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Identity Deconstruction and Humanity Ideology in Anis Chouchène's Poem *Untitled*: A Riffaterre Semiotic Perspective

Mia Mutmainah [1,a], Khotimatun Nafi'ah [1,b], Silmi Malina Binta[2,c], Andri Ilham[1,d]*
[1]Universitas Negeri Jakarta, Indonesia, [3]University of Jordan, Yordania
[a]mia.mutmainah@unj.ac.id, [b]khotimatun.nafi'ah@unj.ac.id, [c]slm8240783@ju.edu.jo,
[d]andriilham@unj.ac.id
Corresponding Author

Abstract

This study examined Anis Chouchène's poem *Untitled* through Michael Riffaterre's semiotic theory, employing heuristic and hermeneutic readings. It aimed to explore how ungrammaticalities in the poem generated deeper meanings. At the heuristic level, the poem questions conventional Arab identity through irony and contradiction. The hermeneutic reading revealed a critique of moral and cultural decline in the Arab world, expressed through themes of disillusionment, hypocrisy, and the erosion of human values. The model of a nation that has eroded the value of humanity is reflected in the matrix of humanity, underscoring Chouchène's broader poetic message, particularly in *Salām' Alaikum*. The findings showed that Chouchène employed poetic language not only to challenge identity constructs but also to promote universal human values as essential foundations for justice and peace.

Keywords: Semiotic; Riffatere; Arabic Poom; Anis Suzan.

ملخص البحث

تهدف الدراسة إلى تحليل قصيدة "بلا عنوان" لأنيس شوشان باستخدام نظرية السيميائية لمايكل ريفاتير، لا سيما من خلال القراءتين الاستدلالية والتأويلية. تعتمد الدراسة على المنهج النوعي لاستكشاف كيفية إيصال القصيدة لمعانيها من خلال العلامات النصية والتناصية. وقد كشفت النتائج أن الموضوع المركزي في القصيدة هو "الإنسانية"، وذلك من خلال تحويل اللاّنحويات إلى بُنى دلالية مترابطة. وعلى المستوى الاستدلالي، تحدّت القصيدة البُنى التقليدية للهوية، ولا سيما الهوية العربية من خلال استخدام السخرية والتناقض. أما القراءة التأويلية فقد كشفت عن نقد عميق لانحدار القيم الأخلاقية في العالم العربي، عَبَّر عنه من خلال خيبة الأمل التاريخية، والنفاق الثقافي، وتآكل القيم الإنسانية. وتبيّن من الدراسة أن النموذج الدلالي "أمة مسحت قيمة الإنسانية" قاد إلى المصفوفة "الإنسانية" وخصوصًا في قصيدته "سلامٌ عليكم". وأشارت النتائج إلى أن شوشان استخدم اللغة الشعرية ليس فقط لتفكيك الهوية، بل أيضًا للدعوة إلى العودة إلى القيم الإنسانية الكونية كأساس لتحقيق العدالة والسلام.

الكلمات الرئيسية: السيميائية، ريفاتير، الشعر، أنيس شوشان

Introduction

Literature is a creative product born from spontaneous emotional expression, capable of conveying aesthetic aspects, whether based on linguistic elements or on meaning (Fananie, 2002). Literary works encompass various genres, one of which is poetry. According to Ahmad Syaib (Shayib, 1994), poetry is an imaginative use of language crafted to express new meanings, feelings, ideas, emotions, and the mysteries of humanity. In terms of its writing style, poetic language is characterized by its multi-interpretative nature and the symbolic meaning of words.

Preminger as cited in (Pradopo, 1995) asserts that poetry constitutes a second-level semiotic system, utilizing the first-level system of language. This implies the existence of literary conventions, also referred to as additional conventions. These additional conventions suggest that poetry expresses one thing while meaning another. Consequently, the language of poetry conveys meanings distinct from those of ordinary or everyday communication.

