Analyzing Pre-Prison Spatial Constructs: A Study of Cell Block Five

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Abstract: This paper examines the conditions of life before imprisonment of a prisoner in the Arab World, while also delving into the process leading up to incarceration, including arrest, pursuit, and the journey to prison, investigative procedures, and surveillance within prison walls.

Fadhil al-Azzawi emphasizes the peril faced by Arab nations due to oppressive regimes and their pervasive intelligence networks. These agents infiltrate various aspects of society, including government bodies, educational institutions, eateries, homes, and places of worship. This widespread surveillance has transformed Arab countries into realms of heightened fear and apprehension due to the omnipresence of spies. Individuals feel constrained from openly discussing public affairs or politics, as they suspect constant surveillance that could lead to swift arrests. Consequently, pre-prison life becomes a realm of constant threat and anxiety. The Arab World endured a prolonged period of turmoil spanning from 1950 to 2011, following its liberation from Western colonial rule. Post-independence, institutional progress was hindered as military coups and autocratic governments prevailed. Despite this, a significant movement of political and social resistance emerged, involving students, intellectuals, and opposition leaders, persistently challenging the status quo. Despite the central governments’ assurances of freedom and safety, many authoritarian leaders in the Arab World have detained and even killed writers and critics in oppressive prisons. Intellectuals and activists who dared to challenge these regimes have often suffered severe consequences, including the revocation of citizenship. Prominent figures including leftist party leaders, Islamic activists, writers, novelists, and intellectuals across the Arab World, notably in Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia, have been imprisoned. In Egypt, notable writers like Sayyid Qutb, Nawal El-Saadawi, Souha Bechara and Frida al-Naqqash have been detained. These individuals seek to express their views, religious beliefs, and philosophical thoughts rather than directly opposing authorities. Moroccan authorities have detained writers and critics, including Abdul Qadi al-Shawi, Ahmed Marzuqi, Fatima Oufkir and his family including his daughter Malika Oufkir. Similarly, Iraqi authorities have imprisoned numerous writers and novelists, such as Fadhil al-Azzawi. These arbitrary arrests expose the true nature of Arab dictators, who reject diversity, democracy, and freedom, opting for oppression and control. Their inclination towards arresting innocent individuals contributes to internal conflicts among Arabs today. These corrupt regimes have harshly punished independent thinkers and writers within their brutal prisons.

The novels by Fadhil al-Azzawi discussed in this paper provide only a partial glimpse into the wider realm of pre-prison life, arrest, and investigation in the Arab World’s harrowing prisons. Other writers have also contributed to this narrative. For instance, Egyptian novelist and activist Raga al-Naqqash’s work The Nation and Prison offers insight into the pursuit of intellectuals in Egypt, revealing the dark face of the dictatorial regime. Similarly, Nawal El-Saadawi’s Memoir from Women’s Prison exposes the method of nighttime raids on writers’ homes and the subsequent confinement in shadowy dungeons, illustrating a recurring pattern across the Arab World.

Key Words: Prison, Pre-Prison Life, Prisoner, Arrest, Space, Environment, Fadhil al-Azzawi and Investigation

Fadhil al-Azzawi

In the realm of Arab literature, the notion of prison writings encompasses two distinct categories. The first involves authors who haven’t personally endured incarceration but have explored its harrowing depths in their works, as seen with Naguib Mahfouz and Ben Jelloun, unveiling narratives of brutality, torment, dehumanization, and the relentless pursuit of innocence within their nations. The second category features writers who have directly confronted imprisonment and subsequently penned their experiences. Noteworthy figures like Abdel Rahman Mounif, Sonallah Ibrahim, Nawal el-Saadawi, Fadhil al-Azzawi, and others have eloquently captured their encounters within these confining walls. Sobanet said that the prison narrative that many readers are interested in is one that delves into the experiences of inmates themselves. These stories vividly unveil the unsettling horrors and occasional fleeting moments of joy that punctuate life within prison walls. Through these narratives, readers gain insight into the labyrinthine bureaucratic processes that underpin the penal system, showcasing the complex and often confounding web of rules and regulations that govern every facet of an inmate’s existence. Moreover, these accounts provide a window into the mind-numbing routines that shape daily life, emphasizing the repetitive and stifling nature of incarceration (1-2). By immersing themselves in these narratives, readers confront the stark realities of the penal system, forcing contemplation on issues of justice, humanity, and the intricate interplay between individual lives and institutional forces. These authors give us a close and detailed look at what happens inside prisons, and how people on both sides of the law, especially after independence, experience this. Through their stories, they show the intense pain that many Arab families feel when their loved ones are behind bars.

