رئيس التحرير
الأستاذ الدكتور
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مقدمة

يشرفني أن أقدم لكم هذه المقدمة التي تسلط الضوء على الدور الحيوي والمهم للبحوث التي يقدمها الباحثون للمجلة، والتي تسهم بشكل فاعل في تعزيز وتطوير مجالات الدراسات الإنسانية. إن المجلة تهدف إلى توفير منصة علمية رائدة لنشر الأعمال الأكاديمية التي تتناول قضايا حيوية في مختلف فروع العلوم الإنسانية، بما في ذلك الفلسفة، وعلم الاجتماع، والأنثروبولوجيا، وعلم النفس، واللغة، والتاريخ، والفنون، وغيرها.

إن الأبحاث المقدمة للمجلة ليست مجرد نتائج لدراسات علمية، بل هي محطات فكرية تعكس تطور المفاهيم والنظريات في هذه المجالات. تعمل هذه الدراسات على طرح حلول للمشاكل المعاصرة، وفهم الظواهر الإنسانية في سياقاتها المختلفة، كما تساهم في تقديم رؤى جديدة لتطوير المجتمع وتعزيز الوعي الثقافي والعلمي.

إن الدور الكبير لهذه البحوث لا يتوقف عند نشر المعرفة فقط، بل يتعداه إلى تحفيز التفكير النقدي والإبداعي، ودعم الجهود الأكاديمية في بناء قاعدة معرفية متينة تُسهم في تحريك عجلة التغيير والتطور في المجتمعات الإنسانية. ولذلك، فإننا نعتبر هذه البحوث أداة أساسية في تطوير الفكر الإنساني، ودعم المساعي المستمرة لتحسين جودة الحياة البشرية عبر أبعادها المختلفة.

نتطلع في المجلة إلى استقبال مزيد من الدراسات الرصينة التي تثرينا وتوسع آفاقنا العلمية، مؤمنين بأن هذه الإسهامات العلمية هي حجر الزاوية في بناء مستقبل أكثر إشراقاً في مجال الدراسات الإنسانية.

رئيس هيئة التحرير

ا. د. مراد إسماعيل احمد

شروط وقواعد النشر في مجلة جامعة كركوك للدراسات الإنسانية

1. تسلم نسخة الكترونية من البحث عبر الموقع (https://kujhs.uokirkuk.edu.iq) تحت برنامج Microsoft Word بصيغة doc او بصيغة dox.

2. يطبع البحث بواسطة الحاسوب بمسافات واحدة بين الأسطر شريطة أن لايزيد عدد صفحاته عن 25 خمس وعشرين صفحة وبواقع (5000 الى 10000) كلمة، ونوع الخط Simplified Arabic بما في ذلك الجداول، مع تنسيق محدد مسافة 1.5، خط بحجم 14، على ورق A4. للبحوث الخاصة باللغة العربية، يُكتب البحث بخط (Times New Roman) للغة الإنجليزية و التركية بحجم خط (14) على ورق مقاس(A4). اما بالنسبة اللغة الكوردية فونت كوران Kurdfonts.

3. تقديم سيرة علمية مختصرة للباحث أو الباحثين مرفقة مع البحث وتكون منفصلة.

4. تكتب أسماء الباحثين الثلاثية باللغة العربية والإنجليزية كما تذكر عناوين وظائفهم الحالية ورتبهم العلمية.

5. إقرار من المؤلف يؤكد أن البحث لم يسبق نشره وليس قيد النشر في مجلة أخرى.

6. العناوين الرئيسة والفرعية تستعمل داخل البحث لتقسيم أجزاء البحث حسب أهميتها وبتسلسل منطقي وتشمل العناوين الرئيسة: عنوان البحث، الملخص، الكلمات الدالة، المقدمة، إجراءات البحث، الشرح، الاستنتاج، المراجع.

7. يرفق مع البحث ملخص باللغة العربية وباللغة الإنجليزية على أن لاتزيد كلمات الملخص عن (250) كلمة.

8. تكتب بعد الملخص الكلمات الدالة للبحث.

9. تطبع الجداول والأشكال والخرائط داخل المتن وترقم حسب ورودها في البحث وتزود بعناوين ويشار إلى كل منها بالتسلسل.

10. يجوز نشر البحث إذا كان مستلًا من أطروحة أو رسالة دكتوراه أو ماجستير، بشرط ألا تكون هذه الرسائل منشورة أو مقبولة للنشر، ويجب الإشارة إلى هذا في الصحيفة الأولى وقائمة المراجع، والإفصاح عن ذلك في الإقرار والتعهد.

11. يلتزم الباحث بدفع النفقات المالية المترتبة على إجراءات التقويم في حال طلبه سحب البحث ورغبته عدم متابعة إجراءات النشر.

12. يمنح الباحث مدة أقصاها ثلاثة اشهر لإجراء التعديلات على بحثه إن وجدت ومن حق المجلة بعد ذلك الغاء الملف البحثي تلقائيا في حال تجاوز المدة المذكرة أعلاه.

13. التوثيق (قائمة المراجع)

أ. يُشترط اتباع أسلوب الكتابة وفقًا لمعايير APA النسخة السابعة (الجمعية الأمريكية لعلم النفس)، ويجب الالتزام بالدقة في الاستشهادات وتنسيق القائمة المرجعية وفقًا لهذه المعايير، لضمان الوضوح والتناسق في تقديم البيانات والمعلومات العلمية.

ب. يشار إلى المراجع في المتن بالاسم الأخير للمؤلف وسنة النشر والصحيفة، مثال: علي عبد عباس العزاوي (العزاوي، 2008: 214) أو (العزاوي، 2008).

ت. يجوز في بحوث علوم القرآن والتأريخ الإسلامي توثيق المراجع من خلال تهميش المراجع باستعمال الأرقام المتسلسلة بين قوسين هكذا (1) ، (2) ، (3) وتبين في آخر البحث تفاصيل المراجع حسب تسلسلها وتوضع قبل قائمة المصادر والمراجع.

ث. توثق المصادر والمراجع في قائمة واحدة في نهاية البحث وترتب هجائيا حسب الاسم الأخير للمؤلف مثل:

(اسم العائلة، الاسم الأول للمؤلف، (سنة النشر)، عنوان الكتاب، رقم الطبعة، مدينة النشر، در النشر)، مثال:

شحاذة ، نعمان 2011، التحليل الإحصائي في الجغرافية والعلوم الاجتماعية، عمان – الأردن، دار صفاء للنشر والتوزيع.

ج. أما الدوريات: فيبدأ بذكر الاسم الأخير للمؤلف، ثم بقية الاسم كاملاً، ثم توضع سنة النشر بين حاصرتين. ثم عنوان البحث. ثم اسم المجلة غامق، ثم مكان صدورها، ثم رقم المجلد، ثم رقم العدد، ثم أرقام الصفحات.

14. يستشهد الباحث ببحثين على الأقل منشورين في مجلة جامعة كركوك للدراسات الإنسانية

15. عمل استلال للبحث في مركز الحاسبة الصادر من رئاسة الجامعة.

16. على الباحث دفع أجور النشر البالغة: (150.000) مائة الف دينار عراقي واذا زاد عدد الصفحات عن (25) خمس وعشرين صحيفة فسوف يتم استيفاء الأجور بواقع (5.000) خمسة الاف دينار لكل صفحة.