One of the most appropriate theories for analyzing poetry rich in signs and symbols is Michael Riffaterre's semiotic theory. Regarding his theory, Riffaterre posits two axioms: a poem says one thing and means another, and second, the characteristic of a poem is its unity (Riffaterre, 1978). According to Riffaterre, achieving this unity of meaning requires two levels of reading: heuristic reading and retroactive or hermeneutic reading. Heuristic reading seeks to derive meaning based on linguistic conventions through dictionary definitions, while retroactive or hermeneutic reading aims to achieve a more profound meaning grounded in literary conventions.

The object of study in this research is a poem by Anis Chouchène titled *Untitled*, meaning that the poet deliberately did not assign a title to the piece. This absence of a title suggests particular implications, symbolizing deeper meanings and making it an especially compelling subject for analysis. Moreover, another reason for selecting this poem is that it was written by Anis Chouchène, a Tunisian nationalist poet who writes in both Arabic and French. His works are rich in meaning, often addressing themes of peace, humanity, and racism. One of his most renowned poems is *Salām 'Alaikum*, which has been extensively studied from various perspectives. Chouchène is also notable for representing the modern generation of poets by disseminating his works through the internet and social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter, thereby making his poetry widely accessible to a broader audience (Al-Mubassyir, 2024).

Research on Anis Chouchène's poetry, particularly his famed *Salām 'Alaikum*, has been abundant, analyzing aspects such as stylistic features (Karim, 2021), social reflections, and especially semiotic meanings (Yudistira, 2023), whether through Peirce's semiotic theory (Qomariyah et al., 2025) or Riffaterre's (As'ad & Sabiila, 2024). However, research on Chouchène's other poems, including his untitled poem, remains scarce. This poem has not been analyzed by previous scholars, particularly in terms of its meaning, despite its rich symbolism—beginning with the absence of a title, the perspective of the lyrical subject, and other elements. Therefore, this poem is highly suitable for analysis through Riffaterre's semiotic approach, which seeks to uncover the unity of a poem's meaning.

The application of Riffaterre's semiotic theory has been widely employed in literary analysis due to its effectiveness in uncovering the symbolic meanings embedded in texts particularly in Arabic poetry, including classical works such as the *Mu'allaqāt* (Sudarmawan & Adelawati, 2024) and devotional texts like the *Burdah* (Tamim Mulloh et al., 2023), as well as modern poetry by figures such as Mahmoud Darwish (Raden Muhammad Ardiansyah Kurniawan et al., 2024). Riffaterre's semiotic theory has proven effective in revealing meaning more clearly, as understanding poetry cannot be achieved in a single reading and instead requires repeated readings (Mushfiroh, 2023). However, there is a noticeable gap in research on Chouchène's other works, particularly his poem *Untitled*, which remains underexplored despite its symbolic richness and critical themes.

The absence of a title in this poem, coupled with its strong critique of social and human values, positions it as a compelling subject for semiotic analysis. Chouchène's identity as a bilingual, nationalist, and socially engaged poet who utilizes digital media to reach diverse audiences further adds to the poem's relevance and accessibility.

Although prior studies have applied Riffaterre's theory to various poetic texts, including Chouchène's *Salām 'Alaikum*, no comprehensive semiotic analysis has yet been conducted on his *Untitled* poem. This research seeks to fill that gap by providing a focused interpretation of this overlooked work.

This study aims to examine the unity of meaning in Anis Chouchène's *Untitled* poem through the application of Michael Riffaterre's semiotic theory, specifically using heuristic and hermeneutic readings, to uncover the poem's underlying symbolic and ideological structures.

Method

This research adopts a qualitative, library-based approach aimed at analyzing Anis Chouchène's untitled poem through the lens of semiotic theory, particularly utilizing Michael Riffaterre's model. The study employs the documentation method, which involves gathering and synthesizing data from various sources, including academic books, journals, and previous research studies. These sources provide the necessary theoretical and contextual foundations for the analysis (Sugiyono, 2013).

The primary data source is the text of Chouchène's untitled poem, which serves as the focal point of the analysis. The research follows Riffaterre's two-step process: the heuristic reading and the hermeneutic reading. The heuristic reading examines the surface-level text for ungrammaticalities, contradictions, and anomalies, which are indicative of deeper, symbolic meanings. The hermeneutic reading then interprets these anomalies by identifying patterns, symbolic networks, and intertextual references, reconstructing the matrix, model, and variants that inform the poem's meaning.

This study aims to explore the symbolic structures of the poem, shedding light on its critique of Arab identity, cultural values, and the loss of humanity. By situating the poem within a broader literary and socio-political context, particularly in relation to Chouchène's other works, the research offers a comprehensive, semiotically grounded interpretation of the poem's message.

Finding and Discussion

Heuristic Reading

Heuristic reading refers to the interpretation of a text based on its linguistic structure or the conventions of the first-order semiotic system (Pradopo, 1995). At this stage, what is obtained is meaning as derived from the reader's linguistic competence. In this phase, the reader often encounters several obstacles, which Riffaterre (Riffaterre, 1978) identifies as ungrammaticalities. These include meanings that contradict dictionary definitions and disruptions in the continuity of expression.

According to Riffaterre, such discontinuities in expression result from one of three processes: displacing of meaning, distorting of meaning, or creating of meaning. Displacement of meaning arises from the use of metaphor or metonymy. Distortion of meaning is caused by ambiguity, contradiction, or nonsense. Meanwhile, the creation of

meaning refers to textual organization beyond the linguistic level, such as symmetry, rhyme, typography, or semantic equivalence between homologous positions.

The heuristic reading constitutes the initial stage in Riffaterre's semiotic approach, focusing on meaning derived from grammatical and lexical structures as commonly understood in everyday linguistic conventions. Heuristic reading is the interpretation of a poem based on normative grammar, morphology, syntax, and semantics (Ulum, 2021). Basically, heuristic reading is the first stage of interpretation, progressing from the beginning to the end of the literary text, from top to bottom, following the syntagmatic sequence (Hasibuan, 2021). At this stage, the text is interpreted linearly and referentially, without engaging with implicit or symbolic dimensions. Due to the poem's considerable length, the analysis is divided according to thematic units and dominant semantic cohesion in each section.

وُلِدتُ في وطنٍ زعموا أنه عربيّ. يعني وأنا أُحدثك الآن تجد أنه من الطبيعي أن أستعمل اللغة العربية. لأنك أنت عربيّ وهو عربيّ وهي عربية

Wulidtu means 'I (subject) was born (predicate)'(Umar, 2008). *Fī waṭan zaʿamū annahu ʿarabiyy* serves as an adverbial phrase of place, meaning 'in a homeland or territory that they claimed to be Arab' (Wehr, 1976). The identity of 'they' is not specified, though it refers to a group, as indicated by the third-person plural pronoun. *Uḥaddiṡuka* means 'I (lyrical self) speak to you (second person singular)'. *Tajidu annahu min aṭ-ṭabīʿī* means that the second person or interlocutor perceives it as natural, normal, or instinctive. The action deemed natural is *astaʿmila al-lughah al-ʿarabiyyah*, namely, the lyrical self's use of the Arabic language. *Liannaka ʿarabiyy wa huwa ʿarabiyy wa hiya ʿarabiyyah* translates as 'because you (the interlocutor) are Arab, he is Arab, and she is Arab'. However, the specific identities of 'he' and 'she' are not clarified. Thus, the meaning of this stanza is: "I was born in a land they claimed to be Arab. I mean, as I speak to you now, you perceive it as natural for me to use Arabic. Because you are Arab, he is Arab, and she is Arab."

وأنا... هذا لا يهم. المهم أني لدي مجموعة من التساؤلات للعرب

Ana, or 'I' (lyrical self), attempts to continue an introduction by revealing who he is, but leaves the statement incomplete, considering it irrelevant. *Ahamma, yuhimmu, muhimm* all relate to the notion of importance. *At-tasāʾulāt* is the plural form and signifies doubts or uncertainties (Umar, 2008). *ʿArab* here refers to the Arab nation or people. The

translation is: "As for me… that does not matter. What matters is that I have a set of doubts concerning the Arabs."

للذي على الثورات ركب .للذي ساعد الغريب حين نهب. للذي لم يقل شئا حين الغريب لارضنا و عرضنا اغتصب. للذي سئم من القضايا العالقة فهرب. للذي اغترب. للذي طبل و مجد و للملوك و السلاطين تهجد .للذي سمع فردد و غيب عقله و ما تردد. للذي تعلم الخنوع و الخضوع و نسي انه لغير الله لا ركوع. للذي يكنز أموالا و امة تجوع فخانها بلا رجوع. للذي يحرم الفنون والغناء. ويحل في أذهاننا استعباد النساء، يحل في أذهاننا اغتصاب النساء ويزعم أن الظلم ابتلاء وحقوق الإنسان كفر ورياء. للذي رضي بامة ما انفكت عن انحدار. للذي رضي بامة تدجن الأفكار فتزعم ان الفلاسفة كفار. للذي حاصر وجداننا بجملة من الاقفال. للذي كبل عقولنا بوابل من الاغلال وحصر حياتنا في الحرام والحلال و علمنا الوقوف على الاطلال وحتى لذلك المواطن البسيط الذي لم يقرا لا معجما و لا وسيط و لم يكن له صدا و سيط

This section comprises several long verses grouped together due to their shared syntactic role: they all function as descriptors or qualifiers of the word *'Arab* the Arab nation mentioned in the previous stanza. *Aś-śawrāt* (revolutions) is in plural form. *Rakiba yarkabu* means to ride or mount, indicating a nation that "rides revolutions". *Al-gharīb* means 'the foreigner' or 'stranger'. *Nahaba yanhabu* signifies 'to plunder', thus, the phrase refers to "the nation that aided the stranger in plundering" (Wehr, 1976).

Arḍunā and *'arḍunā* respectively denote 'our land' and 'our honor/property', marked with the possessive suffix *-nā* indicating the first-person plural (*naḥnu*, or 'we'). This implies the lyrical self is no longer speaking as an individual but as part of a collective, which contradicts the singular form used in earlier stanzas. *Igtaṣaba yagtaṣibu* means 'to take forcibly', interpreted here as 'a nation that said nothing when the stranger took our land and our honor by force'. *Sa'ima yas'amu* means 'to tire of', and *haraba yahrubu* means 'to flee', resulting in 'a nation that grew tired of unresolved issues and ran away'. *Ightaraba yaghtaribu* denotes 'to go abroad or live in exile', thus 'a nation that went into exile (Umar, 2008).

Ṭabbala yuṭabbilu implies 'to beat the drum', and *majjada* means 'to glorify'. *Al-mulūk* and *as-salāṭīn* are plural forms for 'kings' and 'sultans', respectively (Wehr, 1976). Hence: 'a nation that beat the drum, glorified, and even prayed at night for kings and sultans. *Sami'a, raddada, ghayyaba*, and *taraddada* mean 'heard', 'repeated', 'nullified' (or 'buried'), and 'hesitated', respectively implying 'a nation that listened, repeated, eliminated its reason, and did not hesitate'.

Al-khunū' and *al-khuḍū'* both denote submission. *Rukū'* can mean prostration or bowing in worship. Thus, 'a nation that learned submission but forgot that one should

only bow to God'. *Kanaza yaknizu* means 'to hoard', hence: 'a nation that hoards wealth while its people starve, betraying them with no return'. *Funūn* (arts), *gināʾ* (music/song), *istiʿbād* (enslavement), *ightiṣāb* (rape), and *ibtilāʾ* (tribulation) yield: 'a nation that forbids art and song but sanctions the enslavement and rape of women in its mind, claiming oppression is a divine trial, and human rights are blasphemy and hypocrisy'. *Inḥidār* (decline) describes 'a nation content with continual decline'. *Dajjana yudajjinu* (to domesticate) implies 'a nation that domesticates thought, claiming philosophers are heretics (Umar, 2008).

Ḥāṣara, wijdān, and *aqfāl* signify 'to besiege', 'conscience', and 'locks', respectively interpreted as 'a nation that besieges our conscience with chains'. *Kabbala yukabbilu* (to shackle), *aghlāl* (fetters), *aṭlāl* (ruins), and *basīṭ* (simple/common) culminate in: 'a nation that shackles our minds, reduces life to lawful and unlawful, and teaches us to stand upon ruins, even to the common citizen who cannot read dictionaries nor serve as a mediator'.