Al-Azzawi earned a B.A. from Baghdad University in 1966. Fleeing persecution by the Baathist Party, which ruled Iraq and Syria in 1970, he relocated to Germany in 1976. He later obtained a Ph.D. in communication studies from Leipzig University.
in 1983. He worked as a writer and translator for Arabic media while outside Iraq. He authored six novels, but we'll focus only on one: *Cell Block Five* (1972), translated by William M. Hutchins in 2008. He skillfully employs lucid and eloquent language in his novels. His creative repertoire spans across poetry, short stories, and prose, wherein he adeptly integrates techniques of existentialism, stream of consciousness, and surrealism. In a notable interview, he underscores the equal importance he attributes to both prose and poetry in his writing endeavors. Al-Azzawi expresses that while he is recognized as a poet in the Arab World, he is also engaged in crafting novels, short stories, articles, and critiques. He emphasizes that the essence lies in the written content itself. Whenever he has a subject he wishes to explore, he chooses the appropriate literary form, be it a poem, story, or article, to convey his thoughts (Tarbush par.15).

In the period following their attainment of independence, the prevalence of the pursuit phenomenon becomes widespread across Arab nations. Arab writers, in their novels, have endeavored to depict the oppressive methods of arrest employed by those in power, shedding light on the unjust imprisonment of both innocent individuals and intellectuals. Among these authors is al-Azzawi, who portrays the arbitrary arrests taking place within *Cell Block Five* as deeply horrifying and dreadful. Within this novel, the writer vividly captures the life of individuals in the Arab World prior to imprisonment following their attainment of independence. The societal landscape is rife with oppression and authoritarianism. Consequently, crafting fiction emerges as the most effective method for revealing the unappealing aspects of dictators and their associates in the Arab World. Furthermore, the author's intention is to portray how the populace is compelled to inhabit a climate of fear in Iraq due to the pervasive arrests.

The concept of pursuit invariably aligns with the despotic governance of the ruling echelon. The Arabic literary narrative directly engages with the notion of pursuit, unburdened by constraints. Within his literary compositions, Al-Azzawi candidly delves into the milieu preceding confinement. These textual renditions are conspicuously devoid of ambiguity, unequivocally depicting the act of arrest as a reprehensible affront. Through this lens, they underscore the authenticity underscoring the pre-incarceration landscape within Arab societies. Furthermore, the concept of arrest and pursuit consistently operates as a recurring theme or motif within *Cell Block Five*. Within the novel, the one doing the pursuing embodies the roles of oppressor, tormentor, executioner, and wrongdoer, while the ones being pursued are portrayed as helpless victims. Moreover, Abdullah al-Naaji asserts in his work *Humamat Aldam fi Sjn Tadmur* that Arab nations have transformed into realms of fear due to incessant surveillance on their citizens. He also said that people are hesitant to visit their own kin or maintain contact, as security forces meticulously track individuals and their activities (9). This signifies that Arab urban centers have become distressing locales due to arbitrary arrests. Autocratic regimes even conduct raids on mosques, apprehending the prayer leaders and worshipers. Thus, places of worship have transitioned from serene sanctuaries to ominous and apprehensive spaces due to the pervasive influence of surveillance.

Arab regimes have systematically incarcerated writers and individuals aspiring to lead peaceful lives, resulting in the transformation of the Arab populace's existence into a realm of turmoil and aggression. Consequently, the act of arrest serves as a pivotal juncture through which violence permeates Arab societies. This assertion aligns with Allen Feldman's perspective in *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland*, wherein he underscores that arrest operates as a gateway for the cultural construction of violence (103). The process of apprehension engenders a profound schism between the ruling elite and the general populace, fomenting discontentment with prevailing regimes and eliciting a pervasive sense of disturbance among the masses.

