

Postcolonial Iraqi Novel and their Theoretical Implications

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Abstract

This paper studies the postcolonial themes and their implications in Iraqi novels placing the period ‘years’ following the American occupation of Iraq in 2003 under the lenses of investigation. Then, bringing a concise description of the Iraqi novel before the aforementioned period. After having read several texts ‘novels’, there will be an introduction to the narrative by which postcolonial identity of the Iraqi novel has been established. The language of such novels is Arabic in which their mood is highlighted realistically and melancholically. It has been shown that through the analysis of these works how the causes and impacts of have led to the progress within the Iraqi context. Iraqi locals have written the selected novels and they have lived in Iraq and exist within the real implications of daily life. Though they vary in their topics, techniques, and publication dates, they resemble the distinctive features of the Iraqi novel in its modern view.

Keywords

Literature of Iraq, Postcolonial novel in Iraq, USA occupation (2003), [realistic issues](#).

Introduction

Iraqi tragic scene began after the American occupation in 2003. This occupation or what can be called as the period of transition, which is ushered with the international coalition destructive force that had brought the country backwards. This occupation supplemented extra disaster that complicated the situation extremely. Such tragedy triggered the destruction and turmoil by which Iraq is disordered in such a radical way to become a basis in inspiring literary writings as a whole and the genre of novel respectively. The novel is similar to the country, in which the expressive role could open the way ahead for new realities subsequent to the occupation in 2003. This in turn has endured a dramatic change, in the way it emphasizes, uses of techniques and applies its narrative style. The present statuses such as violent actions, corrupted people and cases of death altogether adds to the total concern of the Iraqi postcolonial novelist.

New Voices: A Preview of Works Describing Events and Outcomes of US Occupation of Iraq

Postcolonial novel in Iraq accompanied with its own tone of melancholy has typically formed its new voice. This forming varies as for realism, imagination, speculation, myth, personal reflection to severe objectivity. Postcolonial novel is noticeable for its point of view with regard to Arabic and international sides. Ahmed Alsaadaw's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2014), has introduced a narration for a strange creature that grows as an outcome of the remains of dead people. It functioned as punisher for those responsible for their fate. Also, Inaam Kachach's *The American Granddaughter* (2008), in which the tragedy of cultural hybridization that is experienced by a young Iraqi woman, raised in the USA. Upon coming back to her land of origin as a soldier in the American army, she has to encounter the conflict of reconciling between conflicting identities and loyalties. *Ayam Alturab* (2016) for Zuhair Al-Hiti discusses the chaos and vengeance-policy that have flooded the country once the Iraq was occupied.

Legacy of Iraq's Literature

Prior to start discussing the issue of the postcolonial novel in Iraq, it is needed for remembering the way by which such literary genre is different from the conventional one of Iraq. As for its own criteria, it has been established taking two sides of interest such as to explore territory venturing far from the limits of the conventional novel, and to retrace how the Iraqi novel has developed through history. However, Iraqi literature was not too much interested in the novel as compared with poetry. Being conservative and observant are the characteristics of the Iraqi context due to its traditional and tribal customs. This can be attributed to its patriarchal setting as a genre was a Western and an event of femininity.

It is all about how to tell a story, which was a women's concern while were occupied with more significant issues that were society-related ones. Furthermore, the Iraqi people were full of interior struggles as well as those struggles of the government's ups and downs. Even the conspiracies had their own space within the Iraqi context, which were common in a time following WWI's end by which the country was under the British Mandate. Having had its independence in 1932, Iraq had been through a period of monarchy, which was dethroned in 1958 in the hands of followers of the Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party, that dominated Iraq then. As a party, and its domination that continued till the American occupation in April, 2003. The period from the late 1950s till the early 2000s was a period of self-occupation in which people were encountering the misery of poverty, oppression, and institutionalized violence.

Sulaymān Faydī's work *Al-riwyah al-iqaziyyah* (English meaning 'The Awakening Novel, 1919) as it is regarded as the first Iraqi description, in which the characteristics of a novel are included. This genre of novel limited its aims to awaken societal awareness, and ethical transformation, without aiming at entertaining or producing romantic effects (Kashou, 52). To be followed by the

intellectuals such as Ahmed Mahmoud Alsaed who tackled issues such as those of tackling society, politics, mores and education.

