



وقائع المؤتمر العلمي الدوري الثاني للمديرية العامة للتربية في بغداد الرصافة الثانية الموسوم:
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وتحت شعار
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An Analytical Study Of Post-Pandemic Fictions With A Focus On Iraq: Crisis, Recovery, And Social Transformation In Contemporary English Novels
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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped societies across the globe, not only through its devastating impact on public health but also by destabilizing economies, social relations, and cultural production. Beyond the immediate crisis, it has generated new modes of storytelling, inspiring a growing body of literary works that grapple with themes of vulnerability, resilience, and transformation in the face of systemic disruption. Within this broader context of global post-pandemic imaginaries, Iraqi literature written in English provides a particularly compelling case.

This paper investigates post-pandemic fiction in contemporary Iraqi writing, focusing on how narratives articulate crisis, recovery, and social transformation in a country already marked by decades of war, sanctions, and occupation. Through close readings of works by Ahmed Saadawi, Sinan Antoon, and Hassan Blasim, the study examines how Iraqi authors engage with trauma, resilience, and the reconstruction of meaning under conditions of prolonged instability. The concept of post-pandemic fiction is redefined here to encompass not only responses to health crises such as COVID-19 but also the long-term disruptions of conflict, underscoring the parallels between global pandemics and Iraq's systemic ruptures.

Beyond the canonical male voices, the paper incorporates gendered perspectives by highlighting the contributions of Betoool Khedairi, Inaam Kachachi, and Helen Benedict, whose narratives foreground women's experiences of war, displacement, and resilience. It also analyzes the role of the diaspora, showing how writers based in the United States and Europe construct a transnational memory that mediates between Iraqi trauma and global audiences. Finally, the study adopts a comparative lens, situating Iraqi fiction alongside Syrian and Lebanese post-crisis literatures, revealing shared themes of exile, memory, and identity reconstruction.



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By integrating these dimensions, the article argues that Iraqi post-pandemic fiction functions as both an archive of collective trauma and an imaginative laboratory for resilience and social renewal. It highlights the capacity of literature to bridge local and global contexts, transforming the Iraqi experience into a universal reflection on crisis, adaptation, and the possibility of new futures.

Keywords: Pandemic, Ahmed Saadawi, crisis, recovery, diaspora, Transnational Memory

1- Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly altered contemporary societies, producing far-reaching effects that extend well beyond the realm of public health. As a global crisis, it disrupted daily life on an unprecedented scale, exposing vulnerabilities in healthcare systems, accelerating economic inequalities, reshaping labor markets, and redefining modes of social interaction. It also had significant cultural repercussions, as artists and writers worldwide sought new ways to process uncertainty, loss, and resilience. Literature, in particular, emerged as a critical site for exploring the emotional and symbolic dimensions of the pandemic. Unlike statistics or policy reports, which measure quantifiable impacts, literature captures the intangible human experiences of fear, isolation, solidarity, and adaptation. It creates spaces where trauma can be narrated, collective memory reconstructed, and possible futures envisioned.

This response to crisis has been conceptualized under the term *post-pandemic fiction*. The expression refers to literary works that engage directly or indirectly with the aftermath of pandemics by foregrounding themes of vulnerability, systemic fragility, collective trauma, and the search for resilience. These narratives do not merely chronicle events but interrogate the meaning of crisis itself, tracing processes of recovery and imagining pathways of social transformation. In a broader sense, *post-pandemic fiction* functions as a cultural response to systemic ruptures, emphasizing how crises—whether medical, social, or political—reshape communities and identities. By weaving together personal and collective experiences, this literature highlights both the universality of human responses to disruption and the specificity of how crises unfold in particular contexts. As seen across Asia, Europe, and the Americas, such works illustrate how global health emergencies can fracture social structures while simultaneously stimulating forms of creativity, resistance, and renewal.