17. تجري هيئة تحرير المجلة التقييم الأولي للبحث، ثم يُعرض على محكّمين من ذوي الخبرة العلمية في مجال التخصص، وتلتزم المجلة بإخطار الباحث بالقرار النهائي بشأن الموافقة على النشر من عدمها على أن يلتزم الباحث بإجراء التعديلات التي قد يطلبها المحكمون من أجل إجازة البحث أو الدراسة للنشر في المجلة.

18. ترسل البحوث وجميع المراسلات المتعلقة بالمجلة الى موقع المجلة.

	اللغة الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية		
124-106	م. د. زينب عصمت صفاء الدين النفطجي	لا تدعني أذهب أبدًا" لكازو إيشيجورو: قراءة ماركسية لغسيل الدماغ من خلال التعليم	4
155-125	م.م. علي حسن علي	الطبقات الاجتماعية ودور الملابس والقراءة في رواية التوقعات العظيمة موضوعية لتشارلز ديكنز: دراسة	5
188-156	م. د. غياث منهل الكناني	الهوية الوطنية كمنتج ثقافي في الرواية العراقية المعاصرة: دراسة ثقافية في روايتي علي بدر "بابا سارتر" و"حارس التبغ	6
203-189	ا.م. مي احمد مجيد	المسرح داخل المسرح ووسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في مسرحية "قاعة السينما" لآني بيكر و"صمت السماء" للورين غندرسو	7

اللغة الكردية

| | | وتخزينها | |

اللغة التركية

رقم الصفحة	الباحث	اسم البحث	ت
385-411	م. م. ابراهيم ضياء انور	(1921-2025) على ضوء وثائق الأرشيف التربية والتعليم اللغة التركية في كركوك	1
412-432	م.م.علي نيازي رشيد	عناصر الجمال في ديوان ابو بكر المفتي	2
433-458	م. د. مرتضى حيدر عزت	دراسة الحكايات الشعبية في قرية قره ناز التركمانية	3
459-478	م. م. عائشة ممتاز حسن	ديوان المفتي بكر أفندي في ضوء نسخة منسية وقصائد حصرية لهذه النسخة	4

Iraqi National Identity as a Cultural Product in Contemporary Iraqi Novels: A Study of Ali Bader's *Papa Sartre* and *the Tobacco Keeper*

Dr. Ghyath Manhel Alkinani

Abstract

The novel as a literary genre emerged with the rise of the middle class and their political ideology of nationalism. The emergence of a postcolonial national identity in modern Iraq accompanied the spread of the novel genre as a key cultural medium that helped to formulate the national identity of the new state. Much has been written about the Iraqi novel especially when it starts to gain much popularity after the 2003 American invasion of the country. However, it has been usually studied in the context of literary criticism via its different schools and approaches. This paper studies the Iraqi novel at the turn of the century as a cultural phenomenon that not only represents but also formulates the national identity of the contemporary Iraqi state. To avoid generalizations, the paper focusses on two significant novels by Iraqi writer Ali Bader: Papa Sartre (2001) and the Tobacco Keeper (2008). The paper follows combines textual analysis of the two novels with cultural reading of their larger context following Richard Johnson's (1986) approach of studying cultural phenomena via the three phases of their production context and formulating conditions, their status as texts to be culturally consumed and analyzed, and finally the responses or outcomes that emerge from consuming these cultural texts. This three-phase approach provides rewarding insights into the selected literary texts as they function and interact within their cultural space, redefining and remaking the fragmented and problematic identity formations that they are written in and that they engage with.

Keywords: Cultural studies, nationalism and identity, national allegory, cultural production, Ali Bader.

الهوية الوطنية كمنتج ثقافي في الرواية العراقية المعاصرة:
دراسة ثقافية في روايتي علي بدر "بابا سارتر" و"حارس التبغ"
م. د. غياث منهل الكناني[*]

الملخص

واكب صعودُ الرواية كنوع ثقافي ريادي في القرنين الماضيين صعود الطبقة الوسطى وأيديولوجيتها السياسية المتمثلة بالقومية. حدث هذا في الحالة العراقية مع ظهورِ الدولة العراقية الحديثة في العقد الثاني من القرن العشرين إذ أخذت هوية وطنية ما بعد استعمارية بالتشكل والانتشارُ، رافق هذا ظهور الرواية محليا كواحدة من الوسائط الثقافية المهمة في التعبير عن هموم الطبقة الوسطى وطليعتها النخبوية التي شكلت بيئة كتابة الرواية وجمهور قراءها. لم يكن الدور المقدر للرواية فقط للتعبير عن الهوية الوطنية للدولة ونخبتها الجديدة، بل أيضًا لتشكيل تلك الهوية وتلك الفئة ثقافيًا. كُتبَ الكثير عن الرواية العراقية وتاريخها ومراحل تطورها، خاصةً عندما بدأت تنتشر انتشارا واسعا بعد الاحتلال الأمريكي للبلاد عام 2003. ومع ذلك، فقد دُرست الرواية العراقية غالبا في سياق التاريخ الأدبي للأجناس الأدبية أو النقد الأدبي التقليدي بمدارسه ومناهجه المختلفة. أناقش في هذه الورقة البحثية الرواية العراقية في مطلع القرن الحادي والعشرين كظاهرة ثقافية لا "تمثّل" الهوية الوطنية للدولة العراقية المعاصرة فحسب، بل تشكلها أيضًا. تركز الورقة البحثية على روايتي: "بابا سارتر" (2001) و"حارس التبغ" (2008) للكاتب العراقي علي بدر. أزعم أن الروايتين التين اختيرتا كعينة للدراسة، يمثلان نصين ثقافيين يشتبكان مع فكرة الهوية الإشكالية للفرد العراقي والجماعة الوطنية العراقية معا في ظرف استثنائي ومرحلة خطيرة من مراحل تحولات الهوية المذكورة وإعادة تشكلها.

تجمع الورقة في بعدها النظري مزيجًا من التحليل النصي للروايتين مع قراءة ثقافية لسياقهما الأكبر، باتباع منهج ريتشارد جونسون (1986) الرائد في دراسة الظواهر والنصوص الثقافية من خلال المراحل الثلاث لسياق إنتاجها وشروط تشكيلها أولاً، ووضعها كنصوص يتم استهلاكها وتحليلها ثقافيًا ثانياً، وأخيرًا من خلال تحليل الاستجابات أو النتائج التي تنشأ عن استهلاك هذه النصوص ثالثاً. يوفر هذا النهج ذو المراحل الثلاث تحليلا قيّما للنصوص الأدبية المختارة بعيدا عن الضياع في أبعادها الجمالية والدلالية فحسب حيث تعمل وتتفاعل النصوص داخل فضائها الثقافي، مُعيدةً تعريفَ وصناعةَ تشكيلات الهوية الإشكالية المتمضية التي كُتِبَت في سياقها وتفاعلت معها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الدراسات الثقافية، الهوية والقومية، الأليكوريا الوطنية، الإنتاج الثقافي، علي بدر

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Introduction: The Novel, the State and National Identity

The fall of Saddam Husain's statue in April 9, 2003 symbolized the collapse of the modern Iraqi national state. It was a moment of violent neocolonial encounter that shook the very foundations and structure of the state. This collapse released long repressed divides and differences among the people. In addition to their political nature, the differences are utilized and emphasized by the American-made political process and the new political elite to extend their hegemony. More than the war itself, the focus of the media, the literature and the public discourse is directed to the postwar divides and conflicts. The shock of the neocolonial reality of the American invasion and destruction of the country has triggered multifold cultural responses, which are best manifested in the novel genre. The contemporary novel undertakes the cultural task of dismantling the ideological construction of the Iraqi national identity under the former totalitarian regime, reviving and recreating that identity on new post-nationalist grounds. By dismantling the ideological concept of homogenous Iraqi identity; by creating a collective national imaginary among the readers, the postwar novel in Iraq participates in reviving the destroyed Iraqi identity. Novels restate the cultural identity and heritage of the country in their narrative discourse. They write the people's version of history. The contemporary Iraqi novel creates possibilities and imaginary horizons for nation building beyond the discourse of the last and current political regimes. Keeping critical eyes on the daily reality, recognizing the facts, challenges and threatening open possibilities of the future, the novel discourse imagines, implicates and entertains the possibility and the hope to survive the upheaval of the ongoing divides.