أين ذهب علم ابن سينا. إما كان ابن الجزار فينا . إما كان عندنا الجاحظ و المعري . يا أمة انحدرت و لم تقري . أين علماؤنا . أين أعلامنا . يا أمة اجهضت أحلامنا . حتى متى سنتفاخر بامجاد أجدادنا . ماذا سنقول إذا سألنا أولادنا ، إذا سألنا أحفادنا ، ما كانت هي أمجادنا ، أو لماذا كانت هي وضيعة أوطاننا ، أو لماذا تراجعت الحضارة في زماننا ، أو كيف نسينا صبرا و شتيلا، و رضينا أن ينكلوا بنا تنكيلا . و كيف نسيناها فلسطين . و نشاهد المجازر من خلف التلفاز هادئين . و هم يحرقون أطفالنا . يغتصبون نساءنا . يقتلون رجالنا . احينها احينها سنمامؤ ثم نعلق الفشل على الظروف . أم سنقول تقهقرنا لان الحروب ما عادت بالسيوف . أم سنعود مثلكم إلى الامجاد و الأجداد يا نعجة تتباهى بلية الخروف

This section articulates the lyrical self's doubts. Figures like Ibn Sīnā, Ibn al-Jazzār, al-Jāḥiẓ, and al-Maʿarrī are mentioned, though their relevance remains unspecified. The lyrical self-questions: "Where has the knowledge of Ibn Sīnā gone? Was not Ibn al-Jazzār among us? Did we not have al-Jāḥiẓ and al-Maʿarrī?"

Inḥadarti wa lam tuqirrī is addressed to the *ummah* (nation), meaning: "O nation, you have fallen and have not admitted it." Yet the referent of *ummah* remains ambiguous, whether it refers to the same Arab nation from earlier or another group is unclear. *Yā ummatan ajhaḍat aḥlāmanā* translates as: "O nation that has aborted our dreams." From this point onward, the lyrical voice adopts the first-person plural: "Until when will we pride ourselves in the glories of our ancestors? What shall we tell our children or grandchildren when they ask: What were our glories? Why did our homelands fall into disgrace? Why did civilization decline in our era? How did we forget Sabra and Shatila

and accept being tortured? How did we forget Palestine, watching the massacres quietly on TV while they burned our children, raped our women, and killed our men?"

Maʿmaʿa yumaʿmiʿu (to bleat like a goat) is unusual in this human context (Umar, 2008). *Taqahqara yataqahqara* (to regress), *ḥurūb* (wars), and *suyūf* (swords) lead to: "Will we then bleat and blame our failures on circumstances? Or claim that our regression is due to wars no longer being fought with swords? Or, like you, shall we revert to ancestral glory, O ewe that boasts of a lamb's affliction?"

معذرة يا أمتي إذا كنت سليط اللسان . معذرة إذا تطاولت على مجتمع الخرفان . ولكن هذه هي حقيقة أمة قد غيبت قيمة الانسان. و لا انتظر إجابة فتساؤلاتي من البداية بلا عنوان

The final section contains the lyrical self's apology. The speaker returns to the first-person singular, shown in *ummatī* ('my nation'), in contrast to the previous pronoun (we). *Taṭāwala yataṭāwalu ʿalā* implies aggression or transgression. *Khirfān* is the plural of *kharūf,* meaning male sheep or lambs. The metaphorical role of sheep remains unresolved. "Forgive me, my nation, if I have been harsh-tongued. Forgive me if I insulted the flock of lambs. But this is the reality of a nation that has erased human dignity. And I await no answer, for my doubts have been without title from the start". No direct link is provided between doubt and the absence of a title.

Based on this linguistic reading, the heuristic meaning remains incomplete. Therefore, it is essential to proceed to the second phase, namely the hermeneutic reading.

Hermeneutic Reading

The difficulties encountered during the first phase (heuristic reading) lead the reader to the second stage: retroactive or hermeneutic reading. In this phase, the interpretation moves beyond the surface of the text to penetrate deeper layers in search of hidden meaning structures. Riffaterre asserts that the ungrammaticalities encountered during mimetic reading indicate the presence of an alternative semiotic system beneath the surface, which must be interpreted holistically through retroactive reading (Riffaterre, 1978).