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When applied to the Iraqi context, however, the concept takes on an expanded and particularly charged meaning. Iraq did not encounter the pandemic as an isolated event but as one crisis layered upon many others. For decades, the country has been shaped by war, foreign occupation, sectarian conflict, authoritarian governance, and political instability. These overlapping traumas have left indelible marks on the nation's social fabric, fragmenting communities and eroding trust in institutions. In such a setting, the COVID-19 crisis cannot be read simply as a medical or social disruption; it becomes part of a continuum of instability that has long defined Iraqi life. This layered experience means that Iraqi post-pandemic fiction does not only grapple with the pandemic itself but also with its intersection with war, displacement, poverty, and the search for cultural reconstruction. As Dabashi (2021) observes, post-pandemic literature in the Middle East highlights how global upheavals resonate in contexts already burdened by instability, while Al-Musawi (2017) underscores that Iraqi literature in English often functions as a space where traumatic memory is negotiated and reimagined in ways that speak both locally and globally.

Iraqi literature thus occupies a singular position within the broader field of post-pandemic fiction. For Iraqi authors, crisis is not a temporary rupture but an ongoing condition of existence. Their narratives explore survival under overlapping threats, the psychological burden of prolonged trauma, and the cultural work of reconstituting meaning in fragmented societies. Literature becomes both an archive of suffering and a laboratory of imagination where alternative futures can be envisioned. Particularly significant is the role of English-language Iraqi writing. By choosing to write in English, these authors not only address international audiences but also situate Iraq within global literary conversations about crisis and recovery. This linguistic and cultural mediation allows them to bridge the gap between personal experiences of war, occupation, or pandemic and universal themes of vulnerability and resilience.

English-language Iraqi novels frequently experiment with form and genre to convey the complexity of crisis. They combine allegory, magical realism, social critique, and testimonial elements to represent experiences that defy straightforward narration. Works such as Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* foreground the surreal dimensions of violence and disintegration; Sinan Antoon's *The Book of Collateral Damage* explores memory, destruction, and the politics of loss; and Hassan Blasim's *Sololand*



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intertwines allegory and absurdity to capture the disorientation of post-crisis life. Though not written in direct response to COVID-19, these texts exemplify the qualities of post-pandemic fiction by reflecting on how individuals and communities navigate uncertainty, confront systemic collapse, and seek pathways of adaptation and resilience.

This study, therefore, examines post-pandemic fiction through the lens of contemporary Iraqi novels written in English. Its purpose is to analyze how crises—whether health-related, political, or social—are represented in literary form, and how processes of recovery and transformation are imagined in contexts of prolonged instability. By situating Iraqi narratives within the broader framework of post-pandemic literature, the research highlights both the universality of crisis as a human condition and the particularities of Iraq’s historical experience. In doing so, it demonstrates how literature functions as both a repository of collective memory and a medium of imaginative reconstruction, offering insight into the ways societies grapple with uncertainty and envision renewal in the aftermath of systemic rupture.

2. Crisis: Portraying Societal and Individual Catastrophe

2.1 Crisis in Ahmed Saadawi’s *Frankenstein in Baghdad*

Ahmed Saadawi’s *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013) is widely recognized as a seminal work in contemporary Iraqi literature that explores the devastating consequences of prolonged conflict on both individual and societal levels. Set against the backdrop of Baghdad during the U.S. occupation, the novel presents a city deeply scarred by violence, political instability, and social fragmentation. Through its complex narrative structure and symbolic imagery, Saadawi illustrates how repeated crises erode trust, moral certainty, and the basic fabric of communal life.

The story revolves around Hadi, a scavenger who collects body parts from victims of bombings to assemble a new being, al-Fadhi, a “Frankenstein” creature that comes to life with a will of its own. Al-Fadhi’s emergence serves as a powerful allegory for the unintended consequences of human actions during times of societal collapse. The character embodies both the collective trauma of Baghdad’s inhabitants and the uncontrollable forces unleashed by ongoing violence. By anthropomorphizing the fragmented remains of the city’s victims, Saadawi transforms individual tragedies into a literal representation of the societal crisis, making the reader confront the magnitude of destruction in visceral terms.



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Baghdad itself functions as a character in the novel, depicted as a city under siege by fear, chaos, and moral ambiguity. Everyday life is punctuated by bombings, death, and social disintegