



Traditions and Religious Rituals in Resisting American Occupation: An Indigenous Ecocritical Reading of Maysalun Hadi's The Prophecy of Pharaoh

Suhad Kareem Hussien¹, Lamiaa Ahmed Rasheed²

Tikrit University/ College of Education for Humanities\ Department of English Language

***Correspondence:**

Suhad.Hussein469@st.tu.edu.iq

Lamiaa.ahmed62@tu.edu.iq

Received: 10 August 2025

Accepted: 28 August 2025

Published: 01 November 2025

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.31185/wjfh.Vol21.Iss4.1264>



This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0) <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Cite:

Hussien, S. K. . & Rasheed, L. A. . (n.d.). Traditions and Religious Rituals in Resisting American Occupation: An Indigenous Ecocritical Reading of Maysalun Hadi's The Prophecy of Pharaoh. Wasit Journal for Human Sciences, 21(4).

<https://doi.org/10.31185/wjfh.Vol21.Iss4.1264>

ABSTRACT

This study examines the traditions and rituals of indigenous Iraqi communities, as depicted in Maysaloun Hadi's *The Prophecy of Pharaoh* (2011), through the lens of Indigenous Ecocriticism, which emphasizes the importance of traditional rituals, cultural heritage, and land-based practices within Iraqi communities. The research aims to analyze how cultural traditions, spiritual practices, and the impact of American occupation are presented in the novel. Employing a qualitative approach, the study examines the effects of colonialism and its extractive industries on land, cultural heritage, and traditional knowledge of indigenous Iraqis. The analysis reveals that the novel reclaims indigenous Iraqi identities by revitalizing ancestral knowledge, sacred rituals, and spiritual ties to the land. These cultural expressions form an act of resistance against American occupation. The study concludes that rituals, traditions, and spiritual ties to the land serve as spiritual practices and tools for decolonization, preserving ancestral knowledge, identity, and resisting ecological and cultural erasure.

Keywords: indigenous ecocriticism, *The Prophecy of Pharaoh*, identity

التقاليد والطقوس الدينية في مقاومة الاحتلال الأمريكي: قراءة نقدية

بينية أصلية لرواية ميسلون هادي نبوءة فرعون

¹سهاد كريم حسين، ²د. لمياء أحمد رشيد

جامعة تكريت | كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية | قسم اللغة الإنجليزية

المستخلص

تدرس هذه الدراسة تقاليد وطقوس المجتمعات العراقية الأصلية، كما هو موضح في رواية "نبوءة فرعون" لميسلون هادي، من خلال منظور النقد البيئي الأصلي، الذي يؤكد على أهمية الطقوس التقليدية والتراث الثقافي والممارسات القائمة على الأرض داخل المجتمعات العراقية. يهدف البحث إلى تحليل كيفية عرض التقاليد الثقافية والممارسات الروحية وتأثير الاحتلال الأمريكي في الرواية. باستخدام نهج نوعي، يدرس البحث آثار الاستعمار وصناعاته الاستخراجية على الأرض والتراث الثقافي والمعرفة التقليدية للعراقيين الأصليين. يكشف التحليل أن الرواية تستعيد الهويات العراقية الأصلية من خلال إحياء المعرفة المتوارثة والطقوس المقدسة والروابط الروحية بالأرض. تشكل هذه التعبيرات الثقافية عملاً من أعمال المقاومة ضد الاحتلال الأمريكي. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن الطقوس والتقاليد والروابط الروحية بالأرض تعمل كممارسات روحية وأدوات لإنهاء الاستعمار والحفاظ على المعرفة المتوارثة والهوية ومقاومة المحو البيئي والثقافي

الكلمات المفتاحية: التقاليد، الطقوس، نبوءة الفرعون، الهوية

1.1 Introduction: Context of Indigenous Ecocritical Theory

Indigenous Eco-criticism theory focuses on the relationships of three realms: the environmental, spiritual, and human worlds of indigenous people, as well as their beliefs regarding their traditional, ritual system, and relatedness system, which includes caring for various aspects of nature, all of these making their "closeness" to nature very clear. Several indigenous societies worldwide rely heavily on the ecosystems in which they live, as evidenced by their intimate familiarity with biodiversity (Sangha et al., 2015). As a discipline, indigenous ecology centers on the study of traditional knowledge, the ecological knowledge associated with specific places, and the interactions between nature and culture in indigenous thought. Throughout the history of indigenous people worldwide, they have paid more attention to ecological issues that revolve around the importance of understanding nature, agriculture, ecological knowledge, and spiritual connection with the land (Coates, 2004).

Indigenous ecology has emerged through the intersection of eco-criticism and indigenous studies, explored by many scholars. Joni Adamson is the first one who accounts this intersection between Ecocriticism and Indigenous Studies as it has developed from discussions that started nearly fifteen years ago in Adamson's 2001 book, *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice and Eco Criticism: The Middle Place*. Joni Adamson is considered the first ecocritical scholar who discussed the significance of indigenous oral and written traditions that challenged Euro-American ideas of "nature" and "place" through her monograph. Adamson brings decolonization, environmental justice, and the rights of indigenous people to the attention of ecocriticism. The 21st century has seen the development of Ecocriticism, from its initial emphasis on Euro-American nonfiction nature writing to the inclusion of the voices and struggles of marginalized minorities, particularly the suffering of indigenous communities worldwide (Adamson & Monani, 2017).

Many eco-critics have enhanced Adamson's work through their studies, like Kyle Whyte, whose work, *Indigenous Environmental Justice Anti-Colonial Action through Kinship*, looks at how indigenous familial practices and ethical connections to nature present strategies for resolving

sustainable development, and how indigenous people have long-standing familial customs that are important in appreciating sustainable development. The fight for sustainable development among indigenous people is anti-colonial (Whyte, 2020). Another study by Fikret Berkes, *Sacred Ecology* (2018), investigates the knowledge systems of indigenous and rural people globally, exploring how we might get insights and benefit from their knowledge. Berkes emphasizes the value of indigenous and local knowledge as a supplement to ecological research, as well as the cultural and political importance of native communities in their own right (Berkes, 2018).

