stages.

The first step was to find passages about artistic aspirations and sculpture. It is through these passages that Jawad came to be associated with creation and physicality. They also uncovered the significance of artistry in artists' lives. His training at the Academy was a focus. It was analysed how sculptures promote autonomy and possibility for the future. It also explored the development of artistic identity through touch and sight. The first textual cluster was these scenes. They were the first to set up the novel's first link between Art and Life. Passages of bodily destruction and mortuary labour marked the second stage. The scenes with washing, cleansing, touching and preparing the dead were included. This study has focused on the impact of war on the meaning of the human body. The bodies were read as material forms shaped by violence. They were also read as remains, as remembered personal history. The study involved a comparison of sculptural attention to mortuary attention. This comparison did not take into account the disparity between the two practices. Sculpture continues to be voluntary, creative and future-oriented. The washing of corpses is still obligatory, monotonous and connected to death. Their common focus on the physical form was the aspect of analysis they chose to examine. The third stage examined changes in art perception. This stage examined the role of Jawad's trained attention in a context outside formal sculpture. The analysis was centred on caring practices towards the damaged bodies. These included washing, arranging, cleaning and shrouding. The study focused on whether or not these actions uphold human dignity. It also asked whether they are capable of being anonymous or subjected to the erasure of their bodies. This step was the backbone of the paper. Artistic practice was thus explored as not destroyed, but displaced. This displacement was followed throughout the novel.

The principle of aesthetic resistance was used as the primary analytical concept. It was a reference to the preservation of human beings' form, memory and value. It did not mention any organised political opposition. It also failed to define art as "flight from

violence. The idea was carried over to Jawad's ongoing focus on the bodies. It was also used in creating his art and sculpture. The study explored the question of the survival of aesthetic attention in harmed social conditions. This enabled the analysis to be linked to ethical caring and artistic form. It also helped to define the boundaries of resistance in the novel. The main analytical framework was complemented with embodied care. Practical attention was described as when attention is given in a practical way through body movements. It consisted of washing, touching, arranging and preparing the dead. The actions were looked at without romanticising Jawad's work. He was tired and frightened, and had no alternative but to do what he did, the study said. Washing the dead was not considered to be an art. It was studied in the context of a transformation of the site of aesthetic attention. This separation prevented the false redemption arguments from being made. It thus maintained the balance between care and compulsion. The major spatial and symbolic motifs were also analysed. The Academy was contrasted with the washhouse, which served as a central space. The Academy was the place of artistic formation, the place of personal choice. The washhouse was a legacy of responsibility and of encountering death over and over. This research analysed the effect of war on the atrophy of the boundary of these spaces. The pomegranate tree was a recurring image and was accorded secondary attention. Baghdad was also a huge spatial field. The city was interpreted as a 'cultural environment in danger'. Its ruins were connected with broken bodies and discontinued artistic life.

The narrative structure also guided the analytical process. The novel alternates among past, imagined and real experience. The changes were examined in terms of their role in representing trauma and continuity. The same image was traced in various time periods. Special focus was placed on the recurring body-and-art image. The method was also used for comparisons of creation and destruction. Beauty and ruination were accorded the same attention. The contrasts facilitated the organisation of the interpretation of aesthetic resistance. The study focused on a textual approach. It did not try to read all of the themes. Political history was added to the text only where necessary for interpretation. The analysis continued to focus on Jawad's artistic consciousness. It also continued to focus on the human body as a material form. Generalisations were only made when there were repeated patterns in the text. This method helped to obtain a short, coherent analysis. Thus, the method used was a close reading and thematic text organisation. It shifted from artistry to body destruction, becoming a body of care. The analysis of the sculpture and the washing of the corpse were considered to be two related textual fields. The centre of their relationship was the main focus of the central interpretation. The study examined aesthetic survival amid extreme violence as follows. It also revealed the changes in artistic attention in the case of the impossibility of formal creation.