In the context of Anis Chouchène's poem *"Untitled"*, hermeneutic reading serves as a gateway to uncovering the underlying tensions and contradictions that structure the poem's meaning, particularly concerning identity, nationality, and human values.

Potential Hypogram

The potential hypogram encompasses implicit linguistic and cultural associations, constructing a complex semiotic system not immediately apparent in the surface text.

While the poem overtly addresses themes of Arab identity and nationalism, it implicitly disavows both in favor of interrogating a more fundamental concern: humanity.

The absence of a title represents an intentional silence, serving as a form of meaningful absence. This lack is not a mere technical omission but a semiotic strategy designed to produce ambiguity, emphasizing the poem's refusal of fixed categorization, including identity labels. It is a negation of the conventional definitions of national identity.

In the opening section, the lyrical "I" declares that he was born in a land that "they claim" to be Arab. This statement subtly rejects the dominant narrative of Arab identity. The use of the verb "claim" suggests that Arabness is not an authentically assumed identity, but rather one imposed from the outside. Thus, the tension between the lyrical "I" and Arab identity serves as the primary entry point for understanding the fractures articulated in the poem.

In the second section, the rejection of Arab identity is no longer personal but collective. The speaker positions himself as a representative of a broader community that shares his sense of disillusionment. This rejection is not rooted in hatred for one's origins but stems from deep disappointment over the moral and social decadence associated with contemporary Arab societies. Here emerges a form of collective irony: the speaker is Arab, yet refuses to be identified as Arab in its current sociopolitical configuration.

The third section reaches the climax of this identity conflict. Arab society is depicted as having not only failed to uphold revolutionary values but also betrayed basic human principles. Religious and moral symbols are selectively mobilized to justify injustice. The Arabic language, Arab identity, and even religion are subjected to critique for becoming tools of repression, discrimination, and violence.

In the fourth section, a shift occurs from "I" to "we," marking a transition from personal to collective consciousness. The critique is no longer individual but collective. "We" question why a people who once gave rise to figures such as Ibn Sina and al-Ma'arri have now succumbed to ignorance and oppression. The "we" feels alienated within its own nation, severed from an intellectual legacy rooted in humanism and freedom of thought.

The final section concludes the poem with a tone of bitter irony. The expression of apology is not a gesture of reconciliation but a lamentation: the Arab world has lost its foundational value which is humanity. The term *ghayyaba* (to eliminate or efface) implies

a deliberate and systematic act, not an accidental loss. In this way, the poem positions itself as an ethical indictment of the current condition of the Arab world.

Matrix, Model, and Variants

According to Riffaterre's framework, once the textual tensions are unraveled, the reader may identify the underlying structure of meaning in terms of matrix, model, and variants.

The model of the poem emerges clearly in the line:

حقيقة أمة قد غيبت قيمة الإنسان) (*"The reality of a nation that has effaced the value of humanity."*) This line functions as the central signifier that encapsulates the dominant meaning of the entire poem. From this, we can infer the matrix of the poem: **humanity**.

The matrix is the source of all meanings contained in the words and sentences in poetry (Nashihah, 2024). The matrix is not explicitly stated in the surface text, but it acts as the gravitational center that binds all semantic elements. All rejections of identity, critiques of Arab nationalism, denunciations of religious hypocrisy, and expressions of historical irony converge on a single fundamental conclusion: the erosion of human values.

In the process of actualizing the matrix, it is necessary to identify the variants within the poem (Marahayu et al., 2021).The variants derived from this matrix include: A critique of Arab nationalism as empty and hollow; A rejection of religious symbolism used to justify violence; A rebellion against the denial of past intellectual achievements; Figurative depictions of Arabs as passive and powerless flocks (khirfān); Rhetorical statements expressing skepticism about the possibility of change.

Thus, the poem's structure reveals a layered transformation from existential experience to collective indictment through a semiotic system that centers humanity as the axis of critique.