Alsaed's *Khaled Jalal* (1928), is treated as the first Iraqi novel because of its design and content. Through this narrative, the narrator argues how to set the best way by which the British colonialism can be resisted through enhancing education and knowledge. Women's rights and policy have occupied a great deal in his narrative as well. To be mentioned, also are Fu'ad Al-Takarli, who in 1944 initiated trying short-story when he published the first of his works in Beirut 1951. This writer started to appear as the significant body, as well as Abd Al- Malik Nuri sharing the development of Iraqi postcolonial novel. Yet, a wait that Iraq had to gone through, which was till 1966, at the time of publishing Gha'ab Tumaa Farman's *Palm and Neighbour*, as the first literary text including characteristics of fiction writing (Ibrahim, 3). Such a novel is fundamentally depending on daily-life routine all through WWII in the urban neighborhoods of Baghdad. Throughout its realistic setting, this novel emphasizes miseries of war such as deprivation and poverty. Coming later, are the second and third novels of Farman, which were published under the titles *Five Sounds* (1967) and *Labour* (1974). Such works emphasized the daily-presence of a modest folks, presented in the Iraqi dialect. In addition to *The Fifth Castle* (1977) for Fahdil Alazaawi that sheds light on the communist ideology accounting life as a jail, showing life as pessimistic.

The Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party's Regime and the Novelist

The initiation of the Ba'ath dictatorship as represented by Saddam Hussein was in 1977. At that time, this situation did not inspire fiction writing by which it could compete with what was going on in another place in the Middle East. Exile was the first place where fiction presented by Iraqi writers. Those writers were considered the intellects under suspect when Saddam Hussein was in power. Even artists had been under the prosecution of the Iraqi intelligence because of their refusal to

abandon their talents. These people were not allowed to tackle issues of realist taste that describe the current issue in Iraq by then. Issues such as unfairness and the oppressive policies of the government were avoided, and there was an awareness towards paying homage to glorifying death caused by war.

Instances of such style of expression is represented by the way Mohamed Khudhair treated myth, and ancient history in *Qadisiya Saddam* (1983) and *Basriaytha* (1996), and in Mahmoud Jindar's *The Edges* (1989). Iraq's war against Iran that lasted for eight years that had destructed everything subsequently the early 1990s by the international community reaction when Saddam invaded Kuwait in 1990. This reaction did not add anything new to the whole situation as it make more complicated. After the sanctions impose by the United Nation, which frustrated along with Iraqi government, even ordinary Iraqi citizen, as well as intellects, who were seized conflicting to survive the sensitive vent to write creatively which was no more a priority-related case.

Iraqi Novel: The Growth of the Genre

The morning of 9th April 2003 was a turning point in Iraq in general and in the realm of novel writing respectively. This is so, because Iraqi novelists who were not already out of Iraq, were not imprisoned from their mental exile and began to write their texts by which Iraqi postcolonial novel was established. The collapse of the Al-Ba'ath enhanced these novelists to be brought back to life by the hope they were waiting for. The abundance of publishing houses assisted novelists and other writes to gain more space in writing and publishing their works. The arrival of bunches of books and the setting up of internet connections permitted those interested in fiction writing to show their talents and in tackling their ideas and beliefs more easily and more publicly.

After 2003, the novel that was written can be divided into two categories. First, those by which the Saddam Hussein regime's violations were revealed. Second, those by which the radical transformation caused by the 2003 invasion. A characterization of a new trend is presented by the second group, in which it is fundamentally about exposing war's influence and the newly colonized scene on the country. However, many challenges were encountered by fiction writers, the success was the final demand of these writes. It was apparent in establishing a new identity for fiction writing in Iraq. An outstanding skill is shown by these writers in the way the connection between their narrative and socio-political reality is managed to produce a fiction. This fiction is expressed through Iraq's new national identity. Within such writings, a reflection of Iraq's ability in creating its mode of writing in such a way to respond to war's devastation.

It's Jameel Alshebeby belief as the novel in Iraq is characterized by its flexibility as a literary genre. This novel has the ability to manipulate producing ideas and concepts differently far removed from realistic representation (Alshebeby, 2014). He is of the belief that ideality exists in the questions and conversations began by Iraqi authors. It is also a form of ideological and psychological responses to the realistic side in Iraq after 1960s. Indeed, the form of Iraqi colonial novel has emerged in a parallel with the political situation as a raw and fruitful material for it. The two sides of the same coin are totally related. The Iraqi novelists' cultural background is determined in the light of the political transformation occurred in the country after the American occupation in 2003.

