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Co-constituting the Self and the City: A Chronotopic Analysis of Raja Alem's *The Dove's Necklace*

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Abstract

This study examines the reciprocal relationship between urban transformation in Mecca and the constitution of identity in Raja Alem's contemporary Saudi novel, *The Dove's Necklace* (2010). While existing scholarship frequently addresses the marginalization of women or the sociocultural erosion resulting from Mecca's urbanization, it often overlooks the mutually constitutive dynamic between the city and its inhabitants. This paper argues that the rapid redevelopment of Mecca precipitates simultaneous and interconnected transformations in both its physical landscape and its characters' subjectivities. The analysis employs a chronotopic framework, drawing on Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope to demonstrate how Mecca's space and time and the characters' sense of self are intrinsically linked and co-productive. By operationalizing the chronotope within a tangible, physical context, this study addresses a critical gap in literary scholarship. Consequently, it not only elucidates the complexity of Alem's narrative but also positions *The Dove's Necklace* within global discourses on urbanization, cultural heritage, and the negotiation of identity, thereby underscoring the significance of contemporary Middle Eastern literature for an international readership.

Keywords: Contemporary Saudi Literature, Chronotope, Bakhtin, Urbanization, Identity, Cultural Heritage, Space and Time

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1. Introduction

From 1985 to 2020, the city of Mecca underwent rapid transformation driven by extensive national development initiatives and sustained migration, as many pilgrims chose to settle in the city after completing their pilgrimage (Alqurashi 22). This period of intensified urban expansion and architectural restructuring profoundly altered the city's physical landscape (1). Yet Mecca is more than an evolving urban environment; it is imbued with historical, cultural, and spiritual significance as the birthplace of Islam, the setting of the Prophet Muhammad's life, and the global center of the annual pilgrimage (van Leeuwen 81). The city thus operates not only as a material space but also as a symbolic and spiritual domain deeply interwoven with the identities and experiences of its inhabitants.

Raja Alem's novel *The Dove's Necklace* (2010), recipient of the International Prize for Arabic Fiction in 2011, directly engages with these transformations, depicting how Mecca's redevelopment reshapes the lives and perceptions of its characters. Although previous scholarship has examined women's marginalization or the sociocultural erosion of Meccan heritage due to urbanization, few studies address the reciprocal relationship between Mecca and its inhabitants, in which the city and its people mutually shape and redefine one another. This paper argues that Mecca's rapid urbanization generates parallel transformations in both the city's architecture and the characters' sense of self, demonstrating that the city's spatiotemporal landscape and human identity are inseparable and mutually constitutive.

To analyze this reciprocal relationship, the study applies Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope alongside close textual analysis. The discussion begins by identifying concrete locations in the novel that appear in both the past and present of the characters, selected for their sociocultural and personal significance. These locations constitute the spatial dimension of the chronotope and function as key sites of interaction between the characters and the narrative's unfolding of space and time, while the temporal dimension is examined as the movement and transformation from one state or action to another, with attention to the perceived speed at which events unfold and are experienced by the characters within each setting. The study then maps the interaction between spatial and temporal elements, exploring how changes in Mecca's physical and cultural landscape shape the characters' memory,

perception, and sense of self, and conversely, how the characters' experiences and interpretations influence the meaning and perception of these spaces. Passages illustrating these dynamics are systematically annotated and categorized by location, temporal period, and impact on character identity, enabling a structured analysis of recurring spatiotemporal configurations and their mutually constitutive relationship with human identity.

By moving beyond analyses of women's marginalization or the sociocultural loss of Meccan heritage, this study addresses a significant gap in contemporary Saudi literary scholarship. Applying Bakhtin's chronotope in a concrete context demonstrates how Mecca's physical and cultural transformation directly shapes and is shaped by the perceptions, memories, and identities of its inhabitants. In doing so, the study highlights the social and psychological effects of urbanization and positions Middle Eastern literature within global discussions of identity formation, urban studies, and cultural memory. Moreover, by examining a novel that intricately intertwines historical memory, lived experience, and urban transformation, the research introduces the richness and nuance of Saudi literature to an international audience, demonstrating its relevance to broader conversations about the reciprocal relationship between human identity and evolving spatial landscapes.

2. Literature Review

Scholarship on Raja Alem's *The Dove's Necklace* has evolved from early formalist analyses of narrative techniques to more recent explorations of sociocultural and identity themes, reflecting broader shifts in Arabic literary criticism toward postcolonial and feminist lenses. However, these studies often overlook the novel's innovative fusion of magical realism with Bakhtin's chronotope theory, a gap this research addresses by examining how spatiotemporal configurations shape identity in a hybridized Saudi context.

Early contributions, such as Aghaei's "Narrative Structure and Characterization in Raja Alem's *The Ring of Pigeons*" (an alternate title for the novel), emphasize Alem's innovative characterization as a driver of narrative organization. While Aghaei's focus on how characters like the fragmented protagonists propel the plot highlights Alem's departure from linear storytelling, it underplays the sociocultural

implications, treating structure as isolated from broader themes like urbanization and gender. Similarly, Abuali and Asbaghi's "Semiotics of Tension in Raja Alem's Tawq Al-Hamam" analyzes semiotic conflicts between Meccan civilization and culture, arguing that these tensions foster reader disorientation. This semiotic approach effectively reveals Alem's critique of cultural erosion but lacks intersectional depth, ignoring how class and gender amplify these tensions, a limitation echoed in later works.

Building on these, Karimi's essay "Raja Alem and Modernism in the Arabic Novel" critiques Alem's first-person narration as a reflection of women's marginalization in Saudi society, linking it to sociocultural exclusion. Karimi's strength lies in connecting modernism to gender dynamics, yet her analysis contrasts with Aghaei's formalism by prioritizing sociopolitical context, revealing an evolution in criticism toward identity politics. However, it overlooks non-Western modernist influences, such as magical realism, which Alem adapts to challenge Eurocentric narratives. Complementing this, Al-Qadi's work on Mecca as a symbol of sacredness examines characters' navigation of sacred-contemporary tensions, praising Alem's symbolic depth but critiquing her for romanticizing the holy city without fully addressing modernization's destructive impacts, a theme underexplored in earlier formalist studies.

More recent scholarship integrates theoretical frameworks to deepen sociocultural readings. Abu Alhassan's research applies Halbwachs' theory of collective memory, arguing that Alem immortalizes Hijazi heritage through mnemonic devices, effectively bridging individual and communal identities. This builds on Karimi's modernism by emphasizing memory's role in cultural preservation, though it risks idealizing Alem's intent without critiquing potential biases toward elite narratives. Aldeeb's gynocritic-intersectional analysis of women's representations reveals how overlapping identities (e.g., gender, class) exacerbate oppression, extending Karimi's gender focus with intersectionality. Aldeeb's critique of patriarchal structures is robust, yet it contrasts with Abu Alhassan's optimism by highlighting memory's role in perpetuating inequality, underscoring a tension in Alem scholarship between preservation and subversion.

Van Leeuwen's paper on Mecca as a multifaceted urban structure explores

characters' boundary navigation amid religious heritage and social complexities, critiquing Alem's portrayal of fragmentation as a metaphor for Saudi modernity. This spatial lens complements Abu Alhassan's memory framework but reveals a weakness: van Leeuwen's emphasis on urban boundaries overlooks magical elements that transcend physical space. Finally, Aboud and Ali's comparison of *The Dove's Necklace* with Al-Gosaibi's *Freedom Apartment* identifies universal themes reflecting Saudi culture and human values, praising Alem's global resonance. However, their universalist approach dilutes local specificities, contrasting with Aldeeb's intersectionality and exposing a divide between thematic breadth and contextual depth.

In addition to these analyses, Sanna Dhahir's study provides a critical framework for understanding The Dove's Necklace as a work of spiritual and cultural preservation. Dhahir argues that Alem performs an "homage" to Mecca by constructing a palimpsestic city where the urban landscape itself functions as a living protagonist (Dhahir 45). She frames Mecca as a maternal body, symbolized by the womb-like traditional alleys of the Abu al-Roos lane, violated by modernization. Dhahir connects this violation to the disappearance of the novel's symbolic doves, which she reads as paralleling the silencing of women, situating Alem's work as a regenerative response to cultural erasure (Dhahir 46). Kholoud Al-Ghamdi further develops an ecocritical perspective, linking the novel's urban transformations to contemporary policy and Saudi Vision 2030. Al-Ghamdi contends that modernization constitutes a form of "spiritual violence," profaning sacred space and destroying the city's ecological and cultural integrity (Al-Ghamdi 112). In her allegorical reading, the murdered woman in the alley represents Mecca itself, exposed and commodified by globalized urban development (Al-Ghamdi 115). Both Dhahir and Al-Ghamdi emphasize the city as an active agent in the narrative, directly shaping characters' experiences and identities, which aligns with the chronotopic perspective employed in this study.

