Exploring anti-narratives of war and de-otherness in Brian Turner's “2000 lbs” and “Alhazen of Basra”

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Abstract The narrative surrounding the United States' decision to declare war on Iraq is a complex and multifaceted issue. The Bush administration did, indeed, make claims asserting a close connection between the Iraqi regime and global terrorism, aiming to shift the focus of the "war on terrorism" toward Iraq. This administration presented inaccurate information and narratives that ultimately led to the occupation of Iraq. Furthermore, the Western view of Iraqis as "the other" played a significant role in justifying the war. Brian Turner, influenced by these war narratives, participated in this controversial conflict. His engagement exposed him to the brutal realities of war and the flaws in its narratives. Consequently, he addressed these issues in his poetry, focusing on the anti-narratives of war and the deothering of Iraqis, as well as the deothering of some American soldiers in the eyes of Iraqis. This aspect has not been thoroughly explored in light of Said's Orientalism and Fanon's concept of "the Other." The article delves into these anti-narratives of war and the deothering processes evident in Turner's poetry, specifically examining "2000 lbs" and "Alhazen of Basra." The study concludes that Turner's anti-narratives of war, presented in these poems, unveil the fallacies of USA war narratives. Moreover, it highlights Turner's efforts to challenge the deothering of some American soldiers stereotyped as invaders in the eyes of Iraqis and his attempts to deother Iraqis, countering portrayals of them as savages and primitives in the eyes of the American people.

Keywords: Brian Turner, Edward Said, Fanon, orientalism, the Other

1. Introduction

The 2003 American invasion of Iraq represents a controversial event in modern history, prompting critical examination of the justifications put forth by the American government and its supporters. A key pillar of US global hegemony lies in its protection of the world's oil reserves, which are particularly concentrated in the Arabian Gulf. Recognizing that oil is a strategic resource essential to military power, the U.S. has taken measures to ensure its uninterrupted flow to the global economy. This control over oil resources has played a significant role in shaping U.S. power on a global scale (Hinnebusch 10).

The Bush administration, backed by its allies, presented a set of claims for the invasion of Iraq to protect its interests. One of these claims was the liberation of the Iraqi people from the rule of Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath Party. Bassil said that concerns about Iraq's alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) have raised fears of their potential use or transfer to terrorist groups, prompting the need for preemptive action. Finally, the establishment of a democratic system aimed to stabilize the region and mitigate the threat of terrorism (2012, 29). The narrative of the war on terrorism served as a primary justification for the 2003 American invasion of Iraq. In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks, the Iraqi government was immediately portrayed as a threat to the international community. The United States asserted a close connection between this regime and global terrorism, emphasizing the need to protect its population and democratic system (Danju et al., 2013). Claims of Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) formed a central premise for invasion, yet these assertions have been debunked, and evidence suggests that the Bush Administration considered inflated, inaccurate claims while aware that Iraq posed no immediate threat to the USA (Cirincione et al., 2004).

In the study titled “The Iraq War 20 years on: Toward A New Regional Architecture” (2023), Louise Fawcett examines the Iraq War of 2003 and its lasting impact on the formation of a new regional order. Fawcett retrospectively analyzes the war and highlights its profound and enduring consequences, focusing on key aspects of change. The study emphasizes that the major objectives envisaged by the U.S. and B.K., who positioned the war as a liberal campaign against Iraq, were not achieved. The war's failure to meet these objectives, along with a misinterpretation of Iraq's intentions and capabilities, resulted in severe damage to Western interests and credibility. Moreover, the war created new instabilities and tensions while exacerbating existing ones. The Iraqi war exposed the poor judgment and mishandling of the US-led decision to initiate the war, overthrow Saddam Hussein, and reconstruct the Iraqi state. The demonstration of ethnic variants and the masculine military power of American combatants over the identity of Iraqi victims, who are predominantly Muslim, has become public.
Essays, novels, short tales, and poetry were produced as a result of the US-led war in Afghanistan and, to a greater extent, the second Iraqi War. Brian Turner, who was recently referred to as “a rock star” in contemporary poetry circles (Bishop, 2010), looks to stand out as the Iraq War poet in his book, here, Bullet (2005), and Phantom Noise (2010). According to Mariani (2020), his work has been compared to that of well-known war poets such as Bruce Weigl, Wilfred Owen, Randall Jarrell, and Yusef Komunyaka. At the start of the twenty-first century, the American soldier and poet Brian Turner was stationed in Iraq. Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), his time in America after the war, his experiences with Iraq as a soldier, and his ongoing cruelty in the fighting zone are all topics covered in his poems. (Swirsky 2015)