Starting from 2003 onwards, Iraqi literature was supplemented by novel writing as everything is recorded as exactly as conceivable including events of invasion events and violations as well. As a literary genre, the novel gained its specific impact in the way it narrates and clarifies the political and social crisis in the country. The Iraqi novel after 2003 has undoubtedly shared themes that dominate the country's

politics, economy, and social destruction. It is a point of initiation in which themes such as war, racism, crimes, political corruption and injustice, economic, social and moral deterioration, the collapse of ideologies, and oil theft are regarded as the most debated in the postcolonial novel.

Individual Identity's Destruction: *Márquez's Curse*

Dhiaa Aljbaili's *Márquez's Curse* (2007) was published as the perfect representation for the fictional work to record the consequences of 2003 war. It has revealed the literary climate under Saddam Hussein's regime. This novel's central theme is the deliberate devastation of Iraq's infrastructure, by which both the public facilities such as buildings, power plants and factories and the financial and cultural services are both affected by such war. This novel is a record of the first moments of the American occupation of Iraq that started in Basra south of Iraq. A record of the occupation's outcomes, it shows – *Márquez's Curse* (2007) – the fearful and chaotic situation that pervaded the city, as seen by the author as symbolic of the occupation's entry of the international coalition forces into the country.

Right after announcing Saddam Hussein's collapse, the absence of power is exploited to loot offices of the government. The choice of post office box by Aljbaili symbolizes the main setting to authenticate such devastation. Basra is the place where the office is placed, which is a sign of the entire situation in Iraq. As subjected to a vicious attack, it is left in a state of misery and chaos. These attacks would place a mask of weakness of on the country for years to overcome it. Looting and devastation have placed their ugliness upon that office. It is the organized devastation of every detail of people's personal records, to obliterate all their personal documents such as wedding invitation.

As an intelligent narrative technique is adopted, Aljbaili achieves success to present how the Iraq society has a duality of appearance (prior 2003 and later to 2003).

The post office box presents the chaos as a current situation while the past is presented in a novel's draft. This draft novel revealed insincere neglected in the office without being stamped that is used for its postage. Here, the use of the present to address the past is Aljbaili characteristic feature of novel writing. Inside the post office box and even within the chaos, the author locates his novel's draft. It is a description conducted by a mysterious language, which is the events before 2003. As a trio of unknown (i. e. the author, sender and recipient) as well as the novel's language is mysterious. The mysterious code is shown as problematic to be deciphered. Making use of such a trick, the author intends to be ascertained that his draft will pass Iraq effectively without the Saddam's security forces' attention. The duality as mentioned earlier lies in the secret code as it is not only a pretending by which the entire situation is seen, it is rather an illustration of the severe repression that reigned at that time. After several readings of this draft, the narrator discovers that it is five young men's work, and one of them appears to the writer himself. One chapter is dedicated to each one of them. Furthermore, these five men wrote their own chapters independently. Aljbaili considers such disagreement as symbolic of what is believed in concerning Iraqi people's dilemma as well as the one-half spokesmen (i. e. the five young men). The five writers even disagreed when it comes to titling their product (i. e. their novel).

This symbolizes the situation of conflict and disagreement that have pervaded the Iraqi community after 2003. On the other extreme of the field, the occupiers maintain the principle of divide to rule, as they were exploiting the wealth of the country and imposing their control in terms of decision making of the country itself. Since it is appeared as impossible to interlock all the five chapters together, which cause the novel's loss of its meaning and it ends with a reflection of these men's failure to establish a united connection among each other with regard to their culture. As it has been suggested by Aljbaili, the core reason that manifests how

weak this literary talent is, in which the five men were suffering the violence and repression under Saddam Hussein's regime.

When it comes to the West as Colombian represents one of the characters of this novel as a novelist *García Márquez*. This novelist is the painter of their portraits, the rewriter of their history and their literature, and the theorizer of their lives. The failure of these writers was caused due to their being inferiority complex as compared with the West. It is a belief according to them, that Márquez, as the observer of their situation is behaving in such a way to seize their heritage, myths and history. This surrender to Imperialism is ashamed as it wills to grant the cultural identity of Iraq to foreigners.