Textual Analysis

Jawad's artistic aspiration starts as an intentional denial of the inherited death. As a family doctor, death is at the heart of everyday living for him. The wash house symbolises continuity, responsibility, trust and fatherhood. This continuity is rejected by Jawad, who

sees sculpture as another relation to the body. He would like to make shapes, not bodies to bury. His selection is thus a personal and aesthetic statement. It sets him apart from what previous generations have done. This separation takes place in the Academy of Fine Arts. The juxtaposition of the corpse's washing and the sculpture is, at first sight, total. Sculpture is a part of creation, imagination and individual choice. Corpse washing is in the domain of death, ritual and inherited obligation. This contrast creates Jawad's sense of his own early identity.

Art is his way to another life, he believes. The ruling also gives him the power to have his destiny in his own hands. He feels his father has rejected him. Jawad is aware of it as self-formation. Artistic practice gets a political dimension in this conflict in the novel. Jawad does not start as a political artist. He does not make an opposition programme. He is still an unassigned social role to choose from. Art allows for an alternate attention and valuation. It makes invisible bodies, things and experiences visible. Aesthetics is concerned with the organisation of what can be perceived, according to Rancière (2004). Jawad is an artist who has transformed his perception and understanding of material form through his training. This trained perception lives on after his career as a painter fails.

The Academy provides Jawad with a language to comprehend form and the presence of human beings. Significantly, his interest in Giacometti becomes apparent. The thinness of the figures, their isolation and their uncertain lives are all characteristics of Giacometti's work. Jawad is attracted to figures that look exposed, incomplete. This attraction is foreshadowing what he would see in the future with the injured bodies. Vulnerability is already present in the artistic body in the studio. Later, this artistic concern is turned into material experience during war. The line between representation and bodily harm will slowly blur. Jawad's artistic growth is also linked to Baghdad's cultural development. There are galleries, teachers, monuments and artistic histories in the city. The youth Jawad can play in these areas and envision a future. A lot of this cultural environment is lost during war. It is not just buildings that are destroyed. It also disrupts the continuity of work and the artist's confidence. Artists lose secure jobs and venues for showing their art. Political battle breaks out over public monuments. Cultural items are at risk of being stolen and destroyed. This process is explored in the novel in Jawad's reflections on public statues. The outcome of their fate shows how ephemeral political memory is. Monuments are a way for regimes to create historical authority. Subsequent powers annihilate them to create a new history. Jawad is aware that statues cannot remain outside these conflicts. Their devastation also represents his own stunted artistic career.

History is a struggle of statues and monuments, Father. I will not have a share in all of this, because I have yet to sculpt anything important. Even Saddam's huge statue in Firdaws Square was brought down right after your death. I thought I would be happy since I detested him so much, but I felt I'd been robbed of the happiness. That was not the end I had

imagined. Those who brought him down were the ones who put him there in the first place. (Antoon, 2013, p. 103)

The passage is an intermingling of political history and personal artistic defeat. Jawad believes that the destiny of the sculpted forms is the key to national change. The statue loses its political nature. It is proof that form can be created, controlled and destroyed. Jawad has not created the sculpture that he had envisioned. He thus thinks he is excluded from the struggle of history, which he has to wage via monuments. His personal disillusionment becomes a part of the broader crisis of Iraqi cultural memory. The artist is a witness to destruction but cannot stop it. The passage also rejects the simplistic notion of political satisfaction. Jawad despises Saddam, but the removal of the statue does not bring about any feeling of relief. The event continues to be influenced by foreign interventions and pre-existing political connections. Jawad thus considers destruction as a part of a process. Artistic freedom does not come without the removal of one monument. It establishes the form's fragility. The reaction he gives here reveals the intricacies of the novel's engagement with political images. Even if art is seemingly permanent, it is still susceptible to power. This exposure is why the title is related to art and death. Mortality is not limited to the death of humans. Cultural forms are also killed in the history of violence. Statues disappear. Institutions weaken. Artistic careers are not completed. Private relationships collapse. Artistic future is one more casualty of war. This expanded narrative of interrupted forms includes Jawad's abandoned sculptures.