One of the central themes in Turner’s poems is the examination of the justifications behind the Iraq War. While the American government and its supporters presented invasion as a defensive response to the threat posed by Saddam Hussein’s purported stockpile of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), Turner’s poetry offers a dissenting perspective. In the study titled “American Soldiers Against “the War on Terror”: War Trauma in Selected Poems by Brian Turner” (2016), Ismael applies Freud’s psychoanalytic theory, Cathy Caruth, Judith Herman, and Shoshana Felman. She demonstrated how this poet attempted to speak aloud about the unspoken reality of war by vividly and graphically describing the suffering, devastation, and terror of the war in Iraq through the eyes of an American soldier. She also demonstrated how the credibility of war poetry can only come from people who have personally experienced such gruesome combat, such as Turner. Like many other American soldiers and veterans, Turner rejects war and the atrocities it causes to both Americans and Iraqis in his poetry. He also battles against political or cultural hegemony that silences war casualties and survivors by repressing them. In another study titled “Picturing the Postmodern Combatant Poetic Mind: Brian Turner's Here, Bullet” (2016), Zahra Ali examines the concept of battlefield consciousness within the context of the American postmodern military, using Brian Turner’s work Here, Bullet as a specific example. Ali argues that Turner sheds light on different aspects of combatant poetic consciousness through four modalities: discrediting overarching narratives, engaging with the imperatives of bioneurological factors, evoking historical perspectives, and emphasizing otherness. Through a multifaceted critique, the study suggests that the sociocultural role of the combatant poet is to challenge the media's idealized portrayal of cyberwarriors and to confront these ideals with the mundane realities of an imperialist war. Ultimately, the study concludes that the poetic voice in Here, Bullet, despite being an American combatant, intellectually opposes the American postmodern military. However, alternative narratives of war to USA narratives are presented by Turner in his poetry. His narratives question the validity of US claims of occupying Iraq. As such, the current study examines the anti-narrative nature of war in Turner’s poetry through the application of Said’s and Fanon’s concepts to release his discourse on deothering Iraq and Iraqis.

2. Discussion

2.1. Turner’s “2000 lbs”: De-Otherizing “Sefwan”

Brian Turner’s selected poems offer a compelling exploration of the complexities of war, providing an anti-narrative lens through which to understand the human experience and consequences of armed conflicts. Turner’s work challenges the dehumanization often associated with war and invites readers to question the underlying motivations and political calculations that shape such interventions. Thus, the article investigates these anti-narratives in his poetry in light of Fanon’s and Said’s concept of the “Other”.

The “2000 lbs” poem is written in the collection titled Here Bullet. Edward Said’s concept of otherness can be considered in this poem. According to Said, the concept of otherness relates to the process of differentiating and defining oneself or one’s own group in contrast to another. In regard to war and conflict, this process frequently leads to the dehumanization of the perceived “other,” reinforcing stereotypes and assisting in the continuation of violence (1978). In his powerful poem “2000 lbs”, Brian Turner questions the idea of otherness by underlining the similarities in the shared human experiences of love, suffering, and loss that unite people from different cultural and national backgrounds. Turner invites the reader to empathize with a wide range of characters through emotive, vivid language and imagery to create a deeper appreciation for humanity, which transcends the arbitrary lines that frequently divide people and encourage a greater understanding of the complexities of war. With an emphasis on the poem’s depiction of common human experiences, Turner uses language to generate empathy and to challenge preconceptions and binary thinking.

In the “2000 lbs” poem, the concept of the “other” is represented. Turner imagines the behaviors, feelings, and thoughts of seven distinct individuals just before the bomb explodes in a Mosul market and kills them: four Iraqi civilians, two American soldiers, and the suicide bomber himself. The poem stands out for how beautifully it captures the brief, complex interval between life and death. If “2000 lbs” was to gain widespread recognition and be used as an educational tool in the future, it would likely be for its ability to foster empathy, encourage critical thinking, and provide a deeper understanding of the human dimensions of the Iraq War. The term “2000 lbs” could serve as a powerful catalyst for discussions on the Iraq War, as Dooley stated: “In fifty to one hundred years, this is the poem that teachers will use to teach the Iraq War, much as Wilfred Owens' poem 'Dulce et Decorum Est' is used when discussing the First World War” (qtd. in Najmi 64).

The poem presents a diverse array of characters from both sides of the conflict, allowing readers to explore their experiences, emotions, and perspectives. Sefwan and other Iraqis act as the “other” for the American forces. The portrayal of
Sefwan with the concept of the “other” aligns with Frantz Fanon’s perspective on the subject. Fanon, a prominent theorist on colonialism and postcolonialism, explored the dehumanization and alienation experienced by marginalized groups under oppressive systems (1952). In the poem, Sefwan represents the “other” within the context of the Iraq War, and his experiences reflect aspects of Fanon’s concept. Fanon argues that the dominant group in a colonial or oppressive system tends to create and perpetuate stereotypes and dehumanizing narratives about the “other”. These narratives serve to justify their own power and maintain control over the marginalized group. Thus, “empowerment and supremacy are extended to the American soldiers and their national and ethnic identity” at the expense of Iraqis (Salih, et al., 2018, 291). In “2000 lbs,” the American soldiers view Sefwan and other Iraqis as the “other” and often perceive them through a lens of suspicion and fear. Although the otherization of Iraqis in general and Sefwan in particular, Turner presents an anti-narrative to the concept of “the other” in “2000 lbs”.

These peoples are the inheritors of a long tradition of history, art, and religion, the senses of which they have not entirely lost and which they are probably anxious about prolonging. We assumed the responsibility of intervening in their development, sometimes without consulting them, sometimes in response to their request. . . . We claim, rightly or wrongly, to represent a superior civilization and be the cause of the right given us by virtue of this superiority, which we regularly affirm with such assurance as makes it seem incontestable to the natives; we have called in question all their native traditions. . . (Said, 1978. 249)

Sefwan’s reminiscence of his past experiences of love and pleasure serves as a counterpoint to the dehumanizing narratives projected onto him by the American forces. By emphasizing his humanity and personal connections, the poem challenges the stereotypical image of the “other” and humanizes Sefwan’s character. Fanon also discusses the psychological impact of colonialism and oppression on the “other.” The constant observation, discrimination, and violence experienced by the marginalized group can lead to feelings of alienation and a loss of identity. Sefwan’s contemplation of his memories and the disruption of his life due to the war demonstrate the psychological toll of being the “other” within the context of the Iraq War. Moreover, Fanon emphasizes the importance of recognizing and confronting the dehumanization of the “other” to dismantle oppressive systems. By presenting Sefwan’s perspective and personal history, “2000 lbs” challenges the dominant narrative and encourages readers to question their own biases and preconceptions about the “other.” Turner prompts readers to empathize with Sefwan’s experiences and consider the impact of the war on innocent civilians:

A flight of gold, that’s what Sefwan thinks as he lights a Miami, draws in the smoke and waits in his taxi at the traffic circle. He thinks of summer 1974, lifting pitchforks of grain high in the air, the slow drift of it like the fall of Shatha’s hair, and although it was decades ago, he still loves her. (7-13)

By providing insight into Sefwan’s personal history and inner thoughts, the poem humanizes him and challenges the stereotypical portrayal of Iraqis as faceless enemies.

2.2. De-Otherizing the Two American Soldiers

In contrast, American soldiers such as Lt. Jackson and Sgt. Ledoux stand in for the “other” in the eyes of Iraqi citizens. Turner wants to otherize these two soldiers in the eyes of Iraqis too. He goes deeply into the lives of these soldiers, highlighting their humanity and frailty instead of merely being foreign invaders; these depictions show the soldiers as complex people with their own feelings, desires, and concerns. Throughout 2000, there were subtle indications of the soldiers’ otherness and their status as foreign invaders. For example, in the depiction of Sgt. Ledoux speaking but not hearing his own words, this suggests a disconnection or lack of understanding between the soldiers and the Iraqi citizens. This can be seen as a representation of soldiers being “othered” by the local population, who may view them as outsiders with whom they struggle to communicate. Additionally, the soldiers’ presence and actions in the poem can be seen as a source of tension and fear for Iraqi civilians. The explosion itself serves as a stark reminder of the violence and destruction brought upon their lives by American forces:

Sgt. Ledoux of the National Guard speaks but cannot hear the words coming out, and it’s just as well his eardrums ruptured because it lends the world a certain calm, though the traffic circle is filled with people (24-28).

Additionally, the metaphor of Lt. Jackson—blowing “bubbles” just before the explosion can be interpreted as a representation of American soldiers being deothered by Iraqis. By showcasing this moment of vulnerability and childlike innocence, the poem suggests that soldiers are not solely foreign invaders but complex individuals who are also affected by the circumstances of war. The act of blowing bubbles involves several metaphorical layers. Bubbles are delicate and ephemeral, symbolizing the fleeting nature of life and the fragility of human existence. Lt. Jackson’s action may be seen as a symbol of soldiers’ humanity, as they desire simple moments of joy and normalcy amidst the chaos of war. It serves as a reminder that they, too, have their own hopes, fears, and dreams. However, the metaphor of blowing bubbles can also convey a sense of innocence and vulnerability. Bubbles easily pop or are destroyed, much like soldiers’ lives and experiences in a hostile environment. The soldiers, as individuals within the occupying force, may have felt the weight of being perceived as the “other”
by the Iraqi people. They could have been subject to suspicion, hostility, and the potential for violence from the local population. By juxtaposing this tender moment of blowing bubbles with the imminent explosion, the poem presents another image of the soldiers. On the one hand, they are deothered as complex individuals with their own humanity and desires. On the other hand, they are part of a larger military force that is seen as the “other” by the Iraqi people:

*The civil affairs officer, Lt. Jackson, stares at his missing hands, which make no sense to him, no sense at all, to wave these absurd stumps held in the air where just a moment before (64-68).*

Although the poem provides glimpses into soldiers’ humanity and complexity, it also acknowledges the perspective of the Iraqi people, who may perceive them as part of the occupying force that has disrupted their lives. By presenting both sides of the conflict and exploring the experiences and perceptions of both Iraqi civilians and American soldiers, the poem invites readers to consider the complexities of the “othering” process. The poem highlights that the concept of the “other” is not one-sided but can exist within different contexts and from various perspectives. Through these portrayals, the poem encourages empathy and understanding for all parties involved, recognizing that both sides may experience the sense of being “othered” by the other. The poem presents a multifaceted exploration of the concept of the “other” and encourages readers to consider the complexities and dynamics of perception in times of conflict.

### 2.3. De-Otherizing the Bombers

Finally, in this poem, Brian Turner complicates the notion of the “other” by presenting the bomber as both a perpetrator of violence and a victim of the blast. The portrayal of the bomber in Brian Turner’s poem “2000 lbs” aligns with the concepts of “the other”, as discussed by Frantz Fanon and Edward Said. Both Fanon and Said explore the dynamics of power, identity, and the construction of the “other” in relation to colonialism and imperialism. In his book Black Skin, Fanon White Masks (1952) examines the dehumanization and alienation experienced by colonized individuals who “in order to shatter the hellish cycle, he explodes” (Fanon 140). He argues that the colonizer constructs the colonized as the “other,” denying their humanity and perpetuating a system of domination. The poem challenges this construction of the “other” by presenting the bomber not only as a perpetrator of violence but also as someone who experiences fear and anxiety. By humanizing the bomber, the poem disrupts the notion of an essentialized “other” and encourages readers to recognize the complex humanity of individuals involved in acts of violence:

*It begins simply with a fist, white-knuckled and tight, glossy with sweat. With two eyes in a rearview mirror watching for a convoy. The radio a soundtrack that adrenaline has pushed into silence, replacing it with a heartbeat, his thumb trembling over the button (1-6).*

Edward Said, in his Orientalism, explores how the West has historically constructed the East as an exotic, inferior “other”. This process of “othering” involves essentializing and stereotyping Eastern cultures and peoples. In “2000 lbs”, the poem complicates the notion of the “other” by emphasizing the bomber’s victimhood in the aftermath of the explosion. By highlighting the consequences and obliteration faced by the bomber, the poem challenges the stereotype of the bomber driven solely by hatred. This portrayal invites readers to reflect on the motivations and experiences of individuals involved in acts of violence, weakening the simplistic categorization of the bomber as an enemy or a product of a particular culture. These lines convey vivid imagery and capture the chaotic aftermath of an explosion triggered by an individual. “He is obliterated at the epicenter” - This image depicts the complete destruction of the person who triggered the button. The word “obliterated” suggests total annihilation, emphasizing the devastating impact of the explosion. “He is everywhere, he is of all things.” This image conveys the idea that the person’s presence or influence extends beyond their physical existence. This suggests that the consequences of their actions ripple throughout their surroundings, affecting everything in their vicinity. “His touch is the air taken in, the blast and wave, the electricity of shock.” This line utilizes sensory imagery to describe the immediate aftermath of the explosion. This suggests that the impact of the explosion permeates the air, creating a shockwave that swallows and electrifies the environment. Then, the poet portrays the physiological response of fear and panic experienced by individuals in the aftermath of the explosion. The sound of the heart beating rapidly and the rush of blood are metaphorically attributed to the triggering individual, emphasizing the impact and terror caused by their actions. The last image introduces religious and martyrdom connotations. This suggests that the person who triggered the explosion may have done so in the name of their faith, with the cry of a martyr’s prayer, “Inshallah”. This image adds complexity and potential motivations behind the act. Overall, these lines paint a vivid and haunting picture of the destructive power and aftermath of an explosion, emphasizing the widespread impact and potentially religious undertones associated with the event:

*And the man who triggered the button, who may have invoked the Prophet’s name, or not—he is obliterated at the epicenter, he is everywhere, he is of all things, his touch is the air taken in, the blast and wave, the electricity of shock, his is the sound the heart makes quick in the panic’s rush, the surge of blood searching for light and color, that sound the martyr cries filled with the word his soul is made of, Inshallah (97-107).*
Indeed, the emotive language employed in the poem “2000 lbs” plays a crucial role in fostering empathy and promoting a deeper understanding of characters’ experiences. By delving into the emotional lives of individuals affected by violence, such as the old woman cradling her grandson, the poem humanizes these characters and evokes a sense of shared humanity with the reader. The lines describe a scene involving an old woman and her grandson in the context of violence and tragedy. Turner’s art often explored themes of destruction, chaos, and the sublime, reflecting the tension between the human experience and the overwhelming forces of nature. This scene is a parallel between Turner’s portrayal of powerful and destructive forces and the violence and tragedy evoked in the scene with the old woman and her grandson. The presence of blood and soaked black dress symbolizes the destructive impact of violence, while the image of the woman cradling the grandson represents a contrasting sense of compassion and humanity in the face of such devastation. The concept of the other can be seen in the juxtaposition of tenderness and violence within the scene. The grandmother and her grandson, in their vulnerable state, stand in contrast to the violence and chaos surrounding them. They become the “other” in the sense that they are separated from and affected by the brutality occurring nearby. These lines convey a complex and emotionally charged scene, blending elements of care and violence, tenderness and destruction:

"Nearby, an old woman cradles her grandson, whispering, rocking him on her knees as though singing him to sleep, her hands wet with their blood, her black dress soaked in it as her legs give out and she buckles with him to the ground."

