



## The Shattered Mirror: Disappointment of Iraqi People After the 2003 Invasion with Special Reference to 'The Baghdad Eucharist' Novel

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### Abstract

This research uses Sinan Antoon's novel 'The Baghdad Eucharist' as a literary lens to investigate the idea of disappointment among Iraqi citizens after the US-led coalition forces invaded Iraq in 2003. The paper places disappointment in Iraq's historical setting and investigates how the disparity between pre-invasion hopes and post-invasion reality produced deep disillusionment throughout Iraqi society. Through the careful reading of Antoon's novel, the paper shows how literary representation, especially via the generational split, depicts the complex character of Iraqi disillusionment. represented by the two primary protagonists of the novel: the elderly optimist Uncle Youssef and the youthful, disillusioned Maha. The study shows that disappointment in post-2003 Iraq is not just a temporary emotional reaction but rather a structural condition affecting every aspect of Iraqi life: social, cultural, religious, and political. This study adds to a more complex knowledge of how Iraqis have processed and articulated their communal and individual dissatisfaction in the wake of invasion, occupation, and sectarian violence by means of analysis of both historical data and literary expression. The results imply that Iraqi literature not only records disappointment, but also produces counter-narratives contesting both Ba'athist and post-Ba'athist hegemonic discourses, so revealing how disappointment operates as a form of resistance as well as a reaction to trauma.

**Key words:** The Baghdad Eucharist; Sinan Antoon; Disappointment; invasion; postcolonial.

المرآة المحطمة: خيبة أمل الشعب العراقي بعد غزو 2003 مع إشارة خاصة إلى رواية "إفخارستيا بغداد"

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المديرية العامة للتربية في محافظة القادسية ، وزارة التربية

يستخدم هذا البحث رواية سنان أنطون "إفخارستيا بغداد" كعدسة أدبية للتحقيق في فكرة خيبة الأمل بين المواطنين العراقيين بعد غزو قوات التحالف بقيادة الولايات المتحدة للعراق في عام 2003. تضع الورقة خيبة الأمل في البيئة التاريخية للعراق وتبحث في كيف أن التباين بين آمال ما قبل الغزو وواقع ما بعد الغزو أنتج خيبة أمل عميقة في جميع أنحاء المجتمع العراقي. من خلال القراءة المتأنية لرواية أنطون، تظهر الورقة كيف أن التمثيل الأدبي، لا سيما من خلال الانقسام بين الأجيال، يصور الطابع المعقد لخيبة الأمل العراقية. يمثلها البطلان الأساسيان في الرواية: العم يوسف المتقائل المسن ومها الشابة المحبطة.



تظهر الدراسة أن خيبة الأمل في عراق ما بعد عام 2003 ليست مجرد رد فعل عاطفي مؤقت بل هي حالة هيكلية تؤثر على كل جانب من جوانب الحياة العراقية: الاجتماعية والثقافية والدينية والسياسية. تضيف هذه الدراسة إلى معرفة أكثر تعقيدا حول كيفية معالجة العراقيين والتعبير عن استيائهم الطائفي والفردى في أعقاب الغزو والاحتلال والعنف الطائفي من خلال تحليل كل من البيانات التاريخية والتعبير الأدبي. تشير النتائج إلى أن الأدب العراقي لا يسجل خيبة الأمل فحسب، بل ينتج أيضا روايات مضادة تتعارض مع خطابات الهيمنة البعثية وما بعد البعثية، لذلك

**المفتاحية:** أفخارستيا بغداد، سنان انطون، خيبة الأمل، غزو، ما بعد الأستعمار.

## 1. Introduction

Many Western media sources presented the moment of the fall of Baghdad's regime as one of liberty and optimism as American tanks stormed into Baghdad in April 2003, toppling Saddam Hussein's monument in Firdos Square. Many Iraqis, however, found the first hesitant hope to be somewhat gave way to a deep disappointment as the expected democracy, stability, and prosperity fell short. What came next was sectarian conflict, insurgency, civil war, and the growth of extremist organizations like the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) instead. With particular regard to Sinan Antoon's book 'The Baghdad Eucharist' (first released in Arabic in 2012) this research paper investigates the idea of disillusionment among Iraqi citizens after the 2003 invasion.