While these analyses enhance understanding through diverse lenses, from semiotics and modernism to memory and urbanism, they predominantly focus on sociocultural or universal elements without addressing the setting as a magical realist chronotope that shapes identity formation and perception. This oversight

limits insights into how Alem's interplay of magical realism and physical landscapes influences characters' hybrid identities, a void this study fills by applying Bakhtin's chronotope to reveal deeper narrative dynamics.

3. Methodology

The significance of Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope in this study lies in its understanding of time and space as inseparable forces that shape narrative experience and determine the possibilities of human identity within literature. In *Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel*, Bakhtin defines the chronotope as the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relations that structure the world of the text and the depiction of human beings within it (84). Time and space are thus not passive background elements but active forces that influence how events unfold, how characters act, and how identities develop. As Liisa Steinby explains, chronotopes define "the possibilities of action available to the individuals in the world of the novel" (119), indicating that characters' behaviors and choices are shaped by the specific spatial and temporal circumstances they inhabit (123).

Furthermore, Bakhtin draws on Kant's theory of space and time to highlight their role as fundamental aspects of human cognition, giving the chronotope a dimension that connects the narrative's space and time to perception, memory, and consciousness. As Bakhtin notes, referring to Kant:

> In his *Transcendental Aesthetics*, Kant defines space and time as indispensable forms of any cognition, beginning with elementary perceptions and representations. Here we employ the Kantian evaluation of the importance of these forms in the cognitive process, but differ from Kant in taking them not as 'transcendental' but as forms of the most immediate reality. (Bakhtin 85)

While Kant understands space and time as inherent mental frameworks through which individuals organize sensory experience, Bakhtin reconceptualizes them within literature as relational and experiential, shaped by cultural memory and subjective perception rather than existing as fixed absolutes (Bemong & Borghart 4). In this sense, chronotopes arise through the interaction between external environments and human consciousness, continually reshaped by shifting historical and psychological conditions. As Erdinast-Vulcan argues, chronotopes are "constantly achieved and

transformed in the negotiation between mind and world" (120). Thus, narrative space and time operate as bridges between material reality and internal experience, demonstrating how identity, memory, and history are mutually constituted within literary space.

For the present study, this insight allows Mecca's urban and cultural transformations to be understood not merely as physical changes, but as phenomena that interact dynamically with the characters' consciousness, memory, and sense of self. Characters do not merely inhabit the city; their experiences, interpretations, and actions actively participate in constructing the meaning of the spaces and times they occupy. This perspective reinforces the idea that urban transformation and identity formation are mutually constitutive as the city shapes its inhabitants, while their perceptions, memories, and responses continuously influence how the city is experienced, interpreted, and understood within the narrative.

4. Discussion

4.1 Yusuf and His Connection to Mecca

In *The Dove's Necklace*, space and time are portrayed as constructs profoundly influenced by the characters' experiences across various locations and time periods. Yusuf al-Hujubi exemplifies the intricate relationship between chronotope and human identity. By characterizing him as a historian, Alem positions him as a living archive of the city, embodying its essence as his knowledge intertwines with his life experiences and memories. This renders him a vessel for preserving and understanding Mecca's heritage.

Yusuf's perception of Mecca reveals how its modern transformations affect his identity and understanding of space and time. As the city develops into a modern urban landscape with steel buildings and contemporary constructions, he feels alienated. In one of his letters to Azz , he states, "I am the writer and historian Yusuf, half-man, half-robot, twenty-eight years old" (Alem 24). This demonstrates his sense of incompleteness and estrangement, paralleling the hybridized urban landscape he inhabits. He further explains, "for some sin or transgression, I was born deformed in the 1980s" (Alem 24). This deformation is primarily mental; his sense of alienation distances him from his surroundings and Mecca's evolving urban identity. In this

environment, he feels like "a freak who wakes up in the twenty-first century to unfurl and stretch like the monsters looming before us, all these limited and unlimited liability corporations" (Alem 24).