These lines highlight the profound grief and anguish experienced by the old woman as she holds her bloodied grandson. Vivid imagery and poignant language create powerful emotional connections between readers and characters, transcending cultural or national boundaries. This evocation of empathy encourages readers to recognize the universal capacity for suffering and the devastating impact of violence on individuals and communities. This approach challenges the tendency to view the victims and the affected communities as mere statistics or distant “others,” urging readers to confront the human consequences of violence. In fostering a sense of connection and empathy, regardless of cultural or national identity, the poem prompts readers to reflect on the broader implications of violence and the imperative for compassion and understanding in a world where the lines between "us" and "them" are often artificially drawn. This approach encourages us to go beyond stereotypes and preconceived notions, embracing a more inclusive and empathetic perspective.

In conclusion, the language used in “2000 lbs” is instrumental in emphasizing the shared humanity and vulnerability of both Iraqi civilians and American soldiers. Through vivid and emotive descriptions, metaphors, and similes, Turner effectively transcends the boundaries of nationality and culture, revealing the common experiences and emotions that bind people together even in the face of war and conflict, and this approach serves to challenge the concept of the “other”.

2.4. Turner’s De-Otherness in “Alhazen of Basra”

The “Al Hazen of Basra” by Brian Turner is written in the collection titled Here, Bullet, which explores the life and legacy of the Arab scientist Alhazen, who lived in the 10th century. A figure who is often overlooked in Western accounts of the history of science. The poem emphasizes the intellectual curiosity and accomplishments of Alhazen, as well as the challenges that he faced in a world marked by conflict and instability. The poem also highlights the enduring impact of Alhazen’s work and the ways in which it has continued to shape our understanding of the world. Brian Turner’s poem highlights the portrayal of Alhazen as a historical figure who is depicted as trustworthy and knowledgeable, akin to a shaman who possesses spiritual insight and his ability to extend a “spiritual map” and release poetic consciousness from cultural isolation and guide it toward intellectual maturation. Furthermore, Ibn Al-Haytham’s influence is described as transnational, indicating the broad impact of his ideas. The poet also highlights the historiographic element in his poem, which refers to the study of history and its role in raising important questions. He raises the question of how Iraqi civilians living in the aftermath of American military intervention express their desire for normalcy and order and how the combatant mind can move away from essentialist notions of the “other” and understand the human predicament in war. (Ali 9)

Turner, who was a commander within his Unit and an active participant in the war conflict, writes poetry that is astonishingly analytical and dispassionate. He also seems to be acutely conscious of his own foreignness. He was motivated to share in the war by fallacies of representation introduced by the U.S. government. His poems usually include titles that draw on common Arabic words, even though his poetic language is not overtly boastful of the local knowledge he has amassed. Turner frequently presents himself as a student who learns from the Iraqis he works with on a daily basis. In his book, Said defined Orientalism “as a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient” (Said 3). Therefore, it is more like a political tool to dispose of Orientals from any kind of civilization because Oriental society is depicted as weaker than Western society and is described as backward, inaccurate, and prone to despotism and sensuality. Said talks about oriental civilization as an attempt to change the stereotypical idea of the oriental society. In this poem, the concept of otherness is clearly applied. This poem can be considered a biographical one because the poet talks about a well-known person. He wishes to go back thousands of years to the small tent where Ibn Al-Haytham lived among his books as if the poet here wanted to draw our attention to those who lived in tents. However, they managed to build a great civilization:
If I could travel a thousand years back to August 1004, to a small tent where Alhazen has fallen asleep among books about sunsets, shadows, and light itself.

In this poem “Alhazen of Basra”, the poet imagines himself traveling back in time to examine the brilliant physicist “Ibn Al-Haytham”, who was born in southern Iraq in the 10th century and spends his time with books. He would like to ask Alhazen (Metaphorically Ibn Al-Haytham) about “the light within us” and about “the deep shadows/dlight brings, how light defines us”. Indeed, as these lines suggest, some of the volume’s most striking images of light and shadow reveal the speaker’s preoccupation and obsession with self-definition. Whiteness has no meaning without its counterpoint; identity—including racial identity—is not stable and fixed but rather relational and mutually constructed. However, the poet says that he will not ask about the great sciatric achievement of an Eastern scholar. Thus, he celebrates the great history of the envied country “Iraq”:

I wouldn’t ask whether light travels in a straight line, or what governs the laws of refraction, or how he discovered the bridgework of analytical geometry; I would ask about the light within us, what shines in the mind’s great repository of dream, and whether he’s studied the deep shadows daylight brings, how light defines us.

He draws the Westerners’ attention to the great scientist figures in the east. The innumerable references to light and shadow in Here Bullet enable and facilitate the speaker’s dark processing of thought that centers on the speaker’s own American military presence in occupied Iraq (Najmi 68). Indeed, as these lines imply, the speaker’s obsession with self-definition is evident in some of the most dramatic imagery of light and shadow in the poem.

The “Alhazen of Basra” poem in particular discusses both history and light. Turner mentions a leading thinker from the Islamic Golden Age (Swirsky 67). Turner is requesting information about human nature rather than about the concepts Alhazen is known for, specifically “the light within us” and “how light defines us”. Turner is looking for light, which has always been a part of “us”—everyone—even when it is obliterated by conflict. Turner never implies that any of the characters—American soldiers or rebels in Iraq—are wicked. Darkness is accompanied by conflict and, ultimately, by a lack of communication among people. There is a moment of serenity and peace when the violence has subsided, but it is fleeting. Turner learns that war violence disturbs delicate serenity. Turner, as a soldier, aspires to comprehend “the light within us.../...how light defines us.” From this perspective, light is something that dispels shadows, so we may see and comprehend those who are there. Ibn Al-Haytham wrote many books on the topics of shadow, light and geometry. Mentioning these details in the poem provides a clear picture of Eastern society. All these details are reinforced by the concept of otherness by Edward Said when the poet dives into the depths of the soul, wondering about the light within every human being.

Turner, as a writer, cannot stop a war. What he can do is to communicate his anti-discourse of war through shedding light on a region of the world that is typically perceived as being obscured by darkness such as the Middle East. The light should not come from gunfire and explosions “deep shadows” but rather from within, “how light define us”. We cannot fully comprehend someone unless we take into account their history and culture. This strategy helped Turner succeed in deothering Iraqis in his poems through celebrating their own great scholars.

5. Final considerations

Brian Turner’s poem “2000 lbs” explores the complexities of war and challenges the dehumanization of the “other”. The study showed that Turner succeeded in humanizing the characters of Iraqi civilians, American soldiers, and suicide bombers, thereby challenging the stereotypes and binary thinking associated with these characters. Turner aligns with Said’s and Fanon’s perspectives on otherness, who explore the dehumanization and alienation experienced by marginalized groups and highlight the fallacies of war narratives launched against Iraq. His “2000 lbs” challenges preconceived notions, deconstructs stereotypes, and fosters a deeper appreciation for the shared human experiences that transcend cultural and national boundaries.

In “Alhazen of Basra”, Turner’s strategy of deothering Iraqis involved exploring the life and legacy of the Arab scientist Alhazen “Ibn Al-Haytham”, who is often overlooked in Western accounts of the history of Arab scholars. The poem also addresses the transnational influence of Alhazen’s ideas, indicating the broad impact of his work. The poem raises questions about the desire for normalcy and order among Iraqi civilians in the aftermath of American military intervention, urging the combatant mind to move away from essentialist notions of the “other” and understand the human predicament in war. Turner draws on common Arabic words in his titles, reflecting his engagement with Iraqi culture and his position as a student learning from the Iraqis he interacts with. The poem aligns with Edward Said’s Orientalism, challenging stereotypical ideas about Oriental societies and presenting a more nuanced view of the East. The article concludes that Turner, in his “Alhazen of Basra”, deothers Iraq by highlighting their great scholars and promoting a deeper understanding of their history and culture. By communicating his anti-war discourse, Turner succeeds in bringing light to a region typically associated with darkness, emphasizing the importance of recognizing the humanity and complexity of all individuals involved.

Acknowledgments
Thanks and appreciation shall extend to the University Of Anbar, College of Arts, English department, for their endless support in this work.

**Ethical Considerations**

Not Applicable.

**Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

**Funding**

This research did not receive any financial support.

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