### 1.1 Research Context and Significance

One of the most important geopolitical events of the early twenty-first century is the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Although political, military, and economic aspects of the invasion and its aftermath have received much academic focus, less Understanding for the emotional and psychological effect on regular Iraqis has received less emphasis. Disappointment-as an emotional reaction, a social state, and a literary theme-provides a useful lens through which to see how Iraqis have handled the radical transformation of their nation.

There are four important aspects of this study. First, it adds to the expanding collection of post-invasion Iraq literature emphasizing Iraqi voices and experiences rather than Western viewpoints. Second, it investigates how literature may be both a record of historical trauma and a means of resistance against hegemonic narratives. counter dominant narratives, literature is both a record of historical suffering and a tool of resistance. Third, this study reveals a subtler but maybe more widespread component of post invasion Iraqi experience by emphasizing disappointment over more often researched emotions like as rage or sadness.

### 1.2 Theoretical Framework



This paper treats disappointment as a multi-layered idea functioning concurrently on several levels:

1. Historical disappointment: The post-invasion era's inability to fulfil expectations of democracy, stability, and prosperity.
2. Cultural disappointment: the decline of cultural inheritance, identity, and continuity.
3. Existential disappointment: The breaking of fundamental beliefs about safety, belonging, and the prospect of a normal existence.
4. Generational disappointment: The various ways older and younger Iraqis perceive and process disappointment depending on their historical frame of reference.
5. Religious/spiritual disappointment: The doubting of faith and heavenly protection in the face of sectarian violence directed at religious sects.

This article uses postcolonial theory, trauma studies, and literary criticism to look at how these layers of disappointment are shown in historical narratives and literary works, especially in Antoon's 'The Baghdad Eucharist.'

### 1.3 Methodology

This study uses a combined technique of literary critique and historical investigation. Primary sources include historical records of post-2003 Iraq, including data on displacement, violence, and infrastructure damage, as well as personal Iraqi people's stories. Focusing on Sinan Antoon's "The Baghdad Eucharist," the literary study shows and investigates the idea of disappointment by means of the narrative structure, characterization, and symbolism of the book.

The article also uses secondary sources, such as academic studies of Iraqi literature, postcolonial theory, and communal trauma and memory. Triangulating among historical records, literary representation, and theoretical This study intends to provide a thorough knowledge of disappointment as both a lived experience and a literary topic in post-2003 Iraq by triangulating historical documentation, literary representation, and theoretical frameworks.

### 1.4 Research Questions

This study addresses the following key questions:

1. How has disappointment manifested among Iraqi people in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion?



2. How does Sinan Antoon's 'The Baghdad Eucharist' represent and explore this disappointment through its narrative structure, characterization, and symbolism?

### 1.5 Objectives of the study

1. To analyze the historical, social, and cultural factors contributing to the widespread sense of disappointment among Iraqi people in the aftermath of the 2003 US-led invasion.
2. To examine how Sinan Antoon's novel, 'The Baghdad Eucharist,' serves as a literary representation of this disappointment, exploring its nuances, generational differences, and broader implications through character analysis, thematic interpretation, and symbolic reading.

### 1.6 Structure of the Paper

The article is structured into various parts after this introduction. First, it offers a historical summary of the 2003 invasion and its aftermath, emphasizing the disparity between expectations and reality that generated great disappointment. Second, it is drawing on relevant literature research from psychology, sociology, and cultural studies, it looks at the idea of disappointment from theoretical angles. Third, it provides a thorough analysis of "The Baghdad Eucharist," examining how the book depicts disappointment using its dual narrative structure and opposing characters. Fourth, it looks at the larger consequences of disappointment in Iraqi literature and culture, thinking about how literary depictions of disappointment act as counter-narratives to official narratives. At last, the conclusion combines these results and offers future study paths.