The Body between Sculpture and Ruin

Now the human body is the focus of Jawad's artistic education and the work of the mortuary. Sculpture helped him to understand proportion, surface, weight and posture. The corpse washing requires a different kind of attention to the body. These practices are still vastly different. A sculpture is a representation made using 3-D forms. A material body is given to the corpse washed after death. However, both of these practices involve constant contact with form. This parallel emphasises Jawad's hands. Hands were originally a part of art-making. Worked with tools and materials in the studio. Later, they clean up the bodies of those who have been killed. The change is not a symbolic replacement; it is a change in professional development. It is a compulsory channeling of bodily ability. The artist's hands change their function in History. The dead bodies that the corpses bring to the washhouse show violence in terms of damage to the body. They have burns, wounds, mutilation and fragmentation. The body becomes a document, a document which cannot be deleted by political language. Scarry (1985) says that extreme pain eradicates language and wreaks havoc on people's world. Antoon undoes this process in a literary fashion. The broken body is visible once again thanks to Jawad's attention. Each dead body becomes more than just a casualty number.

Jawad's work then puts him in face-to-face contact with the physical consequences of violence. Political events reach him via flesh. He does not see war on the news or in public

debate. He is a receiver of bodies that have been formed by the explosions, shootings, torture and sectarian killing. The washhouse is a last stop for political violence. It is also a place where anonymity is temporarily interrupted. This is a disruption that is important because mass violence dehumanises people. Repeating something makes the emotion fade. Exposing viewers to such images of suffering over time can also diminish moral attention. Sontag (2003) explores this problem in the context of viewing "distant pain. Another issue is that Jawad has a problem. His ties with suffering are not far removed. He brings into contact with the bodies that become statistics in public discourse. The reader is forced to stay in this challenging proximity in the novel. The body also alters Jawad's perception of form in art. The body was used as a model for sculpture earlier. It then appears torn and incomplete. War is like a mad sculptor, transforming human shape without permission. The novel's turnaround is a key aspect. Jawad was once someone who wished to create something artistically, using his will. He is then given the bodies altered by destructive forces. Lost control of form but still perceives form. This collapse is made explicit in the dream, in which Giacometti's sculpture plays a part. On the washing bench, there is a statue that melts when it gets wet. Jawad attempts to mend it, but the pieces fall away from his hands. The scene is a composite of a studio and a washhouse. The artistic form cannot withstand the conditions surrounding Jawad. He tries to restore the sculpture, but he is unsuccessful. The dream is thus not just a loss at work but also a loss within the dream. It is an expression of his faith in artistic immortality.

However, aesthetics are not destroyed at the end of the novel. Jawad is still very focused on the bodies he is watching. His work in sculpture continues to hone his perception. He observes surfaces, wounds, shapes and the absence. This attention does not make corpses into artworks. It helps to prevent the damaged person from being "empty" visually. Bennett (2005) associates aesthetic experience with a way of engaging in the body that is not based on mere identification. Jawad's attention is through this embodied proximity. He faces injury but does not fully comprehend the significance. The novel also puts the destruction of the body in a broader context of organised death. Since the invasion, Jawad has come across more and more dead bodies. Death becomes a routine, a productive, economic process. As violence escalates, more work is done in the family washhouse. When violence gets worse, more work is done in the family's wash house. Jawad is aware of the abominable nature of this situation. His income increases as bodies keep coming. So survival depends on continued death. This structure is similar to the one described by Mbembe (2003) as 'necropolitical power'. The nature of political order is organised by exposure to death. Political order is organised by exposure to death. Easier to kill some lives than others. In Antoon's novel, this is manifested in the day-to-day physical effects. The wash house takes the leftovers of the political systems. Jawad operates in the wake of decisions taken elsewhere. His work thus ends a bloody political system.