Furthermore, several Arab novelists like Najeeb al-Kilani, Naguib Mahfouz, Abdul-Rahman Al-Rabi, Ahmed Raef, and others have highlighted in their writings that the idea of pursuit in the Arab region leads to a destructive environment, sparking conflicts between different groups and causing clashes between those in power and innocent individuals. This can be clearly seen in the current state of affairs in the Arab World. It appears that the acts of pursuit and suppression are direct outcomes of the widespread violence and instability in these regions. In Arab nations, the process of arrest is marked by a prevailing atmosphere of humiliation, derogation, and affront, primarily attributed to the lack of democratic principles and equitable dispensation of justice. This sentiment is encapsulated through the perspective of Aziz, the central figure in *Cell Block Five*, who says, “My dreams had suddenly ended. Like Zoroaster, I awoke from a lengthy slumber to discover rudely and bitterly that justice does not always favor innocence. Indeed, it occasionally supports the other side and adds to the number of victims and martyrs” (23). Presently, such is the prevailing condition within the contemporary Arab World. A disconcerting paradigm has emerged wherein individuals deemed innocent by virtue of their circumstances find themselves unjustly labeled as criminals, while those engaged in criminal activities often manage to evade culpability and are perceived as innocent entities. In the narrative of *Cell Block Five*, Aziz, the central protagonist, exemplifies this disheartening reality. He has relinquished personal care and concern for his well-being, showing a stark detachment from his surroundings within the prison confines. Even the prospect of regaining his freedom no longer holds significance for him. His distress emanates from witnessing his homeland's transformation into an expansive metaphorical dungeon, a sentiment poignantly expressed through his words as he also said that he grieved for all of humanity with a profound and destructive sorrow (30). Ahmed Raef, in his book titled, *The Secret History of the Detainee and the Shadowed Portal: Insights from the Muslim Brotherhood's Past*, emphasizes the notion that any governing system that undermines and represses the fundamental worth of individuals is destined for a limited existence. If the governments in the Arab region aspire to cultivate robust nations and pave the way for a promising future, they must ensure the safeguarding of people's inherent rights. This entails putting an end to the practice of unwarranted police visits at dawn, which instills a pervasive atmosphere of fear and distress among men, women, and children alike (20). This exposes how arrests under authoritarian rule stifle Arab nations' progress. Lack of freedom and democracy hampers innovation, creativity, and artistic expression, impeding growth and development.

Within any nation, urban centers symbolize tolerance, cultured living, education, freedom, and refinement. These spaces embody quality education and consistently showcase harmonious coexistence and tranquility among residents. Madanipour in his book, *Public and Private Spaces of the City*, said that Bourdieu defines social space as the arena where various social positions exist together, shaping the perspectives of its inhabitants. He asserts that this social space often transforms, albeit with some alteration,
into physical space, taking shape through the arrangement of individuals and their attributes (31). On the other hand, in the Arab World, social space is marred by inequality, while urban areas are marked by violence and unwarranted police visits. Streets, hotels, and homes have transformed into unsafe and hostile zones due to the persecution of innocent individuals. Public squares have turned eerie and grim, evoking memories of missing loved ones during religious holidays. This grim reality prompts many to seek refuge elsewhere, akin to numerous politicians and intellectuals who've done the same. Layla Maleh explores this matter in her book, Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature, emphasizing how the oppressive ambience, akin to a prison, renders the home country profoundly unwelcoming. The pervasive censorship and oppressive conditions compel individuals to seek sanctuary in foreign lands (273). In The Cell Block Five, Al-Azzawi further asserts that urban existence lacks significance without freedom. The inhabitants of these cities face imminent danger. This is highlighted when Mustafa questions Aziz:

What does a job in the city offer you? Money? But what is the use of money if it costs you your liberty? Quit your job and head to the countryside, which lacks of police, laws, tribunals, and cars speeding down streets. Go to the forests and learn to love the beasts and the trees. Only there is the paradise you futilely seek. If only you had a little bit of courage, a very little bit, you could see paradise. (52)

The writer emphasizes the superiority of rural areas over urban centers. He highlights the tranquility found in the countryside and the outskirts of towns, where the absence of law enforcement and surveillance brings a sense of peace. Conversely, urban homes become grim places due to the unsettling intrusion of police raids during evenings and early mornings. The excerpt from The Cell Block Five by Al-Azzawi critically examines urban life, highlighting its diminished significance without freedom. The text portrays urban inhabitants facing imminent danger, accentuating the vulnerability of city living. Through Mustafa's probing question to Aziz, the passage challenges the pursuit of monetary gains at the cost of personal liberty. It contrasts the trade-offs of urban existence with the allure of rural life, portrayed as a refuge devoid of policing and societal constraints. Al-Azzawi's call to embrace nature and escape urban pressures underscores a desire for simplicity and tranquility. The notion that true paradise lies in the countryside conveys a longing for authenticity, requiring courage to break societal norms and seek a more meaningful way of life.