The novel genre played a significant role in the history of nation building. The rise of nationalism and the nation state was accompanied by

the rise of "print capitalism" in Europe during the 19th century (Simatei, 2001, 19). The novel and newspaper were key elements that created the sense of belonging to a collective imaginary, the realization that as one reads a newspaper or a novel, one shares the experience with millions of people at the same time; people who share common concerns, speak the same national language and relate to one comprehensive identity. This gives the feeling that one belongs to a bigger common thing, the nation. The novel, according to Benedict Anderson, "concretise[s] the nation by imagining its existence in homogenous time" (Simatei, 2001, 19). For Anderson, the nation is not a real or natural being. It is a construct or an "imagined community" to which people imagine that they belong. The novel addresses questions, issues and concerns that are generally related to "real" people. It imagines and fictionalizes places, times and characters that are familiar and believable. The fictional world it creates corresponds in different ways to the real one. Readers relate to and identify with the novel because it creates an imaginary communion in which people share similar (imagined) geographies and histories. They share a common national language and a common identity. By creating a "national imagination," the novel mimics the nation's structure "in the movement of a solitary hero through a sociological landscape of a fixity that fuses the world inside the novel with the world outside" (Anderson, 2006, 35). These imaginary realms, history, geography and language produce an imaginary sense of belonging, which creates a national identity. One aspect of the novel, then, is its role in creating a common imaginary for the public, to be able to imagine themselves belonging to one nation. However, the novel does not simply offer a "blue print" to form and build the nation, but depicts the life and death of an "imagined community" (Anderson, 2006) It does not create the nation itself, but contributes to its formation by "mapping out shared experiences and turning them into

cornerstones to construct national… consciousness" (Simatei, 2001, 20; 24).

The state as an agent of national formation is a challenge to the national identity. Nation-states complicate the concept of nationalism. The state, an ideological, political institution identifies itself with the nation, "the imagined" concept. The state erases (or at least marginalizes) sub-identities and secondary belongings. Nationalism becomes an ideology that serves and maintains the power structure of the state. In totalitarian regimes, this means a threat to the collective identity of the people. When the nation-state fails to embrace their differences, their sense of belonging to the nation deteriorates. The heterogeneity of the people, their cultures, and their differences are molded into one homogenous totalitarian idea, usually fetishized and symbolized by a dictator, the leader and the symbol of the nation.

In the postcolonial nation states, the very identity of state is challenged by the immediate colonial encounter (Al-Musawi, 2015, 32). Nations, as Homi Bhabha maintains in his *Nation and Narration* (1990), are not coherent entities but complex spaces constructed via narrative. The role of the novel becomes twofold; on one hand is the mission to create and maintain this imagined community; on the second hand is avoiding (or trying to avoid) to fall into the ideology of the postcolonial nation state, the state that was built on traces and imbalances left by colonialism. Indeed, "the experience of colonization as a moment of cultural self-consciousness and self-dividedness...generates contradictory and ambivalent identity patterns and subject positions resulting from the encounter with the other (culture), and emphasizes the constructed-ness of identity" (Babana-Hampton, 2004, 111). This constructedness of identity makes it hyperreal, a reflection of Jean Baudrillard's (2012) notion of the hyperreality (a distorted version of reality where they

distinction between what is real and what is fictional or simulated is very blurry) we occupy in the postmodern world. Postmodernism meant, among other things, the undermining of overarching structures and myths such as the nation. Thus, the contemporary novel discourse in Iraq faces this twofold task: to dismantle the myth of the homogenous identity of the totalitarian nation state, and to maintain the sense of a unified "imagined community" beyond the state ideology. Belonging to the nation is contrasted by its identification with state and the ruling power, hence the rejection of the state as the embodiment of the nation. It was seen as a threat to the national identity (Simatei, 2001, 23). Nationalism according to Anderson is not to be confused with "self-consciously held political ideologies, but with large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which - as well as against which- it came into being" (12). Although the concept of national identity has its own ideological aspect, belonging to the nation is more than submitting to the state ideology. In more stable countries, nationalism may connote negative political or ideological limitations associated with fascism and national exceptionalism. However, in a country threatened by civil war and divides, nationalism is more than an ideology. It becomes an existential necessity for a divided population to live together. The realization that the identity is an imaginary construct, a process of merging small belongings, frees the contemporary novelist from falling into ideological state-nationalism. Exposing and dissecting the heavy heritage of such ideologies in the recent history of the state help novelists reimagine the community they (and their readers) belong.

The Ba'athification of the state and society in Iraq during the reign of Saddam Husain merged the nation with the state ideology. The mainstream Ba'athist culture inflated the image of the dictator as the dreamed-of liberator of the people. The national state gradually became identical with Saddam in the official discourse. Ethnic and religious

identities were severely repressed (Rasheed, 2012, 62). This discursive erasure of diversity in the Ba'athist state led to what happened after the fall of Saddam's regime. After the American invasion in 2003, the fall of the dictator who embodies the state and the fragmentation of the national identity led to the realization that Iraq as a state could simply vanish. However, as a nation, an imagined community, Iraq, according to Ali Bader, be maintained and sustained as a gravitation concept of belonging that embraces diversity and difference. Ali Bader (1964) often speaks of the example of the French and Russian novel traditions that *created* and saved the nations of France and Russia throughout history (Magazine). This realization challenges novelists, among other intellectuals to look for other means to revive the nation beyond the state ideology. The postwar Iraqi novel contributes in maintaining the fragmented national identity after the destruction of the country and the constant threats of division and dismantling. Novelists participate in the cultural controversies among educated middle-class people. Their novels document and creates a "third" history of the nation, a hybrid narrative (to invoke Homi Bhabha's notion) of documented history and fiction, focusing on marginalized aspects and creating people's histories, their "collective imaginary" (Al-Musawi, 2015, 127-129). Novels, thus, treat identity as a process of becoming and constant change. They recognize and celebrate the differences of sub-identities but try to maintain a unifying larger narrative.

To study the discourse of the contemporary Iraqi novel and its role in culturally producing the national identity, the paper takes a panoramic larger view of the discourse as a cultural phenomenon, analyzing "moments" and specific aspects of this discourse following Richard Johnson's (1986) analytical approach of cultural phenomena. His essay "What is Cultural Studies Anyway?" provides an interesting approach to

study cultural products as processes rather than fixed texts. Based on Marxist theoretical grounds of reading culture as superstructural materialist manifestation of class struggle and dominant modes of production, the essay provides a theoretical model for cultural studies in which cultural forms, products and discourses are studied in one "circuit of the production, circulation and consumption of cultural products... Each moment or aspect depends upon the others and is indispensable to the whole. Each, however, is distinct and involves characteristic changes of form" (46). The moments in the life circuit of the novel discourse to be studied are the conditions of the production of this discourse, the form it takes as cultural texts and the reception and response in real life that it causes. These moments in the development of the discourse have circular influence and reflection on each other, however, the circuit is not completely closed. The novel discourse is a lively, changing and developing aspect of the culture. Every moment of the above adds its own touch, influences, develops and furthers the fluidity of the discourse into new realms. The production of the novel discourse is clearly influenced by social, political, economic and personal circumstances. These conditions shape and determine the new text. The creative achievement of the writer adds to the ongoing discourse. It shapes and determines it as much as it is being determined and shaped by it. Then, the readers' decoding of the text is another fertile moment of producing meaning. Readers' responses vary. However, no matter how they react, their reaction demonstrates the impact of the texts on them. The impact is reflected on their lived experiences, habits of cultural consumption and political decisions. In return, these would influence the conditions of cultural production, and that is how the cycle of the cultural exchange of meaning continues. Therefore, depending on the conditions of production that shape the discourse; the writers' creativity in encoding appealing

cultural messages in the novel texts; and the readers' conscious and unconscious reactions to these codes, the novel discourse succeeds in reviving and restoring the national identity.

The Production

The conditions of production that create and shape the contemporary novel discourse in Iraq are complex and interconnected. However, within the limits of the present paper, we can only quickly discuss some of them. The personal conditions of the writers, the literary tradition of the novel genre and the conditions of the publication industry are direct factors and influences on the production of novels. However, they need to be contextualized within the economic, social, political conditions of the country. The hegemonic dictatorship and exclusive ideology, which led to the wars and neocolonial invasion and the destruction of the Iraqi identity also led to the rise of minor identities and clash of interests, of representations and civil war among them. Thus, the rejection of the minor identity politics and the drive to revive the collective national belonging become the underlining structure of many postwar Iraqi novels (Rasheed, 2012, 77).

The modern state of Iraq had managed to create, develop and maintain a sense of national identity throughout its history. However, this identity was promoted at the expense of internal cultural differences and secondary identities. The state used different discourses to strengthen and emphasize national identity, stressing one dominant narrative upon the country's diverse and multicultural texture. After 1968, the differences were molded into a "progressive," forward looking authoritarian state ideology: Ba'athism or socialist Arabism. In the Ba'ath discourse, the Iraqi state was only a phase before the establishment of the dreamed-of United Arab Nation State. Iraq was only a *qutur* (district, territory) among

many others that all make the one big Arab country that stretches from the Pacific to the Persian Gulf. Arab nationalism was prior to the Iraqi identity, at least until the 1980s (Marr, 2012, 208). This involved the marginalization and suppression of any other belongings or identities (Masmoudi, 2015, 10). The authoritarian regime drove the country into several wars and conflicts that stopped the country's huge modernization process in the second half of the twentieth century, destroyed its economic infrastructure and wasted its growing oil and humanitarian resources. In addition to the wars, there was a huge internal social and political turmoil, coups and divides that led to the collapse of the myth of the progressive state and the collapse of the Arabic Unity after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. The state repressed social, cultural and individual differences among the people because these differences and identities represent a threat to the "enforced monolithic doctrine" (Masmoudi, 2015, 62). This developed rage and resentment to the nation, which was identified by the person of Saddam. In the official public discourse, the whole country was stereotyped and molded to follow the strict, firm pattern of Saddam's persona.

After the 1990 war and the failure of the intifada that followed (Marr, 2012, 227), ethnic and religious differences were even more intensified. Their rage and yearning for more agency and political rights was reflected in waves of migration. The repression increases with the economic difficulties the country suffered from because of the wars and economic sanctions. All this turmoil and upheavals were prevented from public discussion until the 1990s, after the huge wave of migration the country witnessed. Hundreds of creative writers and intellectuals fled the country, desperate of any perspective of political change. The collapse of the dictatorial regime in 2003 was accompanied by a destruction of the whole structure of the state. The American led invasion did not only

destroy the infrastructure of state and society, it also established a political system based on structural divisional ideologies, serving the economic and strategic interests of the neocolonial power in the Middle East region.

The fall of Saddam's regime was a moment of ecstasy and relief for millions of Iraqis. However, it released immensely repressed divides among people, rage against the unifying whole of the national identity. In addition to the internal divides, the collapse of the nation state served the interests of the invading forces and the neighboring countries. As the war was unfolding the postponed questions, ignored conflicts and social, economic inequalities and injustices erupt as urgent political and cultural themes of debate and controversy. Replacing the old pan-Arabism of the Ba'ath, the new dominant class attempted to redefine Iraq as an Islamic, rather than a secular state (Marr, 2012, 372). The unity of the state was crumbling under the Kurdish-Arabic ethnic divide, the Shi'i-Sunni sectarian strife, and the repression and migration of other ethnic minorities. These divides shaped the cultural scene in the post 2003 Iraq. The novel genre has taken the lead in expressing these debates and questioning the heritage of the past.

Gradually, patriotism and national consciousness was developing as many Iraqi novelists realized the ideological implementation of the sectarian and ethnic divides by the new political elite. The sectarian conflicts benefited political families, financial and political corruption cartels to grow and use the differences, the historical sense of marginalization and injustice of a sect or ethnic group for their own interests. In spite of all the positive aspects of the change, for the most part, the situation for people in the margins did not actually change for the better. A new social-political class grew out of this change, to dominate and rule under a hybrid regime of sectarian-Islamism, capitalist

liberalism (with socialist traces of the former state-run economy) and theocratic democracy. The rising sectarian and ethnic identities are politically represented in the new ruling class, the rising bourgeoisie. This class uses the marginalized-identity discourse to maintain and serve its financial and political interests at the expense of the people. Therefore, while the internal conflicts are presented to the world as identity wars, in fact, they are mostly socio-economic divides within the ruling class itself.

The discourse of the contemporary Iraqi novel, while challenging the ideology of the last regime, is also a challenge to the dominant power structure of the present. The collective imaginaries of the novels represent a cultural response to the factual divisions among the population. Ali Bader, whose novels are to be discussed in the next section, is a journalist, a script writer, a translator, a social media influencer and a public intellectual. His novels, among other things, reflect the divisions and conflicts of the society he reports and writes about in his daily work.

Publication used to be a chronic challenge for Iraqi writers. It used to be state dominated, with very few publishing houses. Moreover, the ones that exist are not competitively professional in the quality of production and marketing. This means that writers have to seek other private or external options. Cultural and creative production in the country suffers from marginalization in a state-run economic system, where there have been very few, private institutions for book publishing. These difficulties drive novelists and creative writers to publish their works abroad (Al-Sakkaf, 2014, p.10). Cultural production, as the super-structural reflection of the dominant mode of production, to use Marxian terms, is the cite for silencing voices outside the state discourse. However, after 2003, the same policy to represent the official discourse of the state, with less restrictions, continues. Writers rely less on the state for publication now. They started seeking private and external avenues.

Writers usually self-publish, rely on friends and peers for editing and designing their books. During the international sanctions on Iraq in the 1990s readers and bookshops developed an illegal photocopying culture. With the absence of strict copyrights laws, photocopying and electronic exchanging of books and reading material are still prevalent. These ways have been important channels to reach a wider audience. Some beginning writers prefer to circulate their works freely among friends or in the internet just to secure a place in the readership market.

In spite of these difficulties, there has been a huge increase in the number of published books after 2003, compared to the past. The number of the published Iraqi novels in the last decade exceeds the whole number of published novels over the last century (Al-Sakkaf, 2014, p.10). The narrative projects of novel writers are primarily personal. Writers are generally not organized or ideologically representative of institutions. The nationalistic agenda or messages that can be found in their novels express their personal, and class, interests in restoring peace, security and stability to their lives and the lives of the people they speak of. To treat themes like Iraqi history, identity politics, the ongoing civil war is a matter of conscious choice determined by a political attitude, a creative participation in the ongoing debate about the future of the country and the people. In their participation, they express the voice of reason to stop the blood shedding and understand the falseness of the identity conceptions that cause the ongoing war. Cultural prizes, external and internal, are also important factors in the publication process. Several novelists publish their novels partly to participate in cultural festival competitions in the country or abroad. Winning a prestigious prize raises their reading profile and increases their popularity. Ali Bader, for instance, is taking writing as a fulltime occupation. Winning several prizes and fellowships in the past

few years, he depends on the popularity and reading public his former novels have achieved.

Geographically, the writer lives in different places when writing the two novels. *Papa Sartre* was written in Iraq in the late 1990s. *The Tobacco Keeper* was written in exile. In any case, the focus of their imagined spaces is Baghdad. Ali Bader was born in Baghdad. He now lives in Brussels, Belgium. The spaces that are reflected in his texts are the historical old center of Baghdad, the most popular space in Iraqi culture. It is there that most of the cultural and intellectual interaction in the country takes place. The cafes of Al-Rasheed and Al-Mutanabbi streets, among other places, are the metropolis of Iraqi culture.

Socially, most writers and novelists belong to the lower middle classes of society. They generally express the interests of these growing, suffering classes, people who have no real interest in the ongoing war and conflicts. The war that was fed by the dead bodies of the poor, serves the interests of the ruling bourgeoisie. The majority of the latter secure themselves, families and relatives by foreign citizenships, abroad financial credits, social and political connections and advanced security systems. It becomes clear among educated people, writers and their audiences, that the ongoing war serves the interests of the ruling class. The novel's primary (target) audience is this large majority, people who have college or basic education, whose lives, interests and futures are threatened by the ongoing identity warfare.

The prevalent political attitude among the intelligentsia is recognizing the political nature of the differences that are considered to be structurally rooted in the social texture of the population. The task was to expose this rhetoric by writing the narrative of these classes from within. Organic intellectuals, belonging and functioning among people, the writers become critical of the dominant ideology in their cultural

milieu. Thus, they play ambivalent roles in opposing but serving the dominant ideology of the new political order. They are trying to "unlearn," to use Raymond Williams wording, the "inherent dominative mode,"(1963, 376) to rethink the given "nationalism" or national identity of the country. At the same time their roles are opposite to the sectarian and ethnic divisional rhetoric. To challenge and deconstruct the established structures, the writer uses his literary platform to archeologically dig for cracks, fissures and structural imbalances in the nationalist ideology. He uncovers and gives voice to forgotten and neglected spots and fractures that made the national identity of a country with so long history and cultural tradition, so fragile. In response to these problematic structural weaknesses in the national identity, the novels used narrative archeological documentation to revisit and reshape the past, replacing the official historical narrative, and representing identity void of political and ideological substance.

The conditions that produce the contemporary novel discourse in Iraq are complex and changing. They range from the very general historical and cultural background, political context, and economical means of production and marketing, to the specific personal reaction of a novelist writing about a place torn by identity warfare. To this web of conditions, the novel texts add aesthetic value, the capacity to imagine alternative realities. The novel discourse emerges as an expression and a reaction to all these factors and circumstances creating fragile, alienated characters, distorted settings, gloomy and uncertain futures. No matter how secondary and minor the novel voice in Iraq because of all the above mentioned conditions, it is an undeniable axis of the cultural scene, a component of the way that people (who read novels) perceive, react to, and live their lives.

The Form: Novel Texts

The cultural discourse of the novel manifests itself physically in the novel texts. Their form, structure and style determine (and is determined by) the cultural conditions they are created and found within. The text is the contact point among these conditions, the creative touch of the writer and the reading audience. It is here that readers perceive and negotiate the discourse of the novel. As a cultural text, the novel builds on a fictional narrative of an imagined story, an implied agreement, or a code of fictive language that creates a common "national imagination." This coding system gives the readers a chance to share a common realm of imaginary places, times and characters, to see themselves in relation to a bigger identity. When these characters, times and places are relevant to what the characters believe to be their identity or sense of belonging, the novel successfully creates the common identity.

Ali Bader's *Papa Sartre* (2001, trans. into English in 2009) succeeds in breaking the dominance of the state's discourse over the definition of the national identity by revolting against the intellectual father figure, creating a counter narrative, a people's history of the country. The novel starts in Baghdad in the 1990s with a frame narrative of an academic assigned to write a biography of an Iraqi "philosopher," Abdulrahman, who is also known as the Philosopher, the existentialist of Al-Sadriyah, and the Sartre of Baghdad. The investigation unveils the myth of this fake intellectual, mocking the whole literary tradition of the Iraqi intelligentsia. The pretentious existentialism that dominates the cultural scene in the country in the 1960s is no more than an imported mode of cultural consumption, in which only looks, appearances, philosophical jargon and pretention are the tools. Along with the unveiling of the story and the character of the "philosopher," the underground life of Baghdad in the 1950s and 1960s is masterfully

depicted. The novel is an elaborate "detailed map of Baghdad" (Al-Yasiry, 2007). It recreates the cultural space of the city and the country, the space that was characterized by multiculturalism and diversity, but also with pretentious imported cultural modes and tropes, not authentic currents of thought. The diversity of the past is implicitly in contrast with the monolithic present of the late 1990s. Oral culture is prevalent; writing is considered futile in a meaningless existence (35). However, this only is a guise to hide the impotence of the intelligentsia. Existentialist philosophy is only a trope in the novel. Philosophies and ideologies like Marxism, existentialism, and structuralism are only masks and ornaments used for intellectual show off. The cultural intelligentsia was too much imitative to the west that it has western figures as role models, and tried to shape local life by borrowed face values of Western modernity. The *Faylasoof* (the Philosopher) attempts to impersonate Sartre in every behavioral and personal aspect, without understanding or care for understanding Sartre's philosophy. Depicting the hedonistic lifestyles of the impotent cultural elite in brothels, bars, and coffeehouses (32), mimicking western intellectuals and blindly adopting western schools of thought, the novel mocks the elite and the dominant ideology as well.

Papa Sartre is a narrative revolt against the fake, borrowed-and-imposed modernism. Its pastiche style of mocking the patriarchal intelligentsia, implying the state, could be interpreted, with some stretching, as referring to Saddam himself. The novel was written at the end of the 1990s, the last chapter of the progressive national state myth. The timing of the novel is interesting as it happened right before the war that exposed the fragility of the state and the intelligentsia, coming from the margins of the cultural scene to shake and expose it right before its formal collapse (Al-Musawi (2021, 34-35). The state's structure was crumbling. The unified nation state of Iraq was gradually destroyed by

wars and economic sanctions in the 1990s. It was politically, emotionally and physically divided even before the 2003 invasion. By reflecting on the 1960s' social and intellectual scene, the novel was commenting on the 1990s' cultural and political situation. By the detailed descriptions of places in Baghdad, the novel retrieves the omitted chapter of Iraqi cultural and social life, the heterogeneity and differences of the past stand up against the homogenous hegemonic present. The revolt against the intellectual father figure is a revolt against the state as the ideological fatherly narrative of identity. The fascist Nationalism of the state was also a borrowed European ideology. The state and the intelligentsia imposed ideologies and identities that have led to the devastating situation of Iraq in the 1990s. The novel criticizes the role of the Iraqi intellectual in the shaping of the cultural identity of the country, simply because criticizing the state was out of the question.

By mocking the Philosopher (the nick name itself is a parody), Bader undermines the elitist position of the 1950s and 1960s intelligentsia, creating an alternative version of history, how it was like to be living in the Baghdad of the1950s and 1960s. One can even stretch the symbolism of the title itself to be the cultural counterpart to the patriarchal title given to the dictator of the Ba'thist regime, i. e. *Papa Saddam*. The novel creates a "third" history" (Al-Musawi, 2015, 127), a hybrid, fictional version that is different from the official story of the dominant ideology (the novel was published just before the collapse of the Ba'ath regime). The individual Iraqi persona, according to Bader, was modeled to represent the official narrative. The official discourse of the time created a tough, harsh, inhuman image of the Iraqi lay person, someone with a thick moustache (like that of Saddam and his close circle), someone that hardly laughs, mistakes or can be sympathetic. The writer creates a counter version of that normativity, a space for difference

and sympathy with that destroyed individual (Magazine). Parody and mocking shakes and challenges the firm patriarchy. Because history writing, similar to other academic disciplines, has been abused by the dominant ideology, the mission of the creative writer is to write a fictive documentary history of the people, the neglected and marginalized aspects of the everyday life. The fictiveness of the novel is both an escape from censorship and an opportunity to manipulate the official history creatively. In his writing, Bader investigates every possible detail that he can find in the newspapers, advertisements, police records, and phone directories; everything that helps him to imagine how it was like to live in Baghdad at that time. This is the only possible way to understand and fictionally recreate "the structure of feeling" of the time, to use Raymond William's words (2011, p. 69). The novel shows that how it felt to live in Baghdad in the middle of the twentieth century is different from the official narrative, the ideological history of the state. Challenging the two discourses, Bader seeks some way not in between, but completely different. He writes a history of the people with himself steering and directing the narrative, undermining the myth of the progressive state ideology.

In addition to this temporal or historical aspect of the novel, geographically speaking, *Papa Sartre* rewrites the story of the nation by bringing together different parts of the country to meet in Baghdad. It unites *Abbas phalsapha* (philosophy) the young Kurdish intellectual from Kirkuk with Salman, another intellectual from *al-Shatra*, in the south, who meet in Baghdad and "bec[o]me the most important intellectuals of the 1960s"(33). Although this centrifugal tendency to relate everything to the central iconic space of the capital is a reiteration of the state's discourse, the Baghdad imagined in the novel is the one belonging to the people, not the one seen in the official discourse.

The progressive state myth was the unifying power of the nationalistic imaginary that forces the people to submit to one national identity. Because of this imposed and ideologically forced sense of nationalism, Bader thinks, it has driven people away from an authentic belonging to the homeland. More than recreating the past and commenting on the present, *Papa Sartre* even predicts the shift to Islamism in the post 2003 era (178). Even though the novel was published before the collapse of the regime, it ironically shows how false values, imported ideas, philosophies, lifestyles and ideologies shape the past, present and future of the Iraqi cultural and public life. The importance of the novel, and the entire narrative project of Ali Bader, lies in the challenge to the shaky foundations of identity. Bader challenges and changes the stereotypically given persona of the Iraqi individual as a daydreaming phony intellectual, or a tough and rough masculine, (modeled after Saddam). Iraqis, as Bader's characters represent them, are fragile, funnier, more human, and more real than how the official discourse would like them to be represented. By doing this, he is challenging the very basics of the state-imposed homogenous identity.

The Tobacco Keeper represents another chapter in the debate over the national identity of the Iraqi people. It was published in 2008, at the highest moment of clash among the constituent sub-identities that make up the Iraqi state. In the novel, Iraqi identity is archeologically investigated and reconstructed around the character of the protagonist, Kamal Medhat, an Iraqi violinist whose body was found in Baghdad in 2006 (3). The narrative starts where a local reporter (the narrator) is chosen by a western news agency as a black-writer to investigate the death of Medhat. In the first page of the narrative, the text reveals Medhat's "real" name and "identity," Yousef Sami Saleh, an Iraqi Jew who was forced to migrate to Israel in 1950, after the displacement of

Iraqi Jews and stripping them of their nationality. Afterward, we also learn that Medhat, or Saleh, has escaped to Iran in order to find a way to return to Iraq, with the new, Shiite name of Haider Salman. Expelled to Tehran as a non-Iraqi Iranian fellow during the 1980s war between the two countries, Salman lived there as a refugee for a year, found a way to go to Syria, and ended up in Baghdad again with a completely new name and identity, Kamal Medhat, a Sunni Arab (4). In all his three identities, the man managed to hold his sense of belonging to the Iraqi place. He had three sons of the three identities that he lived by and performed. Every one of them, their names and their cultural perspectives overtly represent the religious and sectarian components of the present Iraq. Being expelled from Iraq three times, always finding a way back, Saleh/Salman or Medhat gives a different interpretation and performance of his Iraqi identity, his relationship to the place. For him, having a country and belonging are not ideological principles or conscious decisions but, one can say, existential relationship to the place affected by his aesthetic vision as an artist.

By being overtly representative of the conflicting identities, the novel challenges these identities, the ethnic minority, the Shiite and the Sunni Arab as ideological constructs, not given essences, as people might think them to be. In its critique of the state ideology at various times of modern Iraqi history, the novel managed to keep a minimum ideological positioning. Saleh, the central character of the novel, is clearly anti-political. He suspects any political action. He mistrusts the raging revolutionary masses of the 1958 republic (175). He seems very passive, living an aesthetic ideal of his musical interpretation/approach to the world. He meets and performs privately for Saddam Husain, in a national celebration after the eight years' war against Iran (281-282). Playing the submissive role of the intellectual serving power, Medhat is disgusted by

the vulgarity of the pop art of the masses and the state propaganda. Approaching the changing political and social conditions of the country in his lifetime, music is always the aesthetic resort and haven for him. Elitist and classy as this disgust with the masses may look, it is quite telling of Bader's own political and aesthetic views. Politics, Bader contends, is overrated. Real solutions to man's existential dilemmas are to be found in art and culture. Man's real belonging is more cultural, aesthetic, universal and humanitarian. Medhat's individualistic odyssey contradicts collective mythologies of the nation. This elitist attitude in the novel contradicts with *Papa Sartre's* mockery of elitism. It reflects Bader's growing disinterest in politics. For him a real change can be achieved only through spiritual and cultural progress by means of art and culture, after the failure of other means. In spite of the violinist's elitism and distrust of the masses; in spite of what happened to himself and his family, he insistently refuses to live anywhere else, believing that he only belongs in Iraq. His insistence on belonging to the country might look strange to readers in the present conditions and divides, but the writer succeeds to contextualize this attitude. When he was asked to leave by some Israeli-British smuggler, who was also of Russian descent, and the head of a Zionist secret society in Tehran that encourages Jews to leave Iraq, his answer was quite simple, why?

"You are an important musician and we'll help you travel to Israel."

"Do you want me to be a refugee, to be in exile when I have a home and a country?"(143). The complex identity of the smuggler is in contrast with the simplicity of Saleh's perception (before he takes on the other identity masks) of his own identity. Simple also was all Saleh's attitudes to the devastating things that happened to him. Clearly, this episode does not only speak about belonging and identity, it restates a

forgotten historical chapter of modern Iraqi history, the expelling of the Iraqi Jews and the confiscation and looting of their properties, which, as the novel implies, represent the beginning of the following half century of storms and turmoil about who is an Iraqi and who is not. The looting was generally fueled by the rising pro-Arabism which attached Jewish Iraqi citizens with the newly declared state of Israel simply because of their religion. The same thing happens later to the Shiites during the war with Iran. Similar things are taking place against Sunnis, Christians, and other minorities as Bader was writing the novel. These moments of homogenizing the national identity, of othering secondary identities and expelling people for one label or another, are moments of enlarging structural fissures and cracks in the national identity myth. Names in the novel overtly take a comprehensive compromising representation of the religious, sectarian and ethnic variety of the social milieu Bader is reporting about (Al-Musawi, 2015, 144). While this might be a technical narrative take on the novel, Bader seems to care less about the form and focuses more on his message that identities can be assumed by simple means such as a name or a style of living or dressing. Embodying Baudrillard's notion of the simulacra, these identities have nothing original or authentic as people ideologically attach to them. In the three identities Saleh assumes, his three names, the names of his sons and the names of other characters in the novel are overtly artificial. The three fictional identities reflect the hyperreality, to use Jean Baudrillard's concept, of the notion of identity in the world created in the novel, not only the three identities are discursively constructed, but the story itself is layered between the frame of the journalistic investigation and the fact that it is in a fictional story in a novel. This structure of fake layers of meaning suggests that an authentic, original essence could not be found, only layers and copies of copies. The hyperreality appears in the

interaction of historical events and characters with the whole fictional world of the novel. Knowing, or thinking that they know the real from the fictional, readers are struck by the hyperreality of their own conceptions of identity.

The two novels approach the question of identity in a progressive way, trying first to uncover deep structural imbalances and shaky foundations, then showing how constructed the myth of identity is, the irrationality of the contentious othering and expelling of people from the country. The novels dramatize and intensify the politics of identity in times of extreme political and cultural crises, the civil war over identities. *Papa Sartre* questions the confining formal definition of identity, challenging the past, and rewriting history. *The Tobacco Keeper* shows identity as a construct, a cover, or a dress that is changeable and not fixed.

In the two texts one dominant mode is revisiting and interrogating the past. This retrospective trial and questioning are necessary to understand and overcome the mistakes in forming Iraq's national identity. It is a questioning of the imbalanced social and political contract of the Iraqi state. Another dominant trope in the two novels is the space in which events take place. The most recurrent place in the novels is Baghdad, specifically, its old, historical center: Al-Rasheed and Al-Jumhuriyah streets, Al-Midan and Al-Tahreer squares. The centrality of Baghdad is politically rivaled by the margins after 2003 (Rasheed, 2012, 46). The novels' celebration of its historical and cultural value is one means by which a new national identity is attempted. These places are historically considered the cultural center of the country. Most Iraqi writers and intellectuals live, work and meet in these places. Cafes that reappear in the novels are cultural and social spaces where people from different social and cultural strata of society mix (Kashou, 2013, 51, 61). Socially and culturally, the region hosts a miniature of the Iraqi mosaic of

identities. The identity crisis the novels tackle is best seen in these spaces. Depicting these places in the novels create shared imagined geography that the readers can identify, imagine and relate to. A third common thread in these novels is the acceptance, negotiation of the secondary belongings. The secondary identities in the novels are not contradictory with the national comprehensive one. The two texts, at different levels celebrate the religious and ethnic belonging. They perceive the national identity, the existential belonging to the cultural space, as a collective whole that does not contrast with these specific categories of belonging. On the opposite, despite its constructedness, the novels hold the national belonging as a fundamental necessity for people to survive the ongoing identity warfare.

The language of the two texts is journalistic, documentary and realistic. This reflects a departure from rhetorical or literary/poetic devices, by the writer who is also a poet. The style of the novels expresses Bader's disinterest in technical experimentation in the structure or form of his writing. This departure from poetic and experimental language shows two important markers. First, it reflects a revolt against the hegemony of poetry over Iraqi literature and culture. Poetry was privileged as the formal cultural marker of chivalrous Arabism, which has to be challenged after the collapse of the myth of the Arabic dream (Babana-Hampton, 2004, 111). For Bader, the invasion of Kuwait in 1990 was the end of the myth of Pan-Arabism. Poetry belongs to the age of that patriarchal collectivist past. For him, poetry is less capable of expressing the needs and aspirations of the contemporary Iraqi individual (Bader, Magazine). The use of standard Arabic for the narration and colloquial Iraqi Arabic for the dialogue in the three novels reflect the writers' emphasis on the Iraqi identity of their texts, which was a controversial point for non-Iraqi readers as the next section of this paper will show. The

second point has to do with professional success and achievement. The writer moved beyond linguistic and technical games of experimentation in language and form to get close to the readers and their aspirations. He focuses on creating an appealing story in a clear language, with clear coding forms so that he communicates his messages easily. If the newspaper, according to Anderson "creates its imagined community" by implying a "refraction of even 'world events' into a specific imagined world of vernacular readers," (63). The novels' journalistic language creates a similar imagined communion among Iraqi readers, which is better expressed by readers themselves as we will see in the following section.

Reception and Response

The third important moment in the life circuit of the contemporary novel discourse is the reception of the novel's message(s) among readers, its absorption and influence on their lived cultural practices. Blog reviews, social media discussions and other expressions of readers' reactions to the novels illustrate the position of these texts on the real life of readers as active cultural consumers. Readers' reviews, the critical acclaim, the amount of debate a novel creates all indicate its popularity and gauge its influence to a certain extent. Although not all readers write reviews or speak about what they think of a text, those who do express the influence that text had made on them to step out and talk about it. For them, reading a novel is not simply a passing experience but also a moment of reflection and contemplation of one's personal life, experiences, choices and opinions, a moment that deserves to be shared and discussed with others. Viewpoints vary and differ among readers of *Papa Sartre* and *The Tobacco Keeper*. Generally, one common point in the responses is the agreement over the success of these novels, in spite of

differences in the details, in communicating and discussing the question of identity.

It is important to stress that the question of national Iraqi identity in the novels mostly appeals to the primary (target) audience, the Iraqi readers. When the discourse is considered outside this limit, the novels come to signify different things. Interestingly, non-Iraqi commentators on the novels responded with unease to the extended description of places, characters and particular details. On the opposite, the majority of Iraqi commentators were happy, nostalgic and excited with the feeling that the place-descriptions and the colloquial Iraqi dialogue create. Most of non-Iraqis could not stand (or understand) it. They did not like or appreciate either the specificity of the detailed descriptions of places, or the use of the colloquial Iraqi Arabic. The detailed description of the places affects the movement of the plot for many (especially non-Iraqi) readers who were uncomfortable with it. For example, an Amazon reviewer (from the United States) expresses her boredom with *the Tobacco Keeper*. She speaks of the implausibility of the novel's three-identity game, concluding that it was "interesting only for its description of the Green Zone in Iraq" (MabelDodge, 2015). This review was for the English translation of the book, and one can hardly avoid the impression that it reflects the interest into what really concerns an American reader about the country, their American–made-and-run Green Zone, not the rest of the country. Imagining the place is not as important to her as the development of the story and the description of the characters and their actions. While for the target Iraqi readership, the place represents part of their imagined sense of community and identification with the characters and the homeland. They mostly enjoy reading and imagining the details of places that they know and relate to. The same thing can be said about using the colloquial language in the dialogue (Anbbar, 2015). The colloquial

language gives the feeling of home. It creates an imagined collective identity of people who could understand, appreciate and react to this language. It gives them a sense of identity.

Aside from these differences, the theme of identity as a construct of different factors and elements is recurrent in several reviews and commentaries. One commentator thus speaks of *the Tobacco Keeper*'s message as he understands it: "Indeed, identity is a lie. We are victims of the lie of identity" (Al-Zirqi, 2013). In a Facebook group specialized in discussions about novels, a commentary thread about *Papa Sartre* reads "This novel only resembles itself. It is a combination of all Iraqi cultures…" The question of identity was clear even to non-Iraqi commentators. A reviewer in *The Independent*, summarizes *the Tobacco Keeper* as "A fascinating tangle of multiple identities and forgotten histories" (Byrnes, 2012). Another comment focuses on the implication of the message of *Papa Sartre* on readers' perceptions and life experiences. For him, the novel "encourages the readers to entertain the possibility of viewing [their] ideas, things that [they] take for granted, [their] culture as no more than a mode of fashion, changeable with the passage of time and interests..." (Nawrsats, 2010).

Reading novels influences, to a certain extent, cultural rituals and habits of consumption and real-life experiences and attitudes of readers. The influence of the postwar novels' cultural discourse on the lived cultural practices in the almost ritual weekly visit (every Friday morning) to Al-Mutanabbi Street in Baghdad, the cultural center of the country, where the main bookstores, publishing houses, cafes and forums, are. The street is nationally celebrated as the cultural icon of national identity. Its position in the collective self-celebrating image that was famously expressed by the anonymous saying in the 1960s and 1970s that "Cairo writes, Beirut publishes and Baghdad reads." Literary and cultural circles

meet and socialize there. The weekly visit becomes a ritual for educated (especially young) people in Baghdad. Beyond the rituals of reading and buying books there, Al-Mutanabbi Street has become the locus of the nationalist cultural capital. Every Friday it turns into a cultural/ intellectual show that embraces the variety and multitude of Iraqi culture(s). People meet there for various reasons: to buy books, to keep up with the latest in (high) cultural products, for prestigious show-off, to meet famous writers and celebrities and many other reasons.

Influencing and influenced by these rituals, the postwar novel discourse succeeded to change and influence the reading habits of cultural products among readers. Among the changing reading habits for the new generation is rereading Iraq's history, with an interest on marginal, counter accounts. Young people who always thought of Jews as others, are looking for books and histories that retell the story of the Iraqi Jews (Al-Iraqi, 2015). The interest in this marginalized chapter of Iraq's history is in contrast with the hegemonic othering discourse over the Iraqiness of these people by the former and the present dominant cultures. It is mostly through novels that readers get to know this disguised chapter of their history.

In addition to the habits of cultural consumptions, the developing communication between writers and their reading public in the social media indicate their popularity to a certain extent. The role their public personas play is important for enlightening and educating the public, highlighting important issues that may be ignored or marginalized by the traditional media, in addition to the role of reformist political activism. The revolution in media and communication technology bridges the gaps between authors, their texts and the audiences. After 2003, Iraq witnessed a huge shift when restrictions of state-run media and censorship disappeared. Hundreds of daily, weekly and periodical publications came

to the public. Internet access and free satellite TV invaded the cultural sphere. Competing successfully with all these media, the novel is influenced by the advances of social media communication that decentralize the cultural scene. Writers now face their audiences online. The two sides meet, discuss, argue, defend or express themselves more freely. Authors deal with these communication tools personally. Writing is no more that solitary, elitist occupation. It has been to a certain extent socialized, democratized and become a form of addressing audience's interests and concerns. Writers in this and other forums comment and discuss with their followers current cultural and political issues, in addition to their novels. Readers make novel discussion workshops, involving writers, educated and ordinary readers. It is true that the virtual space of the social media that democratizes literature might look fake and illusive, -at least less reliable- but still, it has become a lively cultural space where one can gauges a writer's achievement, success and popularity. Despite its other negative aspects, his virtual interactive space provides a forum where people may forget their divides and ideological, political differences for some time, to talk about novels.

The three moments of cultural production, textual manifestation and response of the cultural process/phenomenon are best represented in the success Ali Bader has attained after the publication of these two novels (and many others that he has since published). Bader has secured his position as one of the leading public intellectuals of the country. To top this material success off, Bader has established his own publication house (Dar Alka) to overcome the difficulties of publishing books that we discussed in "The Production" section above and to materially benefit from his intellectual work, effectively closing the circuit of cultural production.

Conclusion

Expecting a cultural change from novel writing and reading is an overambitious and optimistic fantasy in a country subjected to more than forty years of wars and civil conflicts. It is a luxury to ask the question in a place where important rates of the population are still illiterate, or semi-literate, busy with economic troubles and daily life-threatening risks and challenges. Although there are no accurate statistics about the number of readers, or the figures of novel sales and consumption, novels keep selling out and being republished, triggering larger discussions and arguments about their themes and messages. New literary prizes and festivals are emerging, reading circles are being formed and popularized in real life and in the social media. Novelists such as Ali Bader are celebrated as intellectual avant-gardist leaders toward cultural reforms, civil and political rights and a new democratic nationalism. If the nation is an imaginary sense of communion, and if the novel has been the performance of this imaginary, the contemporary Iraqi novel is culturally forming the national identity of the country by creating and participating in the structure of feeling of an important sector of the population of the country. The political, real-world implications of this can be seen in the ongoing political protests and demonstrations that moved beyond the dividing discourses of the dominant political class into a larger democratic "nationalist" imaginary. Neither Ali Bader nor his readers expect his works to change things drastically overnight. He understands that it takes long time and efforts to reinstall a progressive, unifying national identity. However, his participation is in the cultural fight to reach that goal, the revival of the nation as a cultural sphere, a gravitational point of unity. The novel discourse, as exemplified by these two texts, does not bypass the realities of daily life. Instead, it participates in creating the possibility of imagining other ways, the possibility to re-

establish the unity of the people and the country over new understandings, a new social contract that embraces a shared national identity while honoring the diversity within it.

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