The urbanization Yusuf observes underscores the transformation of Mecca's historical and cultural spaces. Modern constructions such as the Sayf buildings, which replaced the citadel of the Dabba, and the leveling of Mount Omar illustrate how urban development has erased significant landmarks (Alem 287-289). The Sayf buildings, described as "forty-four … kitted out like spaceships … built over where the mountain and citadel of the Dabba used to be" (287), replaced culturally and historically important sites, including a citadel over a century old. Mount Omar was "shorn of all its houses and leveled" (289), leaving only the mechanized and corporate landscape in its place. These transformations signify not just physical change but the erasure of heritage and collective memory, as well as the disruption of Mecca's symbolic and religious past. The removal of mountains, citadels, and other historical structures fractures the temporal continuity that once anchored the city and its inhabitants, producing a sense of alienation and dislocation in Yusuf.

The transformation of Mecca's landscape mirrors the fracturing of Yusuf's own sense of self, making him acutely aware of the dissonance between tradition and modernity. His memories of historical spaces collide with the accelerated temporality of reconstruction, creating a fragmented experience of time in which past and present no longer coexist harmoniously. The erased landmarks are more than architectural losses; they are symbolic of disrupted cultural memory, heightening Yusuf's sense of isolation and incompleteness. This tension clarifies the interdependence of spatial transformation, temporality, and identity formation, revealing that Mecca is not merely a geographic location but a psychologically charged environment that reshapes the consciousness of those who inhabit it.

This is the general state of mind in which Yusuf exists before the narrative turns to his most intense interactions with Mecca, interactions through which both he and the city transform their physical dimensions into lived, experiential spaces. It is at this point that the text turns toward Mount Abu Qubays, a site where the reciprocal relationship between spatial change, temporal disruption, and the construction of identity becomes most pronounced. Through the mountain, space becomes active,

time becomes palpable, and Yusuf's fragmented sense of self encounters one of the oldest loci of Mecca's historical and symbolic significance.

4.2 Mount Abu Qubays

In this novel, Raja Alem constructs Mount Abu Qubays as a dynamic chronotope in which space and time are actively reshaped by Yusuf's cognition. Abu Qubays does not remain a fixed geographical location; rather, it becomes a space continually reconstructed through memory, hallucination, and historical imagination. As Bakhtin asserts, the chronotope is where "the knots of narrative are tied and untied" (250), meaning that space is inseparable from temporal experience and human perception. Here, Yusuf's mind transforms the mountain from a modern construction site into a sacred historical realm containing the bodies of Adam, Eve, and Seth and the legendary ninety tablets of divine knowledge. In doing so, Yusuf alters the mountain's physical reality and invests the space with renewed spiritual significance.

The text demonstrates that when Yusuf sees the sudden flicker of light on the mountain, it becomes the catalyst for cognitive re-creation (Alem 76). The narrator states, "a jolt of electricity tore through Yusuf's mind, sparking the dry tinder of his insanity" (76) and that the light appeared to him "like a shriek of death or a desperate cry for help" (76) This sensory distortion marks the moment when Yusuf begins to reimagine the mountain and actively reconstructs its meaning. His frantic transformation, changing out of his ihram and running toward the height of Abu Qubays "on a mission to save something, whatever it was" (76) reveals his perception of the mountain as a living entity in need of rescue.

Yusuf's reconstruction of space is rooted in his childhood memories. The narrative describes weekly Saturday journeys in which his mother Halima led him and Azza up the mountain to the Cave of Treasures, believed to house the remains of Adam, Eve, and Seth. The mountain is imagined as a sacred site where physical geography merges with mythic time: "Visitors would gather around them every Saturday morning, tracing the steps of the Prophet Noah as he came to return Adam's coffin after the great flood receded" (78). Through Yusuf's recollections, the mountain becomes saturated with religious and mythical temporality.

The power of Yusuf's memory collapses temporal boundaries, turning the present construction site into a catastrophic reenactment of sacred history. When the

bulldozer tears into the ancient stone wall, Yusuf perceives it as sacrilege: "Rock after rock fell. Letters, black and white, piled up and rolled away, tracing out scattered lines of poetry and proverbs" (80). The demolition of physical stones is reinterpreted by Yusuf as the destruction of sacred text and knowledge. He hallucinates the crane lifting "the bodies of Adam, Eve, and Seth, huddled together defensively" (Alem 80). This demonstrates how his cognition reconstructs reality as he transforms a modern development project into a mythical battle to protect the origins of humanity and heritage of Mecca.

Through this reimagining, the mountain is changed into another state and meaning. It is no longer a ruined, emptied space at night but a sacred battlefield, a site of historical urgency. The chronotope becomes a reflection of Yusuf's mental turmoil: the destruction of the mountain mirrors the disintegration of his identity. The narrator notes that Yusuf's emaciated body is "hollow", paralleling the mountain that has been "completely shorn of its houses and left to sink into ravenous emptiness" (70). His mental state accelerates time, "all of a sudden", "quickly", "ran", creating rapid temporal compression (76). Time becomes subjective, produced through Yusuf's perception rather than an external clock.

Mount Abu Qubays demonstrates how Raja Alem constructs Mecca as a dynamic space where perception, memory, and identity are mutually constitutive. Yusuf's reimagining of the mountain from a construction site to a sacred, historical, and mythic realm reveals how human consciousness actively produces the meaning of place. Simultaneously, the mountain shapes Yusuf's temporal perception and sense of self, as its destruction mirrors his psychological turmoil. This interplay shows that transformations in the city's landscape and in its inhabitants are inseparable, highlighting the co-productive relationship between environment and identity.

This dynamic is not limited to Mount Abu Qubays. Al-Lababidi's house, with its rooms, photographs, and inscriptions, functions as a microcosm of the city, where Yusuf's engagement with space and memory generates new meanings and reshapes his sense of self. Shifting from the sacred and mythic terrain of the mountain, the narrative now examines how built spaces, whether domestic, historical, or symbolic, participate in the ongoing transformation of both environment and identity.

4.3 Al-Lababidi's House

In Raja Alem's *The Dove's Necklace*, al-Lababidi's house functions as a profound chronotope where human identity, memory, and historical consciousness converge. Yusuf's prolonged seclusion within the house marks the beginning of an intense, reciprocal interaction between himself and the material environment. The physical isolation allows Yusuf to concentrate fully on the artifacts surrounding him, particularly the photographs that line the walls. As the narrative notes, "He spent whole days in one of the reception rooms, barricading himself inside, blocking every vent, hibernating among the photographs on the walls" (Alem 379) In this moment, the house ceases to be a mere backdrop; it becomes a cognitive space in which past and present, memory and imagination, intersect. Yusuf's mental state, heightened, anxious, and intensely aware, interacts with the spatial and temporal dimensions of the house, producing a lived experience in which time is no longer linear but compressed and subjective. The house becomes a vessel for memory, transmitting the weight of historical and spiritual significance embedded in Mecca's culture.

The photographs within the house serve as catalysts for the emergence of Mecca's past into the present. They are not passive representations but active participants in the narrative. Yusuf's prolonged interaction with these images brings their subjects to life. The text describes, "On day seven of his dematerialization, Yusuf saw a man come out of photograph number sixty-four on the wall of one of the parlors. A live man taking form in the film strip that was Yusuf's body" (380). This passage illustrates the co-productive nature of the chronotope: the house, through its artifacts, animates the city's history, while Yusuf's consciousness provides the perceptual and imaginative energy necessary for this transformation. The material and immaterial aspects of the house interact dynamically, merging historical memory with lived experience. These emergent figures do not simply occupy the space; they communicate, instruct, and guide Yusuf, effectively directing him to engage with Mecca's sacred heritage.

The narrative emphasizes the cultural and spiritual dimensions of this interaction. When the figures instruct Yusuf to retrieve the silver ring marking the Prophet's birthplace, the house becomes a locus of ritual and historical continuity. As the text states, "Go, now. Get yourself to the Kurd's bookstore… Take out the silver

ring. The silver ring marks the birthplace that is the center of all birthplaces. This is your inheritance" (382). The house, through these directives, mediates access to Mecca's spiritual and cultural history, linking Yusuf's identity to the city's sacred and temporal frameworks. His engagement with the house is not merely psychological; it is an embodied enactment of Meccan history. By following the instructions, Yusuf performs rituals that align him physically and spiritually with the city's heritage, bridging temporal distances and creating continuity between past and present.

Yusuf's perception of time within the house is deeply affected by his interactions with the photographs and the emergent figures. Traditional chronological progression gives way to a fluid temporal structure where past, present, and mythical time converge. The text highlights this convergence: "His eyes narrowed till they were thin slits connecting wakefulness and dreaming. They forgot how to sleep, but they no longer cared about sleeping" (381) In this state, Yusuf becomes both a participant and an observer within a temporally layered space. The photographs act as nodes connecting him to multiple historical moments, allowing him to experience events that span centuries. The house, as a spatial construct, is simultaneously physical, cognitive, and temporal. Time becomes subjective, produced through perception rather than measured externally, and the interactions between Yusuf and the house exemplify how human consciousness can reshape spatial and temporal realities.