Devastation of the Cultural identity: *Jannat Al-'atā d*

After 2003, the emphasis is on the cultural and intellectual situation of Iraq, that is regarded as one of the most fundamental resources of inspiration for the Iraqi novelist. Iraqi writers such as Aljbaili and Ibrahim Alsebti care for exposing the concealed plans to destroy the cognitive, intellectual, cultural and literary ability the country. Their writing 'novels' were a tool to discover the strategic process used to target and change the country culturally and historically. It is obvious that such writers attempt are moth part of the foreign agenda and the perpetrators are also the Iraqi themselves. This is what Alsebti suggests in *Jannat Al-'atā d* (2010).

Similarly, Ibrahim Alsebti cares to document the deliberate devastation of Iraq in an objective manner. Having highlighted the effect of colonialism on the Iraqi culture, as well as the radical transformations it has been caused in the ideological and moral values of Iraqi society. Additionally, it is an attempt to discover that damage caused for the Iraqi infrastructures, in which the novel documents the deliberately barbaric attack that aimed against the historic bookselling street, *Almutanabbi*. One more crucial issue that the novel discusses, is the attempt to eliminate the history of Mesopotamia in Iraq. It describes the looting of the Iraqi ruins as well as the sale of

the national treasures to other countries. This description aims to the negative effects against Iraq's heritage. Treason against country is one of the themes found in the novel, in one of the characters becomes traitor of the national identity as he becomes monuments trader. He sells his country's treasures to promote his social status, and transforms from poverty into wealth. For such a character, regret is not found in himself, yet he boasts his greed.

His confession that giving up is not going to happen, however wealthy he becomes. By doing so, he illustrates the steady process of the rejecting the values that Iraqis have grown up with in exchange for self-gaining. Moreover, the other factor that Alsebtî identifies, that has participated in the moral breakdown. It is violence that was perpetrated as the direct consequence of the American strike. It is well depicted by acts such as the repeated violations of human rights, sectarianism, murders, the bomb attacks, pillage, theft, and trade in contraband. Abdul Alzahra Ali is another writer – as Alsebtî – who shares the same concern. Ali's *Riah Alsamum* (2010) *Poisoned Wind* that starts a comprehensive survey of the violations occurred since April 2003.

The Domestic Economy: *Riah Alsamum*, *Poisoned Wind* (2010)

This novel is a work of art that focuses on the devastation occurred Iraq, with especial attention to the economic, cultural and moral crisis that spread in the Iraqi society after 2003. The local market is the location by which the author initiates his criticism against the illegality of trade that devastated the stable economy of the country. This devastation has caused severe effect on people's morals. Throughout the novel, the author wanders the markets, where unprincipled businessmen make use of the absence of law authority and trade in this market. This market is abundant with smuggled goods, looted goods, weapons, pharmaceutical goods, spare car parts, and electronic gadgets. All such goods are priced and so out-of-the-way to the normal Iraqi. Illegal goods and black-market trading have spread all over the country with the influx of beverages such as whisky, beer, and drugs from

different brands. The damage of such illegal goods affects the Iraqi society culturally and religiously. The naïve youngsters are preys of such products as they can be easily tempted by the trickers to gape and bargain.

Within this novel, two issues of significance are highlighted by the author as it concerns the well-being of the Iraqi economy. Of them, is the commercial anarchy and black marketeering devastates the country economically. The second one, is the misery of cultural regression. These two issues affect the younger generation, as it becomes so captivated by useless overseas consumer goods, which have been slaves of new goods of culture that are strange to the Iraqi community. This new taste is imposed by the market on the people which had a damaging effect on them psychologically. Eventually, the way such goods are spread in the Iraqi market leads to confusion and instability. The effects of such commercial practices of free trading has disruptively affect the ordinary Iraqi, by whom goods are consumed greedily to compensate the long years of deprivation. However, the economic issue mentioned earlier as well as that of moral crisis, Poisoned Wind sheds light on another topic, that brought about a social and financial distress. This third issue can be stated as follows: the cruel loot of government facilities, the market of gold and the office of financial services.