Actual Hypogram

The actual hypogram can be found in another poem by the same author, *Salām ʿAlaikum*. In this poem, Chouchène emphasizes the importance of universal values and rejects all forms of sectarianism. He dismisses narrow identities based on race, religion, or nationality in favor of a single, unifying label: *insān* (human being).

In comparison, *"Untitled"* functions as a deconstruction of national identity, while *Salām ʿAlaikum* offers an alternative construction grounded in humanist values. Together,

they form a complementary intertextual system that reinforces Chouchène's central critique of contemporary Arab sociopolitical realities.

The actual hypogram not only enriches the reading but also confirms that this poem does not stand in isolation. Rather, it participates in a wider network of meaning—a practice of cultural critique that consistently positions humanity as the true benchmark of civilization.

The analysis of Anis Chouchène's *Untitled* poem through Michael Riffaterre's semiotic theory reveals a complex interplay of surface-level contradiction and deeper ideological critique. At the heuristic level, the poem challenges linguistic conventions through the ironic use of key terms such as "freedom," "truth," and "God." These words, often associated with idealism and identity, are instead presented as hollow or corrupted in the socio-political context of the Arab world. This strategy aligns with the findings of As'ad & Sabiila (As'ad & Sabiila, 2024), who identified similar ironic inversions in *Salām 'Alaikum*, particularly in its use of religious greetings to expose violence and hypocrisy.

However, *Untitled* diverges in tone and thematic scope. While *Salām 'Alaikum* emphasizes sociopolitical contradictions in religious discourse, *Untitled* adopts a more existential and abstract critique, focusing on the loss of ethical and human values. This broader thematic lens aligns it more closely with the semiotic analyses of Darwish's poetry (Raden Muhammad Ardiansyah Kurniawan et al., 2024) where the poetic text becomes a space for moral contemplation beyond specific political contexts.

At the hermeneutic level, the matrix of "humanity" emerges from the model "a nation that has erased the value of humanity." This abstract critique sets *Untitled* apart from prior works discussed (Qomariyah et al., 2025), which used Peircean semiotics to explore structured sign relations. In contrast, *Untitled* offers open, interpretive layers that better align with Riffaterre's retroactive reading.

Anis Chouchène's *Untitled* poem expresses a rejection of fixed identities such as national or religious identity, using language that deviates from conventional meaning. In Michael Riffaterre's semiotic theory, this is known as *ungrammaticality*—a disruption that invites readers to search for deeper meaning. The absence of a title, the use of irony, and the shift in voice from "I" to "we" suggest that the poem addresses not only personal experience but also a shared sense of disillusionment. Beneath these layers, the core meaning—or *matrix*—of the poem centers on the value of "humanity," which forms the

foundation of all its critiques. Arab identity and religious symbols are challenged for having lost their humanistic values and for becoming tools of repression. This critique becomes clearer when viewed in the context of post-revolution Tunisia, where, as Mohammad Dawood Sofi (Sofi, 2022) explains, society is grappling with questions of identity and the role of religion and nationalism in a democratic transition. Thus, the poem serves not only as a social critique but also as a call to return to humanity as the foundation of identity and collective life.

Conclusion

The analysis of Untitled through Michael Riffaterre's semiotic approach reveals a complex structure of meaning that is not fully apparent on the surface of the text. Through elements such as the absence of a title, the use of irony, and the disruption of the meanings of Arab and religious identity symbols, the poem creates ungrammaticalities that compel the reader to explore hidden meanings. At the core of this system lies the matrix of "humanity," which binds all semantic variants. Thus, the poem not only deconstructs established national and religious identities but also constructs a new system of meaning centered on universal ethical values.

Furthermore, the poem can be read as a response to the socio-political conditions in post-revolution Tunisia, where debates over identity and the role of religion in democracy remain ongoing. Chouchène's critique of moral decay and intellectual decline in Arab society reflects a deep disappointment with the failure to transform values after the revolution. In this regard, Untitled is not merely an artistic expression but also a cultural and ethical discourse that calls for a paradigm shift from group-based identities toward humanity as the fundamental foundation of collective life. These findings enrich contemporary Arabic literary studies by demonstrating how poetry can serve as a space for ideological resistance and the formation of collective ethical awareness.

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