This article intends to add to a deeper knowledge of post-2003 Iraqi experience by looking at disappointment from both historical and literary perspectives, so stressing how literature not only records tragedy, but also imagines prospects for recovery and standing up to challenges.

## 2. Historical Context: The Broken Promises of the 2003 Invasion

The US government, led by Bush, portrayed the invasion of Iraq as a mission to liberate Iraqi people from Saddam Hussein's tyranny and to support democracy in the centre of the Middle East. Davis (2005) claims the invasion was presented to the world as a required action to remove weapons of mass destruction, but they were never discovered. The first collapse of the tyrant gave many Iraqis who had suffered under Saddam Hussein's rule a caution feeling of optimism. The reality of occupation, nevertheless, soon smashed this optimism and left a great feeling of sadness that would define the Iraqi post-invasion experience. (Al-Ali, 2014).

Several important mistakes of the occupation underlined the disillusionment of Iraqis after 2003. First, de-Ba'athification and the dissolution



of the Iraqi army dismantled the Iraqi state, causing chaos and general insecurity to spread throughout the whole country. (Dodge, 2010). UNHCR data show the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) climbed from zero recorded in 2003 to 2.6 million by 2007, peaking at 4.4 million in 2015 during the ISIS surge. This great migration was not just a humanitarian catastrophe but also an important change of Iraqi culture and identity.

Iraq's infrastructure's physical collapse added to this disappointment even more. Documented by the Iraq Body Count project, at least 103,000 people passed away in violence connected to the war and its aftermath between 2003 and 2011. (Iraq Body Count, 2012). Apart from human deaths when Baghdad fell in April 2003 the devastation reached Iraq's cultural legacy. About 15,000 items-many of them thousands of years old-were taken by looters from the National Museum of Iraq. Professor Eleanor Robson of University College London believes this loss is even more difficult to measure than the official statistics indicate, therefore implying an unthinkable loss to Iraqi cultural identity. (Kathan et al.,2022).

For Iraqis who had hoped for national unity and healing, the sectarian bloodshed that broke out after the invasion maybe reflects the most terrible disappointment in their life. According to Hashim (2006), the actions of the U.S. occupation unintentionally increased sectarian tensions by strengthening certain groups at the expense of others. The bombing of the shrine of Imam Hassan al-Askari in Samarra in 2006 set off a series of sectarian murders that further destroyed any last illusions of national unity. The arrival of ISIS in 2014, which took control of significant areas of Iraqi land and subjected people to terrible governance, marked the peak point of this brutality. Due to kleptocracy The economic letdown was just as severe. Iraq's great oil riches did not prevent increasing unemployment, declining public services, and rampant corruption in the post-invasion era. Iraq often placed among the most corrupt nations in the world in the years after the war, according to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (Transparency International, 2020). For most Iraqis, the prospect of economic success under democracy turned out to be empty as fundamental amenities like clean water and power were inconsistent or absent throughout several regions.

The departure of Iraq's professional elite was maybe most heartbreaking. According to the Iraqi Medical Association, half of Iraq's registered medical professionals were among those who left in the years after the war. Iraq's healthcare, education, and other crucial sectors were devastated by this brain drain, which produced what Professor Robson calls a generational divide. The long-term effects are that an entire generation is gone and no one to educate and inspire the next one. This loss of human capital was not just a





current problem but also a mortgage on Iraq's future, hence aggravating the feeling of letdown in the direction the nation was heading (Al Saraf & Garfield, 2008).

This loss of human capital was not just a current problem but also a mortgage on Iraq's future, hence intensifying the feeling of disappointment in the direction the nation was heading.

## **2.1 Theoretical Perspectives on Disappointment in Post- Conflict Societies**

Disappointment as a notion is a complicated social and psychological issue especially relevant to post-conflict nations, not just an emotional reaction.

Disappointment, as Spinoza's philosophy would have it, springs from the disparity between anticipation and actuality, expressing "a sadness accompanied by the idea of a past thing whose outcome was contrary to our hope" (Spinoza, 1677/2018, p.146).

Given post-2003 Iraq, this disparity was especially noticeable as the expected freedom and democratization did not come true in ways relevant to many Iraqis. Sociologist Eva Illouz (2007) contends that disappointment in contemporary society is a "social emotion" reflecting more general structural circumstances rather than just individual psychological states. Applied to post-invasion Iraq, this viewpoint implies that Iraqi disappointment should be seen as a group reaction to structural violence and institutional collapse rather than just personal disillusionment. Iraqis' disappointment then turns into what Berlant (2011) calls "cruel optimism"—a state in which the very things they want (in this case, democracy, security, and prosperity) turn into barriers to their development. Disappointment acquires more layers connected to trauma and memory in post-conflict nations especially. Trauma theorist Cathy Caruth (1996) claims that traumatic events resist complete integration into awareness and producing a temporal disturbance wherein the past constantly intrudes on the present. Many Iraqis find the disappointment of the post-invasion era closely related to this painful period, in which the present is constantly judged against both an idealized pre-war past and the unfulfilled promises of postwar rebuilding.

Marianne Hirsch's (2012) "postmemory" idea provides a further useful tool for comprehending generational variations in feeling disappointment. Hirsch describes postmemory as the connection of the second intense, often painful events that came before their births but were yet passed on to them so profoundly as to become memories in their own right. Younger generations in Iraq who have no firsthand recall of pre-invasion Iraq acquire stories of what was lost, hence producing a unique kind of sadness based not on personal remembrance but on community memory and intergenerational transmission.



Lastly, Postcolonial theory offers a new and decisive perspective on how disappointment operates in cultures coming from occupation. Edward Said's idea of "contrapuntal reading" (1993) holds that colonized people acquire a twofold awareness enabling them to see both the prevailing narrative of the colonizer and its inconsistencies. In post-2003 Iraq, this contrapuntal consciousness shows in Iraqis' capacity to see the disparity between the lived reality of occupation and instability and Western narratives of freedom and democracy. This awareness creates what Homi Bhabha (1994) calls "colonial disappointment"—the understanding that the promises of the colonizer are systematically unachievable within the colonial relationship.

## **2.2 Literary Representation of Disappointment in 'The Baghdad Eucharist'**

Through its dual narrative approach and opposing characters, Sinan Antoon's novel "The Baghdad Eucharist" (first published in Arabic as "Ya Maryam" in 2012) provides a deep literary investigation of disillusionment in post-2003 Iraq. The novel's events set in Baghdad during one day, the events alternate between the viewpoints of seventy-year-old Youssef and his teenage cousin Maha, who has come to live with him after a string of assaults on Christians in her area. Antoon builds on these opposing points of view what literary critic Gretchen McCullough (2017) describes as "a visceral yet poetic novel about the Iraqi diaspora" It reflects the various facets of disappointment felt by Iraqis after the invasion. Representing the elder generation, Youssef reflects a kind of dissatisfaction tempered by nostalgia and historical viewpoint. Having lived through many wars and governments, his dissatisfaction is framed within a larger historical arc. As McCullough (2017) notes, Youssef spends much of his time thinking back on friends and family members who have passed away or moved abroad. Implying a disappointment based on personal loss and the slow decline of society. His ongoing hope in Iraq's future, after all he has seen, reflects what philosopher Jonathan Lear (2006) calls "radical hope" which means believing in the possibility that the future will be better despite all the challenges, circumstances and changing concepts that we raised on.

By comparison, Maha is a younger generation whose disillusionment is more total, without the balancing of good experiences. Born amid conflict and economic sanctions which imposed on Iraq by The United Nations, Maha knows nothing of the wonderful years of Iraq that Youssef cherishes (McCullough, 2017). Her disillusionment shows in her want to leave Iraq for Canada and in her doubts about the prospect of cooperation among many religious communities. The death of her pregnant child when a bomb hits near her home symbolizes the loss of hope for the future what cultural theorist Lauren Berlant (2011) would describe as "the slow death" referring to the



psychological and physical pressure that society is experiencing. The novel's investigation of memory and nostalgia offers a particularly complex portrayal of disappointment. Antoon dismantles sentimental stories about Iraq's past by means of Maha's discovery of a Facebook group named "Beautiful Iraq." As the novel observe "Some of them considered the Baath Party's coming to power and the brutal way Abdel- Karim Qasim was put to death as the end of the 'good' times. Others felt Saddam's accession to the presidency in 1979 was the beginning of the end... Most were nostalgic about the time of the monarchy and they post photographs of the former royal family, the subtext being that their brutal execution in the military coup was the beginning of the descent into the abyss" (Antoon, 2017, P.114). This quotation exposes what literary scholar Svetlana Boym (2001) calls "reflective nostalgia" - a kind of memory that focusses on the contradictions of human desire and belonging rather than trying to restore a legendary homeland.

Antoon's novel reveals how many Iraqis commemorate various historical events as "the beginning of the end," not just a post-2003 occurrence, Antoon implies that dissatisfaction has been a consistent trait of Iraqi history. The religious dimensions of disappointment in the novel have a particular importance as the title translated into Arabic is "Ya Maryam" ("Oh Mary") awakens within us a prayer to the Virgin Mary. While the English title "The Baghdad Eucharist" alludes to the blood of worshippers spilt in the church assault ending the book. Gabriel Said Reynolds (2020) notes that Maha becomes "obsessed with Fairuz's meditations on the suffering endured by the Virgin Mary as she saw her tortured son hanging on the cross, as her heart was pierced." This theological frame implies that disappointment has become spiritual, with Iraqis feeling abandonment not just from political leaders but maybe from heavenly protection

The events end with the October 31, 2010 assault by Islamic State of Iraq terrorists on the Syrian Catholic church Sayyidat al-Najat, which claimed 58 lives. Literary scholar Frank Kermode would call this historical event a "sense-making end," a conclusion that retrospectively organizes and gives meaning to the narrative that precedes it. Kermode (1967) would refer to this as a "sense-making end," an ending that retroactively structures and imparts meaning to the story that came before it. The church slaughter is the ultimate letdown: the collapse of religious harmony in a nation once proud of its variety. Reynolds (2020) points out that "It is an irony, I suppose, that Maha survived while Youssef, who never lost his optimism for Iraq's future, did not." This sad conclusion implies that disappointment has become the prevailing state of modern Iraqi experience, hence validating Maha's pessimism and snuffing





Youssef's hope.

### 2.3 Disappointment as Counter-Narrative and Resistance

Apart from its portrayal in "The Baghdad Eucharist," disappointment acts more generally in Iraqi literature and culture as both a counter-narrative to official narratives and a kind of resistance against hegemonic authority. As literary scholar Yasmeeen Hanoosh (2013) argues, contemporary Iraqi literature defies "our standard knowledge of the procession of historical events in modern Iraq" and negotiates "an entry into the liminal, marginalized discourses that lie on the peripheries of the national narrative of Saddam Hussein's era as well as the counter-narratives of the traditional bodies of opposition." Iraqi authors' use of words of disappointment to confront both the former regime's propaganda and the occupation's stories of liberation and progress reveals this defiance.

According to Hanoosh (2013), Iraqi works "reflect the Iraqi state's failure to achieve full cultural hegemony over its intellectuals." Iraqi authors fight what political theorist Antonio Gramsci (1971) called "cultural hegemony" by expressing disappointment—the ruling class's control of a culturally varied society by means of their worldview manipulation. dominant elite who twists the culture of that society so their opinion becomes the accepted cultural standard.

Hanoosh (2013) characterizes the "binary shape" of Iraqi writing as a result of "inside" and "outside" sensibility, which reflects how disappointment is felt differently by those who stayed in Iraq and those in exile. This binary produces what postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha (1994) describes a "third space" in which new kinds of cultural meaning and production arise. Disappointment in this third dimension is not just an emotional reaction; it is also a critical attitude that helps to express other futures.

The "prolonged experience of war" that "dominates Iraqi articulations of self and place" determines how disappointment is communicated; trauma produces an angle through which both past and future are seen with doubt. Yet, as Hanoosh (2013) notes, "hope and humor also permeate the new Iraqi text in unexpected, subtle ways," suggesting that disillusionment in Iraqi writing is not total but rather includes seeds of hope and tenacity. This contradictory cohabitation of disappointment and optimism represents what philosopher Ernst Bloch (1986) called "the principle of hope"—the human ability to predict and fight for a better future even in the face of current misery.

'The Baghdad Eucharist' reflects this resistance through disappointment by refusing to offer a clear answer to the debate between Youssef and Maha regarding the possibility of coexistence in Iraq. Antoon



resists both naive optimism and absolute despair by leaving this central question unresolved, so creating what literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) would call a "dialogic" text allowing several viewpoints to coexist without hierarchical resolution. This dialogism is a kind of resistance against monologic narratives imposed by both the Ba'athist regime and the occupation authorities.

The novel focus on daily disappointments and regular people thus qualifies as a kind of "hidden transcript"—the criticism of authority offstage, beyond direct observation, as described by anthropologist Scott (1990). from those in authority. Antoon provides a venue for expressing unhappiness escaping state censorship and control by emphasizing the home world and intimate connections instead of lofty political stories. Paradoxically, this emphasis on the mundane becomes an exceptional act of defiance against the removal of Iraqi realities from both Ba'athist and post-Ba'athist historical narratives.

### 3. Conclusion

Examined via historical context and literary depiction in Sinan Antoon's 'The Baghdad Eucharist,' the idea of disappointment among Iraqi people after the 2003 invasion shows itself to be considerably more than a fleeting emotional reaction. Instead of that, disappointment becomes a systemic condition affecting social, cultural, religious, and political aspects of Iraqi society. Though experienced differently by elder Iraqis like Youssef and younger ones like Maha, the disparity between the promises of independence and democracy and the reality of occupation, sectarian bloodshed, and institutional collapse has produced a deep feeling of disenchantment that crosses generations.

Iraqi disappointment's multi-layered character—historical, cultural, existential, generational, and spiritual—calls for an equally complex analysis and response. Disappointment, as this study has shown, is an active form of resistance against dominant narratives rather than just a passive reaction to trauma. Iraqi authors like Antoon provide counter-discourses challenging both Ba'athist and post-Ba'athist efforts to dominate the narrative of Iraq's history, present, and future by expressing disillusionment.

The sad ending of "The Baghdad Eucharist," with Youssef's murder in the church slaughter, may appear to imply the victory of disappointment over hope. But the novel's dual narrative structure, which preserves both Youssef's optimism and Maha's skepticism without definitively privileging either, points towards the possibility of what philosopher Jacques Derrida (1994) calls "the democracy to come"—a future that remains open and undetermined, neither guaranteed nor foreclosed.

Understanding the function of disappointment in Iraqi experience becomes crucial not just for academic study but also for any significant effort at



reconciliation and reconstruction as Iraq continues to negotiate the difficult legacy of the 2003 invasion and its aftermath. Acknowledging the validity of Iraqi disappointment instead of rejecting it as simple negativity or ingratitude helps us to open the door for what political scholar Hannah Arendt (1958) calls "natality"—the human ability to start again and bring something unexpected into the world.

From this perspective, the study of disappointment in post-2003 Iraq provides insights that go beyond the particular instance to shed light on general issues about trauma, memory, and resilience in post-conflict countries. Examining how disappointment is felt, articulated, and maybe overcome helps us to better comprehend the intricate processes by which communities restore not just physical infrastructure but also the more ethereal underpinnings of shared purpose and collective identity. The fractured mirror of Iraqi disappointment reveals not only what was lost but also what may still be discovered in the remnants of a civilization fighting to rebuild itself after great disturbance.

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