

Semiotic Approach and the Analysis of Historical Texts

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Abstract

The semiotic approach is a modern approach for analysing texts of a historical and cultural nature. It seeks to uncover the symbolic patterns that are usually hidden behind social phenomena or textual discourses, moving away from approaching historical events in terms of external description or linear interpretation. The semiotic approach contributes to transcending history as a mere record of facts and events, instead considering it as texts filled with meanings, produced by authorities, accumulated knowledge, and collective imagination throughout history.

In this context, history is not merely a series of facts and events, it is a collection of texts imbued with meaning that reproduce memory, identity, and legitimacy. However, the importance of semiotic analysis lies in revealing the intellectual (ideological) and interpretive nature of historical records, whether they be political discourses, economic and social texts, documents, rituals, or mythological narratives.

Therefore, the semiotic approach is an effective interpretive approach for deconstructing and analysing historical texts, not as a reflection or report of the past, but as symbolic systems that produce and reposition meanings within a specific cultural and political context. This requires a deep understanding of the central semiotic approach as formulated by philosophers. From our perspective, researchers cannot employ semiotic analytical tools in a study of historical texts without knowledge and familiarity with the theoretical approaches developed by those philosophers.

Introduction

The semiotic approach studies signs and symbols within a text, and their use in producing meanings that text conveys as unspoken secrets. These secrets raise questions in readers' mind, prompting readers to seek to uncover them through signs that indicate them, and to understand the dialectical relationship between signifier and signified (Inglis, 2013).

The semiotic approach is a modern approach for analysing texts of a historical and cultural nature. It attempts to uncover the symbolic patterns that regularly lie hidden behind social phenomena or textual discourses, moving beyond a purely descriptive or linear approach to historical events.

The semiotic approach contributes to moving beyond history as a mere record of facts and events, instead viewing it as texts imbued with meaning, produced by authorities throughout history, accumulated knowledge, and collective imagination. In this context, history is not simply a series of facts and events, but rather texts bearing indications that reproduce memory, identity, and legitimacy (Peter, 2003). Herein lies the importance of semiotic analysis in revealing the intellectual (ideological) and interpretive character of historical records, whether they be political discourse, economic or social texts, documents, rituals, or mythological narratives. Therefore, the semiotic approach constitutes an effective interpretive framework for deconstructing and analysing historical texts, not as reflections of the past and their narration, but as symbolic systems that produce meanings and reposition them within a specific cultural and authoritarian context (Inglis, 2013: 173). This requires a deep understanding of the

central semiotic approaches as formulated by philosophers interested in this method. In our view, researchers cannot employ semiotic analytical tools for historical texts without knowledge and familiarity with the theoretical approaches formulated by philosophers. This is necessary to develop a cognitive and methodological understanding of multidimensional historical texts.

Theoretical Visions Framing the Semiotic Approach:

Through this research, we will attempt to present a methodological framework that can be applied to the analysis of historical texts, starting from the premise that: (Historical texts do not only represent facts and events, but also produce meaningful and intentional discourses and instructions).

The semiotic approach is an extension of structuralist perspectives as established by its founder, Ferdinand de Saussure, who distinguished between the signifier and the signified and between language as a system and speech as a practice (ibid: 171). However, its development, spearheaded by a group of thinkers and philosophers; including, for example, Roland Barthes, Hayden White, Umberto Eco, and Michel Foucault (Peter, 2009: 206). Thus, we will use their work to theoretically frame the semiotic method in this study. This allowed de Saussure to open himself up to the field of history, so that every symbolic practice became amenable to deconstruction and analysis, as a semantic structure with an internal system.

As previously mentioned, the reader/researcher should be aware of the central semiotic approaches (Abu Zayd, 2000). This time, however, we will focus on those approaches formulated by Roland Barthes, Hayden White, Umberto Eco, and Michel Foucault. However, we will employ their theoretical approaches in this research, as mentioned earlier. This does not imply that other theoretical approaches developed by other philosophers and thinkers are ineffective. We have specifically chosen these four thinkers and their theoretical perspectives because we believe they have made significant contributions to the development of the semiotic method and the diversity of their interpretations of historical texts.