Throughout the novel, he does not appear to be removed from these bodies. Repetition gives rise to fatigue, but not to apathy. Even though it is not possible to reach out emotionally, nightmares persist. His dreams are filled with lovers, corpses, statues and family members. Artistic memory and experience of death blend. This is the extent of his impaired mind. It also makes it clear that his aesthetic sensibility is alive and well.

From Artistic Labour to Embodied Care

Jawad's comeback to the washhouse seems to be the final nail in the coffin for him. He becomes his father's heir, whom he has always wanted. What he did not want to do, he ended up doing. However, it is not the same paternal order that is restored by the return. The circumstances have turned upside down. His father operated in a more stable ritual world. Jawad's job is during mass violence. That profession, then, has yet another legacy. There are also hints of Jawad's artistic career in the washhouse. In his old notebook, he has ritual instructions and some sketches. Drawings surround some notes on washing bodies.

The following is an important material detail that demonstrates art and the practice of death were never totally divorced. Jawad's artistic hand came into the washhouse even before his official comeback. These practices are retained on the same pages of the notebook. The sounds blend into each other by touch. Careful attention should be paid to the body when washing the dead body. The body has to be washed, cleansed, dried and shrouded. This action does not add any life that was taken away. They do bring a last touch of organisation. The body is often split and/or bare of clothing. The ritual returns it to a state of readiness for mourning and burial. This is the most obvious way of aesthetic resistance in the novel. Resistance is not a force that opposes those who cause death here. It does not take Jawad away from political violence. It will help to save the body from total abandonment. The act is still limited, repetitive and hurts. The interest in it is exactly in this range.

Jawad's artwork thus takes up the issue of the ethics of form. Now he can no longer make sculptures for public display. He is still able to tend to others' skeletal remains. His work safeguards singularity in the face of violence, which creates anonymity. The dead are dead because, violently, they were treated as disposable. By attending to the washing ritual, the disposability is answered. This does not make the wash house a studio space. This type of reading would lessen the novel's agonising struggle. When Jawad gets back to his own job, he never celebrates. His body and mind are still drained. His care is worth it since there is no emotional resolution. The novel does not let go of the trauma to move towards healing. This is the end of this unresolved condition with the help of the pomegranate tree. The water used for washing the dead is given to the tree. It is still producing flowers and fruit. Life grows next to death but does not conquer it. The tree does not remove the bodies that feed its soil. It brings their presence with its own continuity. Jawad realises that the concepts of 'life' and 'death' are not distinct. His last reflection, too, is back to the language of sculpture:

The living die or depart, and the dead always come. I had thought that life and death were two separate worlds with clearly marked boundaries. But now I know they are conjoined, sculpting each other. My father knew that, and the pomegranate tree knows it as well. (Antoon, 2013, p. 184)

The phrase “sculpting each other” helps complete the novel's aesthetic form. Sculpture is no longer a lost art of Jawad's. It becomes a blueprint for understanding historical beings. Life makes death happen through remembering and ceremony. Loss, fear and repetition are how death forms life. Jawad is created in this double product. There is also a change of collusion between the studio and the washhouse, as described in the previous passage. Jawad used to think that sculpture and corpse washing were in different worlds. He comes to realise that each practice is related to the theme of the vulnerable form. The sculptor strives to make a presence. The sculptor strives to make a presence. After the death, the corpse washer is at work. Both practices continue to be preoccupied with the meaning of bodies. This recognition is not an acceptable fate for Jawad. He lost his art, and it is a reality. The statues he did not make continue to haunt him. His aesthetic consciousness, however, lives on in another form of labour. The novel thus will not be a total failure or a simple success. Jawad continues to be an artist who has broken out of his formal practice. He is also a worker who protects the dead from total annihilation at his hands. There is regular, orderly movement of text. First, God's gift of life clashes with artistic ambition.

War then eradicates those conditions that foster this opposition. The broken body, then, is a place where art and death collide. Mortuary care is the only other practice that continues after death. These stages are combined in the final image of mutual sculpting. This is Antoon's biggest feat. He does not show that art is more powerful than war. The novel makes no promise that beauty will overcome violence. It displays more challenging content. Artistic attention can be sustained when artistic production is no longer possible. This attention is still not finished, not complete. Even though it retains shape when violence is sought to be reduced. Jawad's tragedy is not just the loss of one career as an artist, but as a man as well. He reveals in his life the transformation of the function of perception in the context of war. The sculptor's eye is the witness's eye. The artist's hand turns into a washer's hand. Care for what creation leaves behind, giving way to creation. This new practice forms the most fundamental aesthetic opposition to the novel.

Conclusion

In *The Corpse Washer*, writer and artist Sinan Antoon explores art and death as two forces that go hand in hand. The novel is a journey of Jawad's from sculpture to washing corpses. He is a victim of this movement that ushers in the end of his artistic destiny. It also uncovers the nature of the changes war brings to the definition of art-making. Jawad is not just a person who gives up on art and a career. His artistic perception lives on in other, painful work. The analysis has revealed that the two activities, sculpture and corpse washing, are still structurally linked. People need to be closely watched in both practices. Both make use

of the sense of touch, form and material presence. They are still, however, for different purposes. Artistic intention is the factor of sculpture that creates form. Corpse washing is a response to violence that has already damaged the bodies. Jawad thus shifts his focus from working with the material to working with the ruins of human bodies. This change becomes the turning point of the novel and its central conflict. War also expands Baghdad to cover more ground in terms of physical and cultural destruction. The institutions, public spaces, and artistic futures are being destroyed, as are human bodies. His downfall is part of this broader debacle. His personal loss is a sign of the decline of cultural life with longstanding violence. Artists can no longer reliably produce formal art production. However, the sense of beauty does not go away.

The study has suggested that aesthetic resistance is maintained through embodied care. Jawad's activities in the washhouse, on his own and with the help of the Assistant, maintain a sort of dignity and order. His deeds are not undoing death or mending political wrecks. They cannot be completely anonymous and ignored. Washing, touching, arranging and preparing the dead for burial. These acts uphold the dignity and worth of human life amid a system that turns people into casualties. The centrality of the notion of a displaced aesthetic practice is this study's main contribution. Jawad's art is not confined to the realm of sculpture. It moves, and its uses and values are different and moral. Within the labour of the washer of the corpses, the sculptor's attention lives on. This survival is still restricted and is still a hurt. It is not the redemptive power of war. It shows how the perception of aesthetics changes when damaged. Antoon thus refuses to set up a dichotomy between art and death. Both are depicted as forces that constantly mould each other in the novel. Death cannot prevail against art. It may retain memory, form and recognition.

The best resistance to the novel is contained in this preservation. Jawad's hands can no longer create the future he envisioned in art. They are still able to fight the eradication of bodies that history has destroyed. This argument can be furthered in future research by comparing the two pieces of literature. *The Corpse Washer* may be read with other novels about the war in Iraq. These can be studies of the artist, writer, musician, and cultural worker's reactions to prolonged violence. This comparison can shed light on the presence of displaced aesthetic practice in the literature of present-day Iraq. The connection between artwork institutions and national destruction can be explored in further research. There is a need for in-depth research on the Academy of Fine Arts, public statues, museums and cultural spaces. These locations can be the key to understanding the memory and continuity of war. There are also broader possibilities to the notion of embodied care. Further research can be carried out to compare the washing of the dead with nursing and burial, as well as with caring for the body and other work related to it. Such an approach can help to gain a better understanding of care in violent situations. Another useful direction for translation studies comes from the emphasis on translation. The novel was translated into English by Antoon himself. Further research could explore the impact of self-translation on one's body image,

death, art and Baghdad. This research may provide evidence for the changing resistance to aesthetics across languages. The novel could also be used to conduct comparative studies on wounded cities. Baghdad can be the subject of study alongside Beirut, Sarajevo, Gaza, or any other city defined by conflict. This method can consider how damaged bodies and damaged urban spaces are connected in literary form.

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