These studies highlight the significance of the trend utilized by ecocriticism and environmental humanities in the fields of indigenous studies, postcolonial ecology, and environmental justice during the 21st century (Adamson & Monani, 2017). Moreover, indigenous knowledge, traditional practices, rituals, cultures, and spiritual connections with the land are the primary focus of indigenous ecocriticism. Additionally, indigenous ecocriticism emphasizes decolonization, the rights of indigenous people, and the use and inclusion of traditional knowledge, cultures, and customs in the works of literature by indigenous authors (Heit, 2022). Therefore, traditional knowledge is considered a central point of indigenous ecocriticism and a component of the humanities, as well as the heritage of indigenous people. The content and system of knowledge that emerges from the collective acts of indigenous people are regarded as part of traditional knowledge (Popova-Gosart, 2009). Traditional knowledge is derived from accumulated experiences and events recounted in stories that emphasize memories with accurate details, which were passed down through oral tradition (Steeves, 2020). Indigenous knowledge is experiential, taking its social views, meanings, and explanations from personal observations and the inner working of the individual (Dei, 2002).

Traditional ecological knowledge, also known as indigenous ecological knowledge, is encompassed within the broader definition of indigenous knowledge when the knowledge pertains to ecology (Berkes, 2018). Traditional ecological knowledge refers to the knowledge, information, and understanding that indigenous people have about their ecosystems, which have been passed down through the centuries. As one member of the Mohawk, Jameson Brant has defined indigenous knowledge as “a body of information about the interconnected elements of the natural environment which traditional indigenous people have been taught, from generation to generation, to respect and give thanks for” (Menzies, 2006, p.6). The term “traditional ecological knowledge” refers to the way local indigenous and tribal people utilize the structure and function of the natural ecosystems in their area to understand the world surrounding them and utilize it for their well-being (Debbarma, 2022).

Similarly, in the Iraqi context, the Marsh Arabs, the indigenous people of the Marshes, kept a close connection within the marshlands. They have been involved in sustainable traditional resource management for millennia, establishing a distinctive lifestyle that closely connects them to their wetland environment. Traditional resource management techniques have protected biodiversity in multiple cultural landscapes, which evolved from the close connection between environmental changes and stewardship methods rooted in traditional ecological knowledge (Fawzi et al., 2016).

Across the world, traditional ecological knowledge plays a role in preserving cultural heritage by intertwining deep connections between culture and the environment. It is a way of life that blends ecological wisdom with spiritual beliefs and cultural principles (McGregor, 2004). Culture heritage “preserves people's history, including their migrations, origins, and the important events they face. helps people remember their past, and how this history contributes to the formation of their cultural identity” (Hussein et al., 2025, p. 1150). Also, Whyte (2020) states in his work, *Indigenous Environmental Justice: Anti-Colonial Action through Kinship*, that indigenous people possess distinct cultures. Their culture includes linguistic, artistic, ceremonial, religious, and philosophical traditions. It is a culture that is distinct from other civilizations.

Cultural heritage is closely related to land, as indigenous customs, practices, and identity are shaped by the physical environment. Indigenous scholars such as M. Battiste and J. Henderson (2000) emphasize that cultural heritage involves the customs, values, and knowledge passed down through the generations and has a profound connection to the environments in which these people live (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). The Spiritual connection of land can be defined as a close relationship between people and the natural environment without any separation. The concept of spiritual connection with land refers to all elements of the natural world, including plants, animals, ancestors, spirits, and natural features, as well as the environment, such as air, water, and minerals. Additionally, this concept can refer to regional notions and genuine places, which are considered the central term stemming from indigenous knowledge and teachings (McDonald, 2023).

But the displacement of indigenous people from both their lands and cultures weakened and damaged their means of understanding and responding to the environment, which led to the negative health results we experience today (McDonald, 2023). Indigenous peoples' spirituality and cultural heritage have been significantly impacted by the colonization of their homeland. Using frequently abusive methods, for example, European colonists tried to force their own religious practices and beliefs on indigenous people for centuries. Because of the oppression of indigenous spiritual practices brought about by this forced integration, people lost their sense of cultural identity and their connection to nature (Biggle, 2024).

Protecting the lands from exploitation and misuse by external forces is one of the top interests and issues for indigenous cultures and communities, which rely heavily on their land for survival (African Commission on Human and People's Rights & International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2017). States, entrepreneurs, and others' economic operations on lands where indigenous people originated have an impact on them all over the world. Because the lands of indigenous people contain substantial mineral, oil, and gas deposits, they have attracted governments, colonialism, and the extractive industries, which view them as attractive places for foreign investment and revenue-generating products (European Parliament, 2014).

Within this context, the United States' invasion of Iraq was motivated by a quest for dominance over the country's oil reserves. Oil is an essential commodity that propels worldwide economic expansion, and the United States is among the world's major oil users. The US-led coalition established a new administration that began the privatization of Iraq's oil sector, allowing international companies to participate. This action has profoundly affected Iraq's economy since a significant portion of the country's oil revenue is now allocated to international companies instead of the Iraqi populace (Abdelmoumene, 2023). The 2003 invasion of Iraq by the United States can be interpreted as a version of an ancient colonial theme, but with considerable new repercussions for the American public and the entire world. The historical significance of the Middle East to the West is rooted in geopolitics. The region serves as a strategic land bridge, linking commerce between the continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe. The region's direct economic significance increased as oil was used to power an industrialized global economy. Especially Iraq, which has been a significant member of the Middle East since the early 20th century, due to its strategic location and large oil resources (Evans, 2003).