1- Roland Barthes: (Denaturalizing Historical Text)

Roland Barthes's approach posits that the historical text is a discourse carrying both functional and implicit intellectual meanings, transforming narrated facts and events into new myths. These myths reproduce power, legitimacy, and moral standards. From this perspective, Roland Barthes developed the concept of myth, imbuing it with a semantic dimension that encompasses what is left unsaid in historical texts. This meaning complements the text, making it appear within an intuitive intellectual framework. Historical texts do not merely transmit news; they reproduce intellectual, cultural, and authoritarian narratives, presenting them in a seemingly objective and natural form. In other words, the historical text possesses a structural function to create balance and stability within the social order (Inglis, 2013: 180). It also contains what is left unsaid, which could be a source of danger and a threat to that balance and stability. Both of these elements appear self-evident within the text's structure. For Barthes, the unsaid myth is a discourse with its own significance, used to reconstruct events or reality

through the signifier and the signified (ibid: 182) The analytical tools employed can be summarized as follows:

1. a) Uncovering what lies beyond meaning (mythology)
2. b) Analysing and questioning everything assumed to be self-evident.
3. c) Focusing on the collusion between language and ideology.
4. d) Questioning the stereotypes produced by historical texts regarding gender, class, race, creed, tribe, etc. (ibid: 183).

2- Michel Foucault: (Historical Text Has a System of Power and Knowledge)

For Foucault, historical text does not express reality. Rather, it produces and reproduces it over time. Every text has its own conditions of production and mechanisms of exclusion. Foucault focuses on the historical conditions that produce the text, emanating from the institutions that guarantee its truth. In light of this, according to Foucault, historical texts should be read not merely as records, but as discursive traces governed by the structures of power and knowledge that enabled and produced them. His approaches to analysing the historical text begin with understanding the historical conditions—especially the systemic ones—that constitute the historical text, with all the mechanisms of exclusion and domination that are exercised not only over reality, but also over memory through the reproduction of those same historical conditions. In reality, this considered to be a perpetuation of historical conditions, rendering them natural and supra-historical (ontological) (Foucault, 1987: 77)

The tools of analysis, according to the system of power and knowledge, can be defined as follows:

1. a) Identifying the discourse system to which the historical text belongs (political text, religious text, socio-economic text, etc.).
2. b) Analysing the mechanisms of truth production within the text.
3. c) Uncovering what is left unsaid and what is excluded (Dreyfus, n.d: 102).

3. Hayden White: (Historical Text as an Ideologically Influential Narrative Structure)

White argues that the historical text employs literary narrative techniques to imbue historical events with meaning. The historian does not merely recount historical events, but rather composes them according to their own vision, a vision grounded in the historian's/author's intellectual and ideological background. In this composition, they rely on a literary narrative style that aligns with and suits their perspective, whether it be tragedy, epic heroism, idealism, etc. Here, historical narrative is not simply a record of events, but a rhetorical language that produces meanings and a literary form that organizes history /writing (White, 2003: 68).

According to Hyde White's view (history as an ideological narrative structure), the tools of semiotic analysis can be defined as follows:

1. a) Classifying the dominant narrative style in the historical text.
2. b) Analysing the rhetorical devices used in writing the historical text, such as simile, metaphor, and metonymy, etc.
3. c) Uncovering and interpreting the ethical and ideological framework of the historical text.
4. d) Comparing the historical discourse in the text with the narrative discourse in literature (ibid: 273).