The emergence of the figures from the photographs illustrates how memory and space are mutually constitutive. The old men, children, and the old woman materialize not only as historical presences but as active agents who impart knowledge, instruction, and spiritual guidance. The narrative states, "By the time he had gotten used to the dark again, the venerable old men on the walls had stepped out of their frames. They began moving between photographs, going in, coming out, trading places, waving to Yusuf" (381). These interactions demonstrate the reciprocal influence between Yusuf and the house. The figures' emergence reshapes his consciousness and prompts him to act, while Yusuf's responses and physical movements further transform the house into a site of living history. The house's space becomes animated, its rooms, walls, and objects integrated into a temporal and spiritual continuum where memory, history, and action are inseparable.

Cultural elements of Mecca are embedded throughout these interactions. The

text continuously references sacred spaces, historical rituals, and local traditions, situating Yusuf's experience within a larger cultural framework. The emergence of figures such as Abd al-Wahid and Hulayl al-Khuza'i links Yusuf directly to the custodial history of the Kaaba, while the references to the Well of Zamzam, pilgrim robes, and Quranic verses anchor his experiences in Mecca's religious and cultural landscape. The narrative notes, "Yusuf obeyed the command that rose within him and stood up. He followed dutifully as it shone, like the crow before it had shone, from door to door, room to room, to the green marble and the silver ring" (384). Here, the spatial traversal of the house is aligned with ritualistic movement, reinforcing the city's sacred geography within the domestic microcosm. The house thus functions as a bridge between personal identity and collective memory, between the sacred city and its inhabitants.

The cognitive interaction between Yusuf and the house reshapes both parties. The house's artifacts, photographs, and inscriptions catalyze transformations in Yusuf's perception, memory, and identity. In turn, Yusuf animates the house, activating its historical and spiritual significance and creating a dynamic temporal landscape. The narrative consistently shows that these transformations are mutually constitutive: "He became a bundle of energy unlike any other. He felt the terrifying energy of the house all around him, pulling all the doors wide open, climbing up the stairs to the sitting room on the top floor" (381). Yusuf's consciousness and action do not merely inhabit the house; they redefine its function and meaning, converting it from a static container of memory into an active, responsive participant in the construction of Mecca's living history.

Ultimately, al-Lababidi's house demonstrates the thesis that Mecca and its inhabitants are engaged in a continuous, reciprocal transformation. The house embodies the city's layered cultural, spiritual, and historical identity, while Yusuf's perception, memory, and actions bring the city's past alive, shaping both his own identity and the meaning of the spaces he occupies. Through seclusion, engagement with artifacts, and responsiveness to the emergent figures, Yusuf participates in a reconstruction of temporal and spatial realities. The house becomes a chronotope where memory, cognition, and cultural heritage intersect, producing a narrative space in which time, identity, and place are mutually constitutive. By animating the past,

internalizing sacred and historical knowledge, and performing ritualized actions, Yusuf and the house co-create a dynamic environment in which Mecca's spiritual and cultural dimensions are continually renewed.

5. Conclusion

Yusuf's experience in *The Dove's Necklace* exemplifies how urban transformation, memory, and identity are mutually constitutive. The novel demonstrates that Mecca is not merely a physical city but a psychologically and culturally charged environment. Mount Abu Qubays and al-Lababidi's house are key chronotopes where space, time, and consciousness intersect. Yusuf's perception, memory, and action actively shape these spaces, while the spaces reshape his sense of self, temporal awareness, and moral responsibility. Alem's work emphasizes that urbanization accelerates, fragments, and transforms time, but also allows for cognitive, spiritual, and emotional engagement. Time becomes a subjective experience, memory is enacted, and space is reimagined. Through Yusuf, the novel shows that modernity need not erase history; it can catalyze reflection, engagement, and transformation. *The Dove's Necklace* thus illustrates the co-productive relationship between environment and human identity, demonstrating the significance of Mecca's urban, cultural, and spiritual transformations in shaping consciousness. Alem's chronotopic approach highlights the layered and reciprocal interplay of space, time, and subjectivity, contributing to broader discussions of urbanization, heritage, and identity in contemporary Middle Eastern literature.

Statements and Declarations

Thesis Declaration

This article is derived from the MA dissertation entitled "*The Magical Realist Chronotope: Identity Creation in The Dove's Necklace by Raja Alem"*, currently being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Kareem Lowaymi Mutlaq in the field of English Language and Literature at Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz.

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AI Use Declaration

The use of artificial intelligence was limited exclusively to language editing and

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