Mining operations on native ecologies and civilizations are unavoidable. Indigenous people who live in present or former settler colonies are particularly exposed to the negative effects of mining because of their intimate ties to the land, water, and resources therein, as well as their marginalized social and economic status. These prospects and impacts are influenced by various elements, including the minerals' and the environment's characteristics, the extractive company's strategy, suitable legal frameworks, socioeconomic circumstances, and the reactions of Indigenous groups (Horowitz et al., 2018). This is what happened with Iraq, when US companies profited from the post-war rebuilding

initiatives in Iraq, while the effects on the Iraqi economy were negative. The restoration initiatives provided employment and restored infrastructure; nevertheless, they also had negative effects. The arrival of US companies and their staff member resulted in increased pricing for products and services, affecting the ability of ordinary Iraqis to buy things they need. Furthermore, some Iraqis saw the contracts awarded to US firms as unfair, believing that indigenous businesses were being neglected (Abdelmoumene, 2023).

Indigenous people worldwide have historically suffered the worst consequences of extractive industries and imperial expansion. This study examines how Iraqi indigenous communities maintain their ties to tradition, heritage, and land despite the upheavals of war and their efforts to reclaim their homeland. Centring on Maysalun Hadi's *The Prophecy of Pharaoh*, to fill a gap in academic research by providing a new critical analysis of contemporary Iraqi novels from an environmental and cultural perspective that addresses issues of colonization and ecological concerns.

The value of this study includes in its application of Indigenous Ecocriticism to the Arabic literary context, thereby connecting the fields of Middle Eastern literature, decolonial theory, and ecological thought. This novel was originally written in Arabic and later translated into English. No study is available in English, but there are many studies in Arabic. Hadi's *The Prophecy of Pharaoh* has received widespread attention from Arabic readers and critics. As the author is an indigenous Iraqi, her exploration of ritual, tradition, and folklore from an ancient historical era, which many novelists in Arabic literature have not addressed, makes it a matter of interest to students and researchers in literature. Among these issues is a scholarly response by Shameem Radi Abd (2023), titled *The convergence of character in the novel 'Prophecy of Pharaoh' between the crisis of self and reality*. It is a critical literary study that focuses on analyzing fictional characters as reflections of the individual's struggle with social and political realities in post-American occupation Iraq. The study emphasizes understanding how fictional characters are shaped within the context of identity crises and the pressures of Iraqi reality, particularly in light of war, occupation, sectarianism, and social destruction. It highlights the narrator as a writer who controls events, observes reality, and reproduces it in literature. Furthermore, it addresses the identity crisis, psychological fragmentation, and frustration among women, particularly through the character of "Bilqis." How do the characters identify with popular heritage, myth, and folklore as means of expressing pain and survival? Additionally, it explores the ideological influences shaping the novel's discourse (Abd, 2023).

Based on available previous literary review, this study is one of the first—and perhaps the very first—to explore this particular literary work, giving it a sense of originality and novelty. The study hopes to shed light on this important novel, which has not yet received the critical and academic attention it deserves. It also seeks to enhance their broader recognition and global marketing as a literary work worthy of study and appreciation. Additionally, it hopes to pave the way for future research examining this text from various critical perspectives.

1.2 Statement of Problem

The impact of colonialism on Iraq has left lasting damage to its cultural, social, and environmental landscapes. Colonial systems have disrupted indigenous Iraqis' relationships with their land, language, and cultural heritage, marginalizing local identities and knowledge systems. This study aims to examine how contemporary Iraqi authors use indigenous eco-critical perspectives to restore environmental and cultural heritage in colonized lands and raise awareness about adhering to ecological and cultural values. It will provide insights into the intersection of literature, ecology, and indigenous identity in the contemporary Iraqi landscape, illustrating how authors reframe colonial history, recover silenced voices, and advocate for cultural and ecological sovereignty through their

narratives. The study aims to fill a gap in academic research by critically analyzing contemporary Iraqi novels from an environmental and cultural perspective.

1.3 The Aim of the Study

By examining representations of traditional ecological knowledge, rituals, folklore, sacred spaces, and daily practices, the study aims to reveal how the novel expresses resistance to colonial disruption and environmental damage. It also seeks to demonstrate how Hadi's narrative highlights the connection between cultural heritage, land, and spiritual continuity as essential for the survival and revitalization of indigenous Iraqi perspectives.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How do modern Iraqi novels depict the environment, customs, traditional knowledge, and cultural legacy through the framework of Indigenous Ecocriticism Theory?
2. How does selected literary text serve in decolonization, redefining and reclaiming indigenous identity and homeland?
3. What decolonization and reclaiming the homeland practices are portrayed in modern Iraqi novels, and how do these work to deal with the problems of indigenous lifeways being disrupted, cultural removal, and taken advantage of by colonial and postcolonial forces?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study highlights the importance of traditional knowledge, heritage, and spiritual connections to land, as explored through Indigenous theoretical frameworks. By examining *The Prophecy of Pharaoh*, which centers on indigenous and colonized voices, the study reveals how literature serves as a powerful means of resisting colonial policies and asserting cultural identity. This novel provides narratives that reject dominant colonial ideologies and celebrate indigenous resilience and continuity. Through this analysis, the study emphasizes the role of literature in reclaiming silenced histories, resisting epistemic violence, and advocating for sovereignty, land rights, and cultural reclamation.

1.6 Iraqis Maintain their Practice of their Cultural, Historical, and Religious Traditions under the American War

Maysalun Hadi is a novelist, short story writer, and journalist born in Al-A'dhamiyah, Baghdad, in 1954. She graduated from the Department of Statistics at the College of Administration and Economics at the University of Baghdad in 1976. She worked in cultural journalism for several periodicals, such as *Al-Mawsu'ah Al-Saghira*, *Al-Tali'ah Literary Magazine*, and the cultural section of *Alif Baa Magazine*. Her works have garnered significant attention from Iraqi and Arab critics, leading to the publication of master's theses and doctoral dissertations. Hadi's works have also reached an international audience, with her English translation of *The Prophecy of Pharaoh* published in 2011 and a Persian translation in 2022 (Hadi, personal interview, February 6, 2025).

The novel Hadi tells the story of an Iraqi family living under US occupation in 2003. The story

begins with the birth of Yahya, a beautiful and intelligent child. The family, supported by their mother and father's wife, Haniya, struggled to survive with only necessities. One day, Yahya went missing during the conflict. His mother searched tirelessly, but he was nowhere to be found. Holding onto hope, she turned to the Quran for comfort, believing that he might still be alive because he had not been declared dead.

The Prophecy of Pharaoh is a novel set in Baghdad, a city known for its historical and cultural significance. It portrays the daily lives of Iraqi families during the American occupation, focusing on the city's daily turmoil. The novel spans a decade of modern Iraqi history, beginning with the 2003 US invasion, resulting in destruction, displacement, and radical social change. The novel's vivid depiction of Baghdad's bleak landscape is a testament to its historical significance. (Hadi, personal interview, February 6, 2025).

Hadi's novel is a realistic account of an Iraqi family's life during wartime, highlighting the issues of war, characters' thoughts, beliefs, and emotions. She uses symbols, images, simple language, and metaphors to depict the pain and struggles of oppressed communities. Hadi uses a third-person narrative to comment on the war's details, revive traditions, and criticize the war. She aims to illustrate the negative impact of war on the material and spiritual lives of the indigenous people in Iraq.

The Prophecy of Pharaoh begins with a third-person narrator "At the end of the twentieth century and the later years of the "Middle Television Era," which fell between the days of the Moskovitch' and the satellite nights" (Hadi, 2011, p. 1). This quote establishes a powerful setting, as the novel was written during the era of satellite technology, which impacted the identities of indigenous people and their relationship with their land by weakening traditions, ecological knowledge, and local environmental awareness. The arrival of satellite marks a new era in modern Iraqi history, representing the beginning of a break in cultural continuity and ecological knowledge systems, as colonial systems attempt to impose new rhythms on indigenous people. Many academics emphasize that the most negative effect of occupation is the attempt to substitute the values, beliefs, and norms of one culture with those of another. The colonial approach seeks to remove the cultural, religious, civic, and national uniqueness of states and people (Salman & Alkhazalleh, 2016).

After seven days, Haniya gives birth to twins, one named Sabreen, who dies, and the other named Shakreen, and "Mansur Mashi Al-Salemdar never returned home..., and now his funeral was over" (Hadi, 2011, p. 2). Despite Bilqis's grief, she continues to care for Yahya. He is circumcised and becomes restless and cries constantly. Then, "Haniya, the other wife, told her that it was because of the bitter breast milk and suggested sugar water, along with "seven waters," to help soothe him and cure his pains (Hadi, 2011, pp. 2-3)." This quote is closely linked to the traditional ecological knowledge and practices of indigenous Iraqi people. In Iraqi tradition, when a mother is deeply sad while feeding her child, it affects the child and causes them to cry excessively. Hadi highlights traditional medicine through Haniya's advice and Bilqis' actions, which are based on the inherited indigenous knowledge of the medicinal properties of plants that the Iraqi people have passed down from their ancestors. Furthermore, the practice of giving "sugar water" constituted a form of resistance to the removal of indigenous knowledge in the modern colonial era.

Then "Balgis bought some aniseeds, chamomile, cardamom, cumin, hibiscus flower, wild chicory, mastic in addition to date palm pollen, and spearmint (Hadi, 2011, pp. 2-3)", each plant species represents a long-standing use in traditional medicine, passed down through generations in which these plants are not pharmaceuticals, but rather plants with special cultural and ecological significance. Berkes highlights the use of traditional knowledge in his book Sacred Ecology (2018). He says:

The knowledge and practices of some rural and indigenous societies are of significance in this context. Even though indigenous knowledge does not have the quantitative tools and approaches at the disposal of Western science and technology, some local and indigenous systems have developed ways to deal with complexity (Berkes, 2018, p. 182).

Berkes highlights the crucial role of indigenous and rural knowledge systems in understanding and responding to complex issues. Although indigenous ecological knowledge lacks the quantitative methodologies and technological tools that characterize Western science, it represents a sophisticated and context-specific way of interacting with ecosystems.

In the meantime, Balqis rocks him and taps his shoulder to help him fall asleep while singing a traditional lullaby. Yahya listens to her song and finds peace in her arms. "Dillilol, my boy . . . my son, dillilol. Your enemy is ill . . . Your enemy in the wilderness dwells. Yahya used to hear it and smile and then close his eyes calmly and peacefully" (Hadi, 2011, p. 3). This song is deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of indigenous Iraqi mothers, who use it to soothe their children and lull them to sleep. Beyond its calming effect, it serves as a means of transmitting cultural knowledge and imparting spiritual and moral lessons. Lullabies like this are an integral part of Iraqi heritage, passed down through generations, carrying with them stories, values, and ancestral wisdom. The main purpose of these lullabies is to calm the child to sleep, when the mother is likely alone with the child, giving her a chance to express her internal emotions—her worries, concerns, and emotional distress—to appear. Therefore, through the means of the lullaby, the mother can express her ordinary, unexpressed inner feelings (Manasseh, 1991).

“Your enemy in the wilderness dwells” is a reference to foreign forces occupying their homeland. Here, ‘your enemy’ symbolizes the United States. The homeland has spiritual and mythological significance for indigenous Iraqis. The mention of the enemy in the wilderness suggests that colonial forces threaten the lives of the child and the lives of indigenous Iraqis. Therefore, this scene silently resists colonial systems that devalue indigenous traditions and knowledge. Indigenous ecocriticism values these acts as subtle forms of cultural survival and resistance, preserving language and the environment within the home.

Throughout the novel, Tawfiq, Haniya's son, appears singing love songs and looking at Yahya as Haniya feeds their chickens. In response to the significant rise in egg prices, Haniya brings a rooster to promote better egg production. Her garden, once full of flowers, but “Haniya uprooted the flowers in her garden and sprinkled instead tomato and green pepper seeds” (Hadi, 2011, p. 8). Haniya’s uprooting of flowers and planting of food crops, such as tomatoes and green peppers, demonstrates a conscious shift from an aesthetic and decorative relationship with the land to a functional one rooted in cultural heritage. Haniya is reclaiming her traditional ecological knowledge and ability to cultivate, as these two crops are essential and useful in the struggle and survival during crises and wars. Her choice to cultivate edible plants reflects a return to sustainable practices that are at the core of indigenous communities, especially in times of war. This is embodied by Berkes (2018) that “some indigenous groups have resource-use practices that suggest a sophisticated understanding of ecological relationships and dynamics” (p. 182). Berkes highlights how many indigenous groups deal with resource use, rather than treating each environmental component in isolation, indigenous practices are based on a complete understanding of the relationships between land, water, plants, animals, and human communities. This shows that indigenous ecological knowledge systems are culturally significant and offer important models for sustainable living and ecological resilience in the face of crisis and war.

“Though the seeds never grow. She placed a scarecrow in the middle of the garden to help scare the

birds away and to protect the seeds that never sprouted” (Hadi, 2011, p. 8). The garden forms a significant setting in which it provides the family with food in difficult times, especially war. Furthermore, putting of the scarecrow in the garden represents of ritualistic form of protection, functioning as a symbolic protector of the land, cultural heritage, and indigenous identity. As Adamson (2001) stated, “indigenous people have been represented as people with an ancient wisdom that alone can save the planet” (p. 132). Adamson means that indigenous people have full knowledge and information about the universe, they are able to protect their lives, traditions, knowledge, as well as their land.

Shortly after, Nay, the sister of Malaka, their neighbor's daughter, comes to the house asking for bread. “She entered and walked under the grape vines. She kept walking, walking, walking, and walking until Yahya turned five years old, Balqis turned thirty-five, and Haniya turned fifty-six” (Hadi, 2011, p. 9). Nay asks if Haniya still bakes bread. Nay comments that Yahya is still mute, and Balqis recounts:

I give him rice water to drink, and I take him around to sheiks and virtuous holy men. Only yesterday, I took him to the deck on the bluff along the river in Khidr Al-Yas. Thereafter, I took him to Ali's water spring in Buratha Mosque. They say it cures kids from muteness. Balqis continued, "I wonder why he is late in his speech. I breastfed him while I was distressed. They say this is the reason (Hadi, 2011, pp. 9-10).

In ancient Iraqi cultures and traditions, if a child reaches the age of five and has not spoken, their family takes them to sacred places and practices traditional medicine. Bilqis’ actions—giving her son ‘rice water,’ taking him to spiritual figures, and visiting natural and sacred water sources—reflect her reliance on traditional, non-Western medicinal and healing practices. These practices are rooted in knowledge passed down through generations, often transmitted orally throughout the community. “Rice water” is a traditional remedy used in diverse cultures for its medicinal properties, reflecting indigenous ecological knowledge. Visits to sacred sites show a belief in the healing power of sacred sites imbued with spiritual significance. For indigenous ecocriticism, water symbolizes a healing power linked to landscape and faith, as well as the profound interconnectedness between spiritual and ecological systems.

Obviously, Hadi does not place healing in sterile hospitals, but rather in sacred rivers, mosques, and traditional wisdom. She emphasizes a global vision focused on environmental sanctity, spiritual healing, and inherited knowledge systems, rejecting Western systems. This is embodied in the action of Bilqis, who chose to follow local, indigenous knowledge systems in healing her son and not rely on modern medicine or institutional science. Berkes emphasizes that the functional and adaptive nature of folk knowledge, which are traditional, communal knowledge systems passed down through interaction with local environments, resulting in rules, customs, and practical practices that address specific challenges. By reducing complexity, this refers to how these systems break down complex natural and social phenomena or the environment into accessible and actionable forms.

One day, Balqis chooses to walk home instead of taking public transportation. She does this whenever she feels a need for closeness with the universe, as if nature might listen to her more attentively. “Minutes later she found herself walking through the nurseries and gardens that stretched along Al-Risafa, the east bank of the Tigris River (Hadi, 2011, p. 20).” This quote represents the most powerful setting in the novel, embodying the cultural and natural diversity of Baghdad. Balqis's decision to walk home from work, passing through the nurseries, confirms the heroine's engagement with the captivating nature of Baghdad. Smelling the jasmine, feeling the warm breath of the plants, and inhaling the musty odor reveal an intimate, deep, and embodied connection to the place. Her

enjoyment of the steamy, sweaty leaves and mud-drenched roots underscores a worldview in which nature is alive, expressive, and communicative, challenging extractive and colonial views of the environment. Guo (2024) explores how landscapes, including parks, woods, and outdoor playgrounds, offer unique opportunities for sensory involvement, physical exercise, and new experiences. Exposure to nature has been linked to stress reduction, enhanced life satisfaction and pleasure, and psychological recovery. The landscapes indirectly influence the development of personality traits and are strongly associated with environmental identity and the cultivation of pro-environmental behaviors.

Haniya, as indigenous Iraqi mother deeply connected to her home, “Haniya announced to her children more than once that this house was like the umbilical cord that connects her to life, and that if she abandoned because their wretched lives were the barrier to believing her” (Hadi, 2011, p. 36). Hadi metaphorically describes the home as an umbilical cord that directly connects the home to life itself. In indigenous ecocritical theory, this metaphor carries a profound connotation that expresses a spiritual and physical connection to place. The home is an artery of life. The umbilical cord, a symbol of birth, nourishment, and origin, makes the home a living extension of the self. This aligns with indigenous worldviews that view the land or home as living, sacred, and an integral part of one's identity. This means loving the country is loving the tangible elements of the present homeland that still possess an affective value, regardless of being distorted, as well as the elements of the past that once defined the homeland as a home, such as security, family, community, and location. It is a temporal and spatial/physical loving. Ultimately, this affective value is socially assigned through both the past and the present, and it is associated with the life histories of these elements (Majeed, 2018).

That same night, a missile strikes near their house.

The house windows shattered... the curtains were ripped, the porthos pot broke, and from around the neighbourhood rose a giant cloud of dust that buried the entire garden with piles of dust. It suffocated all of Haniya's hens except for the rooster that escaped a guaranteed death (Hadi, 2011, p.46).

Hadi gives a full image of the brutality and destruction of the American occupation in Iraq through this quote. The United States and the United Kingdom killed a lot of innocent people in Iraq; they were killing and destroying people without any emotion or pity because they had the latest and greatest equipment, technology, and the power to do so. There had been plenty of bombs and weapons to destroy Iraq. The US intentionally bombed and wrecked a significant cultural site in Iraq (Faruk, 2024). Through the lens of indigenous ecocriticism, colonialism and military occupation are regarded as a form of environmental and cultural domination aimed at severing the connection between people and the land. The mention of broken windows, torn curtains, smashed plant pots, and buried gardens evokes images of a sacred domestic environment, a living space deeply linked to the land and its care. The destruction of this space is damage to the colonial invasion of the indigenous Iraqi way of life. The home and garden represent an extension of the land and an expression of spiritual identity. The dust cloud that buries the entire garden symbolizes the removal of life, heritage, and identity.

The next morning, Yahya wakes and sees soft sunlight and the scent of blossoms drifting in from the garden. He hears Shakreen singing a playful children's rhyme. But, despite the serene morning, the outside world is shrouded in black smog. Schools have closed and cancelled spring field trips to natural landmarks around Baghdad.

while outside the room, in a cloud of black smog that blocked the sky's light from hitting the ground. The schools closed their doors and cancelled some of the last spring field trips, which were scheduled to attractions surrounding the City of Baghdad like Habaniya Lake, Al-Tharthar, Al-Aras Island, Al-Madain, and Al- Qadisiya Panorama (Hadi, 2011, p. 70).

In this passage, Hadi captures how the beginning of the US occupation of Iraq led to environmental and cultural degradation, and the disruption of education, cultural continuity, and spatial knowledge. The black smog that blocks out sunlight symbolizes the destructive consequences of the US occupation, war, and extractive militarism, where the land is violently destroyed and reshaped. The loss of sunlight, the source of life and cyclical time, symbolizes a disruption to the routine of indigenous Iraqi people, the beautiful nature of the country, and historical cities, replaced by a war area, devastation, destruction, and disruption of the lives of the indigenous Iraqi population. The cancellation of school trips to prominent natural and cultural sites symbolizes a profound disruption in the life of indigenous Iraqi people because of war. These sites are of cultural, civilizational, and historical significance to Iraq and have ecological value within its heritage. School trips, often associated with the spring, provide opportunities for young people to interact with and learn about the land physically, historically, and spiritually. Their cancellation due to war highlights the colonial disruption of environmental education and notions of belonging. This is what Whyte (2020) confirmed when he said that “for hundreds of years, invasion, exploitation, and colonization have greatly harmed Indigenous people. These acts of violence and oppression are sponsored by nation-states, corporations, non-profit entities, and discriminatory persons in their daily behavior” (Whyte, 2020, p.270).

Balqis explains that the black smoke is from people burning rubber tires, and Tawfiq sarcastically wonders “Are we going to fight their satellites with a cloud of black smog?” Tawfiq said” (Hadi, 2011, p. 70). Hadi embodies popular resistance in the face of the technologically advanced US military occupation. Burning tires reflects a symbolic and physical act of protest often seen during wars and occupations, as well as a form of resistance rooted in their culture. Tawfiq’s rhetorical question reveals an imbalance between local forms of resistance and US technological imperialism. Their satellites symbolize the modern equipment and technology used by US forces in their occupation of Iraq. During the 19th and 20th centuries, the United States emerged as one of the most technologically sophisticated nations in the world, as evidenced by its technological and industrial history (Bowman, 2003).

At the same time, Haniya says people are stockpiling food and drilling wells, fearing water cutoffs “People are stacking up food and drilling wells in their home gardens fearing water shutdown,” Haniya said” (Hadi, 2011, p. 70). This quote illustrates the beginning of the period during the US occupation of Iraq. It was characterized by insecurity, scarcity of resources, and the removal of traditional practices based on the land. We see how gardens and homes were transformed from cultural and environmental spaces into sites of survival and emergency response due to the policies of the occupation. It indicates a form of resistance to the US occupation policy.

Before leaving, Tawfiq notes the beauty of the garden “The fog will burn away,” said Haniya. “May Allah protect us all.” Before he left, he looked carefully at the garden and said, “What beautiful flowers!”” (Hadi, 2011, p. 80). The fog symbolizes the American occupation. She believes that this occupation will soon disappear. Flowers symbolize hope and the beauty of indigenous Iraqis. Then, Haniya talks about what she is doing in her garden “We planted cucumbers in the garden,” his mother said, “but it did not bear any fruit. Then we planted flowers seeds, and they bore a lot of flowers” (Hadi, 2011, p. 80). This quote reflects the real damage that befell Iraq during the American occupation period, such as soil degradation, water scarcity, and air pollution, as a result of conflicts and foreign interventions in Iraq. The lack of fruitful cucumbers indicates a defect in the relationship between people and the land, not because of a lack of care, but because of the damage to the land due to the use of weapons and modern technologies that affect the fertility of the land. On the other hand, the flowering of flower seeds can be studied as a form of symbolic renewal in which flowers are always planted for aesthetic, spiritual, and ritual purposes in Iraqi gardens. The blooming flowers herald hope, indicating that all is not yet lost. Even with the threat of the American occupation of Iraq, the spirit and

people remain.

As the war begins, Baghdad is metaphorically described as being vulnerable—its "shirt unbuttoned." Explosions and black smoke affect everything, from rooftops to windows. "Baghdad's shirt was unbuttoned, and everyone was breastfed bitter milk. They were surrounded from all directions by black wind.... black soot blew on the air and then scattered in all directions, landing on the windows and roofs" (Hadi, 2011, p. 83).

The image of Baghdad's unbuttoned shirt symbolizes the loss of protection and sovereignty, as well as the colonial and military invasion that destroyed everything. This metaphor illustrates how the city, once cloaked in its culture, history, heritage, and environmental rhythms, is now being destroyed, violated, and exposed under the weight of American occupation. Black winds and black soot symbolize war, militarism, war industry, and pollution, these elements affect the environment, heritage, and historical monuments of Iraqi civilization. The phrase "Surrounded on Every Side" emphasizes the inevitable destruction and omnipresent nature of war and military damage, trapping the people of Baghdad in a destruction environment that leaves no space, physical or spiritual, uncontaminated. This demonstrates that colonialism is a comprehensive force that displaces people from their land. As Faruk (2024) reported that the country's buildings and roads have been ruined. Attacks and bombs from the air by U.S. and British troops have wrecked infrastructure and people's property in Iraq. There has been a lot of damage to historical and religious places, as well as to water, power, and sewage systems in the towns that are being attacked (Faruk, 2024).

On April 4, a bombing shakes the house, "Outside the house the wind intensified, shook the window frames, and filled the house with dust and tree leaves. Followed by Haniya, Balqis rushed to Yahya's room but did not find him in his bed" (Hadi, 2011, p. 85). In this passage, Hadi depicts how American colonial military raids tore apart indigenous people's homes and their relationship with their homes, land, and kin, transforming their archaeological and cultural sites into fragmented and volatile areas. The bombing carried out by the US military occupation represents an assault on the infrastructure and a desecration of the symbols of the ancestral lands and sacred lifestyles of the indigenous Iraqi population. This is what Fanon (1963) said:

Colonial domination manages to disrupt in spectacular fashion the cultural life of a conquered people. This cultural obliteration is made possible by the negation of national reality, by the banishment of the natives and their customs to outlying districts by colonial society, by expropriation, and by the systematic enslaving of men and women (p. 236).

Which means that colonial power disrupts all aspects of life for indigenous people, ranging from the negation of national reality, forced migration, abuse of the cultural heritage, taking their beneficial resources, to the systematic enslaving of indigenous people, which can be regarded as one of the main goals of colonialism.

In the meantime, the radio plays a broadcast from a female anchor reporting from a tent in Al-Umma Square, urging patriotism, cleanliness, and disarmament. Turning to her faith:

She picked up the Quran, the book of God, near her head and opened it randomly while uttering the invocation. The book opened to Surat Al-Ala. With the dim light available, she started reading, "In the name of Allah.....She went to her praying rug and lay down on it and was finally able to find some rest and sleep through the rest of the night (Hadi, 2011, p. 99).

In the context of the US occupation of Iraq, where the landscape is being militarized, homes are

being destabilized, and cultural continuity is being threatened. Balqis turns to the Holy Quran as a religious text and a sacred cosmic force that provides peace and security amid difficult colonial conditions and chaos. According to their perceptions and convictions, the purpose of resorting to Allah is to use cognitive methods to enhance and deepen hope in individuals. Faith in the unity of Allah leads individuals to seek a singular source of comfort rather than contemplating several influences on their existence and either fearing or aspiring to them. It facilitates the understanding that the knowing of God minimizes one's fear and calms the heart (Foroozanfar, 2020). This action is a part of or a form of cultural resistance and revival of the Iraqi cultural heritage and Islamic identity, which American colonialism is trying to eliminate or weaken.

Conclusion

Maysalun Hadi is one of the most notable indigenous Iraqi authors who is reclaiming and reviving her cultural heritage, traditions, folk knowledge, and identity. Her characters come from ordinary backgrounds, neither ministers, businessmen, nor members of a privileged society. Instead, she opts for simple characters—pessimists who accept their hardships and dream modestly of a quiet life free from pain or frustration. Nevertheless, they remain at the forefront of misery and suffering. Through the perspective of indigenous ecocriticism, which emphasizes the importance of indigenous knowledge, heritage, rituals, and spiritual ties to land, Hadi excels at depicting the recent events during the American war in Iraq as well as illustrating the devastating effects of war on both the material and spiritual lives of the suffering people in Iraq, employing a style that blends realism with tales of Iraqi folklore, heritage, and tradition. Ultimately, Hadi's novel documents the destructive legacy of the American war, serving as both cultural and environmental evidence. The Prophecy of Pharaoh demonstrates the power of literature to serve as a witness to the brutality of the American war on Iraq, from the perspective of an indigenous Iraqi writer. Simultaneously, it advocates for the preservation of heritage, religious, and environmental practices, as well as the preservation of knowledge and traditions rooted in ancestral wisdom and environmental stewardship.