This looting action has a significant role to the raise of a newly-class of carpet baggers who have risen up from the lower orders of society. This point is well-portrayed in one of the characters, named Abu Salman. This person has arranged buying a whole village and becomes the proud owner of valuable properties. The progress of his standard of living as well as his social status, led to the start of preventing people to call him by his name, and he instead to called "Sheik" (tribal leader). After continued attempts, Abu Salman makes it a truth as he obtains fake identity papers from the Sheik Tribal Council, to confirm his being a "Sheik".

Sectarianism has Emerged: Baghdad Wonders

Ward Bader Salam novel's *Eajayib Baghdad* (2012) is another successful record of the transformations that stormed the capital as an outcome of the social and economic crisis and civil war. Throughout this work, a deep look spreads to discuss the disturbing circumstances of the civil war that happened in Iraq during 2006. A documentation of the political history of the country and the internal conspiracies and how the foreign agenda work together to destroy Iraq as a united nation.

The factors that exhaust the country are well-introduced, which led to sectarianism. This novel's main theme is a search for identity, and through its minute analysis, it reveals the agonies and victimization of the Iraqi community during the events of 2006. The reader of such a novel is placed in a miserable and deadly and chaotic world. Having appeared as an encyclopaedia in its coverage of outcomes of the invasion, this novel takes the shape of many stories in one, in which each one records how the country has suffered the conspiracies to be overthrown rather than just the dictatorship of Saddam's regime. The Iraqi journalist who left his modern life in the UAE and went back to cover the bloody conflict unfolding in 2006, a thorough picture of the civil war is painted by Salam, which is regarded as the direct results of the American occupation. At this point, the author focuses on the role of the media in covering the events. To talk about a journalist's mission sounds both original and functional – for Iraqi postcolonial literature – in which the journalist returns home to investigate the murder of the Iraq female journalist Attwar Bahjett who was killed during the coverage of the first occurrence of sectarianism.

This stage of the Iraqi history was foreshadowed when the Shia shrine was exploded in Samarra, north of Iraq. The journalist's description of the killing of Attwar Bahjett, the author achieve success in locating the entire link of the issues. In the first place, the issue of sectarianism is presented, as it emerges out of nowhere in 2006. This issue by itself manifests the arbitrary targeting of innocent people from all persuasions, without any discrimination. The novel's protagonist

narrates the way the Tigris River had become a death-chamber, which was full of the bodies of the slaughtered. Comes second, is the criticism against the paradoxical presence of the International Coalition forces in which their coming was supposed to save people from Saddam's tyranny, spread peace, stability and prosperity. The presence of such forces in – Samarra respectively – did no more than to stop the explosion, and prevent the turmoil and the massacre of innocent people. Such events – for Salam – are directly resulted out of the occupier's presence, that is accompanied with the conspiracy of politicians with the occupiers to control over the country. Such politicians both permitted the occurrence of these events and showed no reaction against the scandal of the Abu Ghraib Prison, where naked bodies of the prisoners became the martyrs and symbols of their betrayal. As the protagonist is investigating the killing of Attwar Bahjett, he is challenged with the horror devastating the country as resembled by disorder, crimes, death, as well as the countless slaughtered bodies from different castes the were floating in the rivers. The never-ending journeys that he starts to witness the misery cause him a deep sense of inner conflict. He hopes to reclaim his identity by exploring his homeland are dashed. After becoming a stunned with the feeling that his homeland has turned to be a mere place for death. He did his best to regain his lost identity that can be compared to the efforts of people attempted to recover the identities of their relatives to document the countless dead bodies that were floating in the Tigris river.

Conclusion

As two selected novels, they have shown the views that reflect the multiple reality of a country that has agonized all types of violence and oppression since April 2003 to the present. The two novels are well-formed to depict a conveyer for the situation of the Iraqi nation to foreign readers. At the same time, they are considered as a literary documentation of the modern history of Iraq, as the issues as well as causes are documented behind the destruction of the country. It has been generally agreed

that the occupation of Iraq by the USA and Britain in 2003, intended to open the way ahead for the smugglers and black-marketers to flood the country with illegal goods and businesses. The varying subjects, ideas, and style, in the two novels theorize the Iraq's postcolonial novel identity to establish the status and importance in the Arabic and international world.

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