4. Umberto Eco: (Historical Text as an Interpretive Space)

Probably, Eco's vision revolves around the idea that historical texts, like all social and literary texts, do not carry a single meaning. However, such texts are laden with multiple interpretive meanings produced by an ideal interpretation of the text. Historical texts can be interpreted in multiple dimensions and perspectives. Within these texts lies the potential for readers to interpret them in different ways, depending on their cultural background, even if those texts are closed and have a single meaning. The signs within the text do not carry a single meaning, but rather open up a cultural network for interpretation. Sometimes, they produce an ideologically programmed narrative that relies on key signs laden with cultural and authoritative meaning. The direct sign/signifier acts as a cultural code driving the functional meanings of the semiotic method (Eco, 2000: 177).

According to Eco, the tools of analysis when using the semiotic method can be defined as follows:

- a- Distinguishing between the open text and the closed text.
- b- Extracting the key signs and indicators that appear to the reader within the text.
1. c) Following the signs that define the horizon of interpretation.
2. d) Avoiding excessive interpretation that deviates from the logic of the text and burdens it with meanings it cannot bear (ibid: 372).

Semiotic analysis of some historical texts according to the aforementioned perspectives:

When interpreting historical texts, the semiotic approach does not offer an alternative to the methodology of writing reality and documentary history. Though, it complements that methodology and completes the texts by shifting the centre of gravity of the text from (What happened?) to (How was it formulated? And why was it formulated in this way?).

Based on the theoretical perspectives presented, the semiotic approach does not simply reread historical texts as they are. Rather, it deconstructs and reconstructs them in a scientific attempt to rebuild the past, which in turn reconstructs the cultural, epistemological, and political fabric of the

present and future. In the following paragraphs, we will attempt to analyse some historical texts using the semiotic approach, taking into account the diversity of these texts, their differing discourses, and their historical contexts.

1. Muawiyah Ibn Abi Sufyan's Sermon after the Peace Treaty with Al-Hasan:

Muawiyah said: "By Allah, I did not fight you so that you would pray, nor so that you would fast, nor so that you would perform Hajj, nor so that you would pay Zakat. You already do all of that. Rather, I fought you so that I might rule over you" (Al-Dhahabi, 1981: 146–147)

In this sermon, we observe that Muawiyah dismantles the legitimacy of the conflict with his opponents in Kufa. He shifts the battle from the arena of religion, which his opponents used as a weapon in their struggle against him, to the arena of pure political power. The signifier here is "I did not fight you so that you would pray," and the first implication is that religion is not the cause of the conflict and fighting, even if his opponents raised the banner of religion to justify their war against him. The second (mythical) implication is that Muawiyah reconstructs the image of the strong, pragmatic ruler who openly declares the centralization of power and its transformation into a political monarchy in which the ruler reigns supreme, in contrast to the model (the Caliph/ruler) that links governance and religion. The text does not merely describe a political statement; rather, it resembles a system of signs that re-encodes and defines the political dynasty as a natural and legitimate dynasty, based on the premise that it is political in nature, aimed at governance. This is imposed by practical power, not by differing religious values. Here, the text produces a new myth of legitimacy by negating religious dissent (Inglis, 2003: 183).

In this text, one can observe that its formulation involves a rhetorical narrative constructed in a tragically realistic manner, devoid of promises or idealism, but rather an acknowledgment of stark reality. Rhetorically, the text expresses a political realism that is not religious. The narrative discourse within the text is used to deconstruct the relationship between power and religion, placing the conflict within the framework of political realism. The text also reveals an epic, realistic narrative pattern: the ruler wages the battle for power not as Allah's shadow on earth, but as the founding leader of a political property, far removed from the theory of divine mandate (ibid).

This text represents a shift of the discursive power centre, from a religiously mobilizing discourse, as in the era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, to a pragmatic authoritarian discourse. This shift reshapes knowledge about the ruler and the legitimacy of his rule in light of a reformulation of the relationship between religion and politics in the collective consciousness. The text's discourse redefines power as being above religion, not through it. It simultaneously reproduces new concepts of memory, knowledge, and power (Abu Zayd, 2000: 97).

The text is imbued with linguistic and symbolic markers and is by no means neutral. It carries a cultural and ideological weight, evident in Mu'awiya's recorded sermon. Power, as in the speeches of those who

ruled before Mu'awiya, is concealed behind religious or moral discourse. Their speeches employ ideological disguise (Berger, 2009: 208), see also (Al-Jabiri, 2000b: 249); saying one thing and implying another. Here, in Mu'awiya's sermon, the term "fighting" is not presented in its previous doctrinal or moral forms, but rather stripped of all religious legitimacy. The fighting in the text is not for the sake of religion, but for power. Thus, the true meaning of the term "fighting" is redirected to reveal the previously concealed official justifications opposing Mu'awiya's position. The text exposes the ideological function of political discourse cloaked in religious garb, undermining and dismantling its foundations. This is achieved by highlighting the true meaning of fighting for rule and power. Power, in the text's discourse, represents the overarching symbol, and its use of religious symbols serves only as functional means to emphasize that its aim is not faith, but solely governance. Therefore, religious symbols (worship rituals) are presented in the text as a given, already realized in reality, requiring no struggle. This constitutes an interpretive shift, whereby the religious sign is redirected to contribute to revealing the text's deeper structure: the pursuit of power. Here, the discourse of power is repositioned in (usl fought you to rule over you." This sentence in the text eliminates the opposing symbolic ambiguity and establishes a new sign: rule through explicit confession. Language becomes an instrument of power, not a means of communication. As Eco says, "Language does not describe the world; it creates it" (Eco, 2000: 197).

Thus, the text explicitly deconstructs the relationship between religion and politics, building its foundations on political disclosure and frankness. It does not fight for religion but to become ruler. This demonstrates how power uses linguistic signs as tools to produce official truth, then redefines them when it suits its purposes. This is what is called a "text complicit with power" (ibid: 70). It assumes that the recipient already knows the truth, so there is no need for ambiguity; rather, the text must directly affirm the reality of power (Inglis, 2013: 78), and see also (Al-Jabiri, 2000b: 237).

2. The sermon of Abu Ja`far Al-Mansur after assuming the caliphate:

"O people, I am, but Allah's sovereign on His earth, ruling you with His guidance and support, and His guardian over His wealth. I act in it according to His will and desire, and I give with His permission. Allah has made me a lock over it; if He wills to open me, He will open me to give to you and distribute your provisions, and if He wills to lock me over it, He will lock me. So, turn to Allah and ask Him on this noble day, which has bestowed upon you from His bounty what He has made known to you" (Ibn Asakir, 1982: 311)

This text is a historical text that carries many implications that make it a mirror that clearly reflects symbolic power engines upon which the Abbasid Caliphate is founded as an Imamate for religious and worldly affairs (Al-Mawardi, n.d:16–17)

Through the text, Al-Mansur's speech effectively stripped the event of its political context. It avoids mentioning conflicts, allegiance, opposition, and oppression. Instead, it replaces all these concepts with the statement, "Allah has appointed me," thus making his authority derive from divine will and his actions appear predetermined. This effectively empties his actions of any human agency. The text contains the

implication that the caliph assumes power, and that this rule is a divine act imbued with symbolic meanings embodied in the concepts of obedience and sanctity. This is the essence of the myth within the text. Allah sent Al-Mansur as caliph to the people in matters of their religion and worldly affairs. The nation did not choose him; rather, Allah chose him for them. This places the opposition in direct confrontation with Allah. When Al-Mansur states, "I am, but Allah's sovereign on His earth" (ibid), he establishes an inseparable link between politics and religion, transforming the caliphate into a myth that affirms the divine selection of this position and implicitly assumes that objecting to the authority is tantamount to objecting to Allah, who has chosen that authority.

In his speech, Al-Mansur employed stereotypical images drawn from the collective imagination associated with ancient political myths at the moment of political establishment. We observe this metaphorical style in the imagery of the lock and key. This is not merely an innocent metaphor, but a deliberate one, establishing an authoritarian meta-linguistic framework—a language that brooks no dissent, not even a response to the discourse of an authority speaking in the name of Allah. This authority derives its legitimacy from Allah alone, as the divine king holds the key to the locks (Inglis, 2013: 183). The image of the lock and key is a mythological one, expressing the secret of assuming power. He who possesses the key controls the fate of the locks. Furthermore, the key and lock symbolize the transition from one world to another, from one culture to another. The holder of the key may lead the masses to a life of happiness and abundance, or he may lead them to the dungeons of captivity and locks. The key carries a profound symbolic weight in the culture of peoples, representing power, knowledge, and authority (ibid).

In Al-Mansur's sermon, we observe the formation of a field of knowledge that makes submission to the ruler is rational and legitimate. The caliph's self-portrayal as guardian of divine funds redefines authority, not on a political basis as Mu'awiya did, but rather on purely religious grounds. This allows him to embody religious authority through political discourse, making submission to his power a religious practice (Al-Jabiri, 2000a: 97). Obedience to his will is presented as rational and ethical, rewarded with Allah's bounty. When he says, "I give it with His permission," the caliph does not control the funds but gives them in Allah's name—a statement that reproduces the authoritarian system through self-discipline among the subjects. He does not demand their obedience to him, but rather their obedience to Allah through him. The text is thus a product of authority, self, and knowledge. Its construction is expressed by presenting the caliph as an indispensable intermediary between Allah and the people. The authoritarian self is not presented as a political actor, but rather as an instrument for executing the divine will. Obedience and submission to the Caliph's orders is a religious duty, not out of fear of oppression (Al-Jabiri, 2000b: 338–339).

Most historical texts are not merely recounting facts and events, but also structured narrative interpretations woven with ideological plots. The text before us is a tightly constructed tragic plot, in which the people are presented as a misguided entity, and the Caliph as their saviour. The narrative presented by the text's context is clearly a moral one. The people are lost and rebellious, and the Caliph is divinely appointed to guide them to the straight path, even if this leads to their oppression and brutality

for their own good. Thus, semiotic analysis reveals how power is written in history, not as a reality, but as a legitimate narrative that convinces the community that submission is a virtue. The text, therefore, does not convey the truth directly, but rather reimagines it through rhetorical and narrative patterns to legitimize power through a prophetic, narrative style (Abu Zayd, 2000: 98). The ascension to the Caliphate is portrayed here as a predestined event, not the product of political struggle. Al-Mansur employs the rhetoric of divine selection and supernatural legitimacy, transforming the discourse into a narrative of a tragic nature. This steers history in a deliberate direction, aiming to establish the caliph as a necessary intermediary between Allah and the people. It reproduces concepts of divine mandate and invokes the concept of salvation, mimicking Christian narratives of sacred authority and adapting them to an Islamic context that does not recognize intermediaries in the first place (Al-Jabiri, 2000b: 342).

The text appears open to multiple interpretations. The symbol of the Caliph is embodied on three semantic levels: a political level, where the Caliph represents the authority of the state; a religious level, where the Caliph is Allah's representative; and a moral level, where he is the guardian of the nation and its finances. Each of these levels transforms the symbol (the Caliph) into a specific interpretive structure depending on the reading of the text (Abu Zayd 2000: 150–151). In addition to individual reader's perspective. The sermon is not merely a declaration of the authority of a new Caliph, but rather a symbolic structure laden with numerous signs, generating political, religious, and moral legitimacy through the language in which it was delivered. It was through this text that the power and knowledge that governed the Abbasid state for approximately five centuries were produced. Virtually all cultural, intellectual, and religious production was founded upon this text.

4- The Zanj Revolution (869AD/ 883AD)*

“The Zanj revolted in Basra in a large gathering, and many slaves and black people responded to them, claiming justice, but in reality they were instigators of sedition. So the Caliph Al-Mu'tamid ordered the army to be sent to cut them off, as they had no place among the believers. Thus, some of them were killed, their homes were burned, and security was restored to its people” (Al-Tabari, n. d: 487).

The text points to a network of signs that lead to a mythical meaning, legitimizing oppression and creating a double contradiction in the form of symbols. The language in the text's discourse produces a duality of good/evil, order/chaos, purity/pollution, and faith/disbelief (Inglis, 2013: 181). From this, we can uncover the direct meaning through the text's apparent and direct signs, and the mythical meaning they contain. The sign of the Zanj (a rebellious group of slaves and Black people) is the first direct sign, behind which lies the mythical meaning of the Zanj as a different chaotic other, posing a threat to the established order (Abu Zayd, 2000: 151). The sign “they claim justice” is a false claim, “a word of truth used for falsehood,” a phrase concealing the mythical meaning of delegitimizing the discourse of the oppressed rebelling for equality. The sign “advocates of sedition” outwardly indicates that the Zanj are troublemakers, sowing the seeds of division and fragmentation within society/the state. This sign underlies the second mythical meaning, demonizing the revolution and labelling it as religious corruption. The apparent sign in the phrase (“the believers”) is that they represent the righteous and

stable class ("us"), in contrast to "them/the other". This signifies that the inner community ("us") is the group of good people who form the foundation of the state's society, in contrast to the marginalized groups ("the other") that exist outside the culture of the state's society and system. These marginalized groups are potentially a threat to the system itself and aim to divide the unity of society. The phrase ("cutting them off") reflects the end of the threat and conceals behind it the myth of state violence as a saviour from chaos and an instrument for purifying society from the stain of sedition. The phrase ("restoring security to its people") embodies the meaning of stability, and behind it lies the victory of the system and the reinforcement of legitimacy for a mythical meaning that implies the state fulfils the will of the subjects ("us"). The text presents the Zanj Revolution as sedition, not as a response to injustice inflicted upon these marginalized groups. This is the essence of the myth, as the authority of the state emerges in the text as an impartial authority that restores order. Meanwhile, acts of violence such as killing and burning are left unpunished, making the text appear natural and neutral. It is in fact imbued with the ideology of the ruling group ("us"), which shapes social and political relations and makes them appear eternal and natural, not historical (ontological-existential) (Al-Khouli, 2000: 409)

The text is produced in language that suggests security is the inherent right of the ruling group ("us") phrase, and that revolution is merely an incidental anomaly, not a structural reaction to historical injustice. It remains silent on the material causes of revolution, such as slavery, marginalization, exploitation, and poverty. The text is neither innocent nor neutral; rather, it is laden with the ideology of power. It uses language to construct a myth of security, justice, and sedition, as tools to conceal power relations. It presents a perception of the other (Black people, slaves) as a source of danger, dissension, and fragmentation, thus producing a racist cultural structure that is perpetuated and reinforced by language (Foucault, 1987, 197).

The text of "The Zanj Revolution" is distinguished by its epic narrative style. The events are portrayed as a struggle between good, represented by the Caliph/the believers, and evil, represented by the slaves/Blacks. This struggle ends with the victory of good (the Caliph) and the restoration of order and security for the believers. This heroic epic presents history as a moral conflict between justice and religious sedition, not a class or political struggle. The Caliph and his army are depicted as heroes representing divine law on the one hand, and the state system aligned with that law on the other. The opposing side, the Blacks, is portrayed as slaves and instigators of sedition. The pivotal event in the narrative is the Zanj uprising and their claim to justice. The climax of the narrative is the dispatch of the army, the killing of the rebels, and the burning of their homes. The epic concludes with the restoration of security to its rightful owners.

Possibly, the narrative in the text contains, in its implicit structure, an unstated, or rather, unspoken, ideological stance. It doesn't merely recount events, but rather produces a vision directed at all components of the state. This vision aims to solidify the authoritarian regime, entrench the aristocratic religious discourse, and transform the revolution into a moral threat, rather than a response to state injustice and a social reaction to the normalization of authoritarian violence justified by religious, security, and political legitimacy (Eco, 2005: 157).

Therefore, historical language is not neutral in any case. This is something we can demonstrate using the mechanisms and tools of semiotic analysis. The phrase (“They claim justice”) was used in a rhetorical discourse to create a vast gap in the recipient's perception between the statement “(They claim justice)” and the reality “(They are false instigators of sedition),” thus stripping the opposition of its legitimacy and denying them their rights. The phrase (“They have no place among the believers”) was used in the text's discourse as a religious statement that excludes the other, accused of disbelief and heresy. The phrase (“Security was restored to its people”) was used in the text as a rhetorical conclusion that closes the narrative and justifies killing without accountability, all in the name of restoring symbolic balance.

As for the major metaphors that govern the text, two central metaphors stand out, shaping its symbolic structure: contagion/disease and the Zanj/sedition. Therefore, the disease and the sedition must be eradicated by a cleansing instrument—the army—to restore security. These two metaphors were used subconsciously to generate meaning and guide the reader (Inglis, 2013: 175).

The text operates through codes, which are cultural systems that compel the reader to interpret signs. Each reader may interpret the signs according to their cultural environment and the civilizational context to which they belong. Although the text, through its discourse, attempts to produce a closed meaning, the signs open it up to alternative interpretations that align with the perspective of the opposition. The Zanj are a symbol of legitimate revolution. The justice demanded is a right that necessitates revolution and revolution. The army is transformed into an instrument of authoritarian violence that perpetuates the dominance of injustice and discrimination, and restoring security equates to restoring poverty and perpetuating slavery (Berger, 2009: 207).

5. Drought and famine in Fatimid Egypt around 1065 AD.

“At that time, Egypt was afflicted by a severe drought. Prices rose and inflation intensified until a loaf of bread reached fifteen dinars. An ardeb* of wheat reached eighty dinars. People ate cats and dogs until they became scarce. People ate each other” (Al-Maqrizi, 2007: 208).

This text cannot be described merely as a fleeting economic event in the history of Fatimid Egypt. Rather, it is a complex historical text that reshapes the relationship between humanity and power, between power and religion, and between bread and death. In this sense, a semiotic analysis of the text reveals its latent and unspoken symbolic structures, in addition to its explicit meanings. The text aims to highlight a narrative structure that is anti-state, stripping it of its legitimacy and placing it in a state of symbolic impotence and failure. The phrase (“the people ate one another”) (ibid) is not a literal statement, nor is it the narrative conclusion of the text. Instead, it is a profound indication of the collapse of human values. Famine, in the text, fulfils its ultimate function of stripping the state/authority of any sanctity. Bread, which, according to the culture of the people, is supposed to be a symbol of life and sustenance, and whose provision is considered the state's most important priority and one of the most important pillars of legitimacy, is transformed in the text into a sign indicating a severe decline in economic life. Its price

rising to fifteen dinars empties it of its sacred dimension and presents it as a subject of paramount importance in the political struggle. Dogs and cats, once integral to the cultural fabric, are now relegated to a single link in the food chain, signifying the collapse of that chain and its associated symbols. The phrase ("people ate one another") (ibid) is not so much a description of hunger in the text as it is a description of humanity's fall from the heights of reason and civilization to the depths of animalistic barbarity. This is the worst state that civilized human societies can reach. In this sense, the text belongs to the discourse that opposes the myth of civilization, since the state collapses not because of an external enemy, but because of the collapse of its moral and civilizational system and its meanings from within that system itself (White, 2023: 70).

The famine exposes the falsity of the state's and society's moral history. The text employs a moral narrative structure. It doesn't simply recount the drought and famine as a natural disaster, but rather utilizes them to construct an accusatory narrative against the state. The reader is reminded of the state's society's moral hypocrisy in a subtle way. The text doesn't explicitly identify the perpetrator, but it remains suspiciously silent about the state's authority and the absence of the Caliph. Prices fluctuate unchecked. Hunger speaks for itself. Death roams the streets unchecked. And the Caliph doesn't intervene to stop the tragedy (ibid).

Perhaps describing and determining prices is not neutral, but rather a reduction of the tragedy to monetary indicators. This implicitly places the blame on the political and economic system, which is driving the collapse of the moral fabric through the unequal distribution of resources. There is no food policy, no balance between supply and demand. It is simply a deadly void. The text here attempts to reshape societal consciousness, portraying the country as a nightmare. In this scenario, a theoretically integrated society is transformed into a predatory arena where the strong eat the weak. The text employs a historical and moral narrative style, a tragic one, to accuse and condemn the state, attempting to overthrow it not by force, but by exposing its responsibility for implementing a policy of starvation. This is because the state exercises its power through control of food and health, according to the Biopolicy project. The text depicts the scene as the moment of the complete collapse of Biopolicy. There is absolutely no intervention from the Caliph and his governors to control prices. The state, with all its resources, has not attempted to provide food security, nor has it improved food distribution based on geographical and demographic equitableness. This clearly indicates the absence of Biopolicy techniques and mechanisms, which is the very essence of the state's function (Al-Zawawi, 2023: 73).

The phrase ("people ate each another") (Al-Maqrizi, 2007: 208) reveals the ultimate breakdown of social bonds. Law collapses, custom is suspended, and values and norms are transformed. The state, in the political sense, becomes an exceptional case, resembling a collection of bandits and criminals, and unbridled violence reigns supreme.

This text, therefore, speaks not only of bread and wheat, but also of a complex discourse on the state and economic and moral collapse. It is an open text, open to reinterpretation, such that reading it through a semiotic lens becomes a process of generating its latent meanings. It is not merely a passive

reception; it allows for reinterpretation, highlighting what is left unsaid and deciphering the codes that constitute its structure (Al-Jabiri, 1988: 79). Famine becomes a symbol of structural inequality in the political economy. Rising prices become a sign of the market's unchecked power and the dominance of material values over those of solidarity and social cohesion. The act of people eating each other is not only a metaphorical representation of famine, but also an allusion to civil war, the disintegration of the social fabric, and the collapse of the state and its authorities, which are the guarantors of the social contract.

Conclusion

The semiotic approach to analysing historical texts necessitates rereading them not as documents of the past that have ceased to exist, but as texts that can be employed to critique, re-examine, and reinterpret the present, free from their perceived sanctity and rigidity. This stems from the understanding that these texts are not lifeless relics merely recounting the past, but rather semiotic platforms capable of reactivation. This reactivation allows for their rewriting according to the demands of the present. The invocation of historical texts should not be limited to their role as witnesses in recording the history of tragedies, wars, and the triumphs of rulers, but should also serve to activate collective memory and cultivate a critical awareness against all the forces that attempt to reproduce poverty, tyranny, civil wars, and tragedies, presenting them as natural inevitabilities that align with the course of history.

Declarations

Ethical Approval

This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was not applicable to this research, as the article does not contain any studies involving human participants.

Author Contribution

The author confirms sole responsibility for all aspects of this work. Prof. Dr. Emhemed Enwiji Ghomid conceived the study, developed the theoretical framework, conducted the analysis, and wrote and revised the manuscript. The author has read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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Data Availability Statement

No new datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study. The data and historical materials discussed in this article are derived from published sources and historical texts cited in the manuscript. All relevant sources are appropriately referenced in the reference list and are available through their respective published sources.

Declaration of Interest Statement

The author declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper. No external funding was received for this study, and the research was conducted independently.

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Footnotes

1. By linear history, we mean that history does not develop along a continuous timeline and epistemological path, but rather requires an epistemological break in which errors are corrected, that is, history is rewritten according to the development of epistemological and methodological tools, as expressed by Bachelard in his work, (The New Scientific Thought, see (Al-Khouli, 2000).
2. * The Zanj Revolution (869 AD) was one of the prominent revolts against the Abbasid Caliphate in the city of Basra. It lasted for 14 years. See (Al-Tabari, n. d: 487).
3. * "Ardeb" is a unit of dry measure used in Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries. In Egypt it is approximately equal to 0.195 cubic metres.