References

- Abdelmoumene, CH. (2023). U.S. foreign policy and imperialism: Case study – The Iraqi War (2003) (Master's thesis). Mohamed Khider University of Biskra.
- Abdul, S. R. (2023). The character convergence in the novel “Prophecy of Pharaoh” between the crisis of self and reality. Proceedings of the Fifth Annual International Scientific Conference of the College of Arts, University of Misan, (1), 363–366.
- Adamson, J., & Monani, S. (Eds.). (2017). *Ecocriticism and Indigenous studies: Conversations from Earth to cosmos*. Taylor & Francis. Routledge
- Adamson, J. (2001). *American Indian literature, environmental justice, and ecocriticism: The middle place*. University of Arizona Press.
- African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), & International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA). (2017). *Extractive industries, land rights and indigenous populations'/communities' rights: East, Central and Southern Africa*. African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.
- Battiste, M., & Henderson, J. (2000). *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: A Global Challenge*. Purich Publishing

Berkes, F. (2018). *Sacred Ecology*. Taylor & Francis

Biggle. (2024). Exploring the spiritual significance of Indigenous heritage. https://biggle.ca/blogs/news/exploring-the-spiritual-significance-of-indigenous-heritage?srsltid=AfmBOoreseAwwh_0vg6idpacz4zOT5uilSKeTLDoWEuNUt16q0rmuA8M

Bowman, S. (2003, May 14). Iraq: U.S. military operations (CRS Report for Congress, Order Code RL31701). Congressional Research Service, The Library of Congress. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL31701>

Coates, Kenneth. (2004). *A global history of indigenous peoples*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: 10.1057/9780230509078

Debbarma, B. (2022). Traditional ecological knowledge: Convergence culture and environment. *Paripex-Indian Journal of Research*, 11(3), Article 362324808.

Dei, G. J. S. (2002). Rethinking the role of Indigenous knowledges in the academy (NALL Working Paper No. 58). Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

European Parliament. Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union. (2014). *Indigenous peoples, extractive industries and human rights (EXPO/B/DROI/2013/23)*. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2014/534980/EXPO_STU\(2014\)534980_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2014/534980/EXPO_STU(2014)534980_EN.pdf)

Evans, E. B. (2003). Iraq and the new American colonialism. *Moebius*, 1(2), Article 10. <http://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/moebius/vol1/iss2/10>

Fanon, F. (1963). *The wretched of the earth* (C. Farrington, Trans.). Grove Press.

Faruk, M. O. (2024). US military occupation of Iraq and its global impact. Dhaka University Institutional Repository.

Fawzi, N. A.-M., Goodwin, K. P., Mahdi, B. A., & Stevens, M. L. (2016). Effects of Mesopotamian Marsh (Iraq) desiccation on the cultural knowledge and livelihood of Marsh Arab women. *Ecosystem Health and Sustainability*, 2(7), e01207. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ehs2.1207w>

Foroozafar, A. (2020). Positive psychology and the Qur'an: A comparative study of the constructs of hope, resilience, and forgiveness. *Iranian Evolutionary and Educational Psychology Journal*, 2(3), 208–224.

Guo, Q. (2024). Impact of the natural environment on individuals' psychological well-being. *Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences IMPES*, 26, 747–754.

Hadi, M. (2011). *The Prophecy of Pharaoh*. Author House UK Ltd.

Heith, A. (2022). *Indigeneity, ecocriticism, and critical literacy (Northern Studies Monographs 7)*. Umeå University & The Royal Skytteean Society.

Horowitz, L. S., Keeling, A., Lévesque, F., Rodon, T., Schott, S., & Thériault, S. (2023). Indigenous Peoples' relationships to large-scale mining in post/colonial contexts: Toward multidisciplinary comparative perspectives. In K. B. J. Givoni, A. Gear, & S. K. Ahmed (Eds.), *Mining and Indigenous livelihoods: Rights, revenues, and resistance* (pp. 109–126). Routledge.

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003406433-8>

Hussein, A. K., Ali, T. S., & Thabet, D. H. (2025). Folklore and cultural identity in Saud Al-Sanousi's *The Bamboo Stalk*. *Wasit Journal for Human Sciences*, 21(3), 1148–1160. <https://doi.org/10.31185/wjfh.Vol21.Iss3.1018>

Majeed, A. (2018). *Unsettling the homeland: Fragments of home and homeland among Iraqi exiles in Amman, Jordan*. Master's thesis, The University of Western Ontario. [Scholarship@Western. https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/5349](https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/5349)

Manasseh, S. (1991). A SONG TO HEAL YOUR WOUNDS: TRADITIONAL LULLABIES OF THE JEWS OF IRAQ. *Musica Judaica*, 12, 1–29. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23687683>

McDonald, M. (2023). *Indigenous land-based education in theory and practice*. Yellowhead Institute.

McGregor, D. (2004). Coming Full Circle: Indigenous Knowledge, Environment, and Our Future. *American Indian Quarterly*, 28(3), 385–410.

Menzies, C. R. (Ed.). (2006). *Traditional ecological knowledge and natural resource management*. University of Nebraska Press.

Popova-Gosart, U. (Ed.). (2009). *Traditional Knowledge & Indigenous Peoples*. L'auravetl'an Information & Education Network of Indigenous Peoples (LIENIP) and World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).

Sangha, K. K., Le Brocque, A., Costanza, R., & Cadet-James, Y. (2015). Ecosystems and indigenous well-being: An integrated framework. *Global Ecology and Conservation*, 4, 197–206.

Salman, F., & Alkhazalleh, M (2016). Negative Impacts of Cultural Globalization on Islamic Identity: A Regional Project on Hashemite University Students. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Studies*, 10 (4), 697-705.

Steeves, P. (2020). Re-claiming and re-writing the past through indigenous voices and worldviews. *Revista de Arqueología Americana*, 38, 87-95.

Whyte, K. (2020). *Indigenous Environmental Justice: Anti-Colonial Action Through Kinship*. *Environmental Justice: Key Issues*. Edited by B. Coolsaet, 266–278. Taylor Francis