The practice of arbitrary arrests functions as a powerful tool to instill fear and dread. In his novel, The Cell Block Five, Al-Azzawi exposes the unsettling reality where ordinary people are taken into custody without apparent cause, as illustrated through Aziz's ordeal. Aziz, a blameless individual from Kirkuk, Iraq, seeks respite in Baghdad following a year of strenuous work, only to be subjected to arrest, despite his lack of involvement in any political wrongdoing. He says, “I had been sitting there, at the front of the café, watching people pass by in the street” (10). His simple act of observing passersby in a café starkly contrasts with the unjust nature of his arrest, shedding light on the arbitrariness and vulnerability that ordinary citizens face in such environments. The quoted line poignantly captures the pervasive atmosphere of fear and uncertainty that random arrests propagate, illuminating the disturbing reality within the narrative and the broader social context.

Awaiting a proposition from a pimp for prostitutes, Aziz becomes ensnared when an abrupt police encirclement results in his arrest. In recounting the ordeal, Aziz describes how he found himself abruptly enclosed by law enforcement officers who were stationed around the café's patrons. Insults and physical aggression follow, with one officer seizing Aziz's shirt collar and derisively labeling him “mighty mouse,” while a commander orders his subordinates to apprehend Aziz under the premise of his affiliation with political activity. Amidst this tumultuous encounter, Aziz grapples with conflicting emotions, uncertain whether to despise or appreciate the authorities (11). Al-Azzawi vividly portrays the stark contrast between pre-prison existence and modern Arab society, depicting an environment reminiscent of ominous islands and forests shaped by the pervasive presence of intelligence agencies and prisons. Within this narrative, law enforcement agents demonstrate a lack of concern for the well-being of citizens, their actions predominantly centering on apprehension and aggression, thereby underscoring a distressing facet of life in the Arab World. Believing it to be an error, Aziz assumes that the authorities will rectify the situation and set him free, expecting an eventual apology from the police or captors. However, his optimism shatters when the police assert their non-involvement in his arrest and their inability to grant his release. This revelation leaves Aziz bewildered, prompting a cascade of internal queries. Al-Azzawi portrays this sequence through the subsequent lines:

Am I really responsible for the ruining of the world? The fault has always been there. There’s some inherent defect in this world, and I’m not responsible for it either. No more were the leaders and scholars. I knew that the world rested on a secret flaw, but I was incapable of grasping it. I naively asked the policeman, ‘but what have I done to deserve arrest?’ (14)

Aziz's subsequent introspection captures a sense of existential questioning. His contemplation about bearing responsibility for the world's troubles unveils a theme of societal burden. This sentiment underscores a broader narrative: the notion that societal problems are deeply rooted, and individuals like Aziz are caught in a larger, flawed framework. The inclusion of leaders and scholars in this contemplation expands this perspective, suggesting that even those in positions of influence might be equally powerless in addressing these issues. The phrase “the world rested on a secret flaw” symbolizes a profound realization that challenges the conventional understanding of the world's order. It portrays a sense of futility in trying to comprehend or correct these systemic flaws, resonating with existential and philosophical themes. In this quoted lines, the writer employs the stream of consciousness technique, a literary approach that delves into the inner world of the protagonist by revealing their emotions, thoughts, internal musings, ideas, and desires. Al-Azzawi employs this technique to provide readers with insight into Aziz's inner thoughts and emotions. Aziz further says in the novel:

We are not alone here. Our whole people stand beside us. They are with us night and day. Even inside the torture rooms. How delightful! I had not thought about that before. Did the people really stand up beside me in my isolation? In my sorrow? In my hope? But I was not political. What it boiled down to was that I had loitered in a café for more than two hours while waiting to locate a pimp. Then I had been arrested. That was all there was to it. (16)

In this above lines from Al-Azzawi's novel, the utilization of the stream of consciousness technique serves as a window into Aziz's mental landscape, effectively conveying his intricate state of mind. Through this technique, Al-Azzawi illuminates Aziz's realization of his shared experience with his fellow countrymen, suggesting a sense of collective solidarity even in the direst circumstances.
including the torment of torture rooms. This awareness introduces a bittersweet revelation, contrasting his prior lack of consideration regarding the support he might receive from his people during moments of isolation, sorrow, and hope. The reflection on whether his fellow citizens truly stand beside him underscores the profound connection between individuals and their broader societal context.

Yet, despite this revelation, Aziz grapples with a certain contradiction. He acknowledges not being a political figure, seemingly questioning whether he is deserving of this shared support. This moment highlights the dissonance between personal perceptions and societal dynamics, hinting at the arbitrary and unjust nature of his arrest. The depiction of his arrest as a result of loitering in a café for a mundane reason underlines the absurdity and randomness of the situation, further emphasizing the oppressive nature of the environment he finds himself in.

Even the mightiest global powers advocate for human rights and individual freedoms to be respected by Arab governments. Paradoxically, during their occupation of Iraq between 2003 and 2004, these very nations engaged in the arrest of innocent individuals. In his book, *The Illusion of Progress in the Arab World: Critiquing Western Misinterpretations*, Jalal Amin highlights instances where American soldiers detained women and innocent civilians right from public spaces and streets. Amin said in the book that a woman, drawn by unfamiliar sounds, ventured outside her home to investigate their source. To her surprise, she found American soldiers conducting a raid on a nearby residence. Unintentionally caught in the scene, she was apprehended alongside the others present (54).

The present government in Iraq employs terrorism as a pretext to target Sunni factions, perpetrating heinous and terrifying acts against innocent Iraqi citizens. It unlawfully detains academics, medical professionals, researchers, and religious leaders, with its prisons overcrowded with those subjected to oppression. This administration is characterized by its sectarian and terrorist nature. Similarly, other authoritarian Arab regimes rely on their military to suppress and coerce those who stand against their policies, utilizing force against dissenting activists. Detentions in the Arab World lack transparency, often relying on unfounded allegations to target dissenters or truth-speakers. Intellectuals, opposition leaders, professionals, and students are pursued under the guise of national interests and security, instilling fear and a sense of alienation among citizens. Random arrests further fuel radical and terrorist movements, as seen in incidents like Egypt in 1981, when oppressed individuals seek revenge against their captors. Arab governments exploit vague reasons for arrests, eroding trust and contributing to societal unrest. Upon issuing a decree for the arrest of over 1500 individuals, President Muhammad Anwar El Sadat of Egypt ultimately sacrificed his own life as a consequence of his oppressive and arbitrary actions. Mustapha Kamel el-Sayyid, a political science professor from Egypt, documents this account, “State authorities found during 1981, “autumn of fury” that the cost of repressing all political and social forces in the country was not only too high, but counterproductive. Sadat was assassinated among “his soldiers” after having ordered the arrest of 1500 citizen of all the political persuasions” (Lust-Okar 65).

The phenomenon of random arrests compelled al-Azzawi to pen his novels, showcasing the oppressive tactics of dictatorial regimes in suppressing citizens through arbitrary detentions. In essence, modern Arab societies are transformed into unsettling spaces prior to imprisonment. *The Cell Block Five* delves into the motives driving arrests in the Arab World, revealing the grim methods employed. Characters within these narratives are subjected to arrests without justifiable cause, their political viewpoints and religious beliefs serving as pretexts for detention. *Cell Block Five* elucidates the causes behind detentions in the Arab World, shedding light on the brutal techniques employed during arrests. The protagonist of this narrative finds himself apprehended without any justifiable grounds. The motives for confinement in the Arab World often stem from one’s political inclinations and religious convictions.

In the tumultuous milieu of Arab nations, the spectacles of apprehensions and pursuits often unfold within the public gaze. This segment of the discourse undertakes the task of deciphering the underlying motives that propel such arrests, as elucidated within the literary canvases of Fadhil al-Azzawi. A discerning intellectual, al-Azzawi aligns himself with the marginalized, as evidenced by his exclusive thematic exploration in “*Cell Block Five*” which delves into the intricate labyrinth of causes precipitating detentions within the Arab world. This thematic congruence finds resonance in the plight of Aziz and his compatriots, who traverse the grim landscape of protracted incarceration, ensnared in the clutches of abhorrent mental and physical agonies.

A prevalent pattern within the Arab World is the detainment of numerous authors and novelists on account of their political perspectives. This parallel extends to the Iraqi context as well. Consequently, a substantial portion of Iraq’s intellectual elite has sought refuge in European or Asian nations, compelled by the imperative of safeguarding their lives and the well-being of their families. In recent times, the intellectual echelon of Iraq has found itself constrained to depart its native soil, a response largely catalyzed by the American occupation and the advent of a sectarian regime. This new regime, characterized by its divisive sectarian policies, exerts zealous efforts to track down these intellectuals, subjecting them to imprisonment, reminiscent of the distressing scenes witnessed within the confines of the Abu Ghraib detention center.

The novel underscores the prisoners’ innocence, yet the arbitrary nature of their arrests instills a pervasive sense of dread and alarm within their ranks. A case in point is that of Aziz within Cell Block Five, taken into custody while innocently patrolling a quaint café in Baghdad. Notably devoid of any anti-government sentiments or criminal activities, Aziz’s apprehension perplexes him. He clings to the notion of a forthcoming exoneration, as eloquently conveyed in his missive to his mother. Aziz says in the novel:

Dear Mother, I hope my absence has not worried you. I have been forced to stay in Baghdad for a time I believe will be short. The cause for my delay – I hope this will not upset you – is that I’m under arrest. This resulted from a misunderstanding. They realize now that I’m not the person they want, but my release will take some time. (32)

In the above lines from the novel, Aziz addresses his mother with a mix of reassurance and concern, informing her of his temporary stay in Baghdad due to an unforeseen arrest, which he attributes to a misunderstanding. He maintains an optimistic tone, expressing confidence in his eventual release as the authorities acknowledge his innocence. However, he acknowledges the bureaucratic delays that hinder his prompt exoneration, shedding light on the complexities of the justice system and the distressing juxtaposition of his
innocence with his unjust detainment. Aziz Mahmud Sa‘id, although he may outwardly present an unintelligent demeanor, is not to be underestimated by the authorities, as evidenced by their accusation of his affiliation with a political party. The initial report characterizes him as a deceptive figure who, since his incarceration, has actively sought connections with radical revolutionaries such as Mun‘im, Husayn, and Salam. Furthermore, Aziz is noted for dedicating a substantial portion of his time to engaging in discussions and absorbing the content of subversive literature. He consistently demonstrates a keen interest in political discourse, a fact that warrants close attention (64). Mun‘im, a dedicated student immersed in the realm of English literature, finds himself apprehended following his active involvement in a student demonstration. Astonishingly, even the simple act of camaraderie among classmates is deemed criminal in this environment. Mun‘im's arrest is orchestrated by the authorities as a means of disconcerting him, yet he steadfastly endeavors to alleviate his ordeal within the confines of his isolated imprisonment. In a display of remarkable resilience, Mun‘im perceives his incarceration as a unique occasion for solitary introspection, an opportunity to contemplate the societal freedoms that have been curtailed. Unlike his fellow detainees who appear devoid of self-awareness, Mun‘im distinguishes himself through his extraordinary insight. Fully cognizant of the political motivations underpinning his arrest, he stands as a beacon of awareness amid a backdrop of obliviousness. The author depicts Mun‘im through the following lines saying, “It was as if a continent had risen from the ashes of hundreds of stagnant seas. Although he was with them, he still was not one of them. His ideas were out there in another world, where a man would not be killed or scorned. A new freedom exploded from the emotions of the revolution in his head that did not resemble that of the others” (34). The quoted lines encapsulate Mun‘im's distinctiveness within the group of detainees, portraying him as a beacon of intellectual and emotional depth. His presence is likened to a transformative force, standing apart from his peers despite his physical proximity, his ideas representing a realm of freedom and understanding unlike the constrained reality around him. Mun‘im's mind becomes a catalyst for personal revolution, contrasting with the obliviousness of others and highlighting his remarkable insight. His resilience and ability to find empowerment within his thoughts underscore his defiance against his oppressive circumstances, symbolizing the true essence of freedom as a state of mind. The journey leading to the prison is characterized by an air of gravity and intimidation, a sentiment that is poignantly depicted in “The Cell Block Five.” The novel vividly portrays the path to imprisonment as a distressing and fear-laden passage. From its very outset, Aziz directly addresses this daunting trajectory, shedding light on the treatment meted out by the oppressors during this transit. Aziz recalls a disconcerting interaction he had while in a patrol wagon, where a police officer seated next to him cynically inquired if he was affiliated with the same group. This exchange left Aziz feeling unsettled, underscoring the tense atmosphere that accompanied his journey to incarceration (1). This dialogue serves as a compelling illustration of how the policeman intentionally instills a sense of terror in the minds of the prisoners as they navigate the route to the prison. This calculated approach not only disseminates an atmosphere of fear but also casts a heavy emotional burden on the already beleaguered psyche of the incarcerated individual. The writer guides the reader towards the heart of the penitentiary during the evening hours, illuminating this particular scene through the subsequent lines wherein he says, “The policeman’s face looked dark in the twilight of the spectacular evening that had been descending on the city for more than an hour. When I looked at him calmly, without hatred or affection, I saw that he was smiling in a way that seemed quite barbaric” (1). In the above lines, the writer guides the reader into the heart of a penitentiary during the evening hours, creating a somber and potentially eerie atmosphere. The description of the policeman’s face, dark in the fading light, and the mention of a “spectacular evening” descending for over an hour, set a mood of anticipation and foreboding. The observer's detached gaze without strong emotion adds a sense of objectivity. The policeman’s smile, described as “barbaric,” hints at hidden motivations or cruelty, adding to the sense of mystery. The lines’ contemplative tone and reflective mood contribute to the atmosphere, while the symbolic elements, such as the penitentiary and the policeman, suggest deeper allegorical meanings. In his novels, the author skillfully employs the stream of consciousness technique to vividly portray the intricate landscape of fear and unease, delving into the prisoner's psyche as he journeys towards the prison. Through this narrative approach, the author exposes the conflicted and intense emotions that swirl within the prisoner's mind, capturing the essence of dread and tension. As the prisoner traverses this harrowing path, an unsettling thought takes root: the looming possibility that the slightest attempt to escape might result in a fatal gunshot from the vigilant policeman. However, intriguingly, the prisoner's demeanor remains remarkably composed, seemingly untouched by fear. Instead, a curious conviction germinates within him – the belief that the policeman's grasp is merely a result of an inadvertent error, a temporary detention that will inevitably unravel, setting him free once again. Aziz intricately articulates his emotional landscape during his descent towards the dungeon, “I was examining my emotions (a raging river through rocky ground where colored pebbles had collected in the riverbed and fragrant flowers grew on the banks)” (3). This poetic imagery vividly captures the essence of his inner turmoil, employing the stream of consciousness technique to illuminate the prisoner's psyche. Through this narrative prism, the author masterfully portrays how Aziz, in his inexorable journey to the prison, forges a disconcerting void within himself. The path to incarceration unfolds as a harrowing expanse, shrouded in uncertainty and an unsettling anticipation of what lies ahead. This portrayal of the prison-bound odyssey as a distressing chasm speaks to the profound psychological impact of the impending, enigmatic future. The author deftly employs this technique to magnify the emotional contours of Aziz's experience, allowing readers to traverse the treacherous terrain of his thoughts and emotions, as he grapples with the formidable abyss that accompanies his march towards the unknown. Investigation, wielded as a tool of oppression, embodies a calculated and often insidious mechanism through which those in power exert control and suppress dissent. In the hands of authorities, investigations can be manipulated to target individuals or groups who challenge the established order or voice dissenting opinions. By subjecting them to intrusive scrutiny, unwarranted surveillance, or coercive interrogation tactics, investigations can breed fear, erode trust, and stifle free expression. The investigators employ deplorable tactics to coerce detainees into divulging information, plunging into depths that defy human decency. These methods extend beyond physical torment, encompassing psychological manipulation and emotional blackmail. Detainees are subjected to the unsettling ritual of blinding their sight, a prelude to the chamber of torture where they witness the agony of others. The horror intensifies as threats loom, invoking the specter of rape and degradation against the most cherished, mirroring the atrocities of Syrian and Iraqi prisons. Even the investigative process itself is tainted by cruelty, exemplified by the repugnant practice
of administering a loathsome mixture of urine and excrement, forcing detainees to consume this abomination. This grim reality pervades Iraqi prisons, casting a long and disheartening shadow over periods of independence. These distressing tactics transcend mere interrogation, eroding human rights and dignity to an appalling extent, underscoring the imperative of justice, transparency, and respect for every individual's inherent worth. The tormentor employs coercive tactics to extract confessions from the detainees. Employing a range of torturous methods throughout the investigation, the oppressor seeks to compel the prisoners into divulging information. Shockingly, techniques such as administering electric shocks, forced disrobing, and even the gruesome act of extracting detainees' nails are utilized. In *Cell Block Five*, al-Azzawi vividly exposes the harrowing strategies employed by the interrogator to forcefully elicit admissions from the detainees. The investigator addresses Aziz by saying, “You stated in your Dashela 126 petition on entering the penitentiary that you are not political activist and were arrested by mistake, but the reports reaching us tell a different story. You are not just ordinary political activist; you are one of the extremists” (63). These lines showcase how the investigator manipulates Aziz by exploiting contradictions in his statements and labeling him an “extremist,” employing character assassination and dehumanization. The use of derogatory terms like “ugly authority” and “terrible tools” highlights emotional manipulation and a willingness to employ any means, degrading Aziz's sense of self-worth. The investigator's tactics, shifting the burden of proof onto Aziz, underscores the power imbalance and potential injustices within the criminal justice system, portraying a disturbing display of authority abusing its power to control and demean an innocent prisoner.

Furthermore, the act of this coercive and horrifying investigation starkly underscores the innocence of the imprisoned individual. It also lays bare the merciless disposition of the investigators, who subject the prisoner to a relentless ordeal. Throughout the investigation, their treatment of the prisoner is described as uncivilized and severe; devoid of any semblance of compassion. Aziz depicts this harrowing scene in his words, “As I left the room my buttocks received a powerful kick that propelled me outside. Then the policeman grabbed me by the right hand and dragged me back to the cell block. When I passed through the gate there, I felt queasy and racked with pain as the inmates gathered around me. The policeman insulted me contemptuously, “Get in there, coward!” (66). These lines vividly capture the egregious nature of the coercive and horrifying investigation, which not only serves to underline the prisoner's innocence but also exposes the unrelenting cruelty of the investigators. Aziz's depiction of the scene evokes a visceral sense of brutality, as evidenced by the powerful kick that forcefully expels him from the interrogation room. The subsequent physical assault, as the policeman seizes his hand and forcefully drags him back to the cell block, exemplifies the complete disregard for the prisoner's well-being. The description of passing through the gate while enduring queasiness and excruciating pain, compounded by the presence of on looking inmates, conveys a palpable atmosphere of suffering and humiliation. The final insult hurled at Aziz, branding him a "coward," underscores the dehumanizing nature of the treatment he endures. Overall, these lines serve as a poignant indictment of the investigators' callousness and the distressing reality faced by the prisoner, illuminating the stark contrast between the principles of justice and the harsh, merciless actions depicted in the scene.

This paper endeavors to illuminate the circumstances of life before imprisonment, vividly portraying the transformation of the Arab World into an expansive and ominous prison, wrought by the unjust apprehension and relentless persecution of innocent individuals. The portrayal of pre-prison life is imbued with an aura of dread, evoking a formidable and chilling atmosphere, tinged with tragedy. Furthermore, this chapter delves into the meticulous tactics employed by the authorities as they relentlessly track and pursue individuals in a multitude of settings, from bustling streets and serene cafes to sacred mosques, quaint villages, and even private abodes. This paper unveils the distressing trajectory leading to imprisonment, skillfully employing the stream of consciousness technique to illuminate prisoners' internal struggles as they navigate the path to jail. Al-Azzawi's portrayal captures the erosion of their sanity due to arbitrary arrests driven by political and ideological motives. Additionally, the chapter delves into the unsettling realm of investigations, exposing the brutal methods used by captors to extract confessions, laying bare the intense psychological and physical torment inflicted. The pervasive specter of surveillance within the prison environment is explored, revealing how authorities have transformed it into a hub of espionage, blurring the lines between captives and captors. In essence, this chapter weaves personal experiences, political intricacies, and the mechanics of coercion into a tapestry that starkly exposes the grim realities of the prison system, all while delving into the depths of the human psyche under extreme pressure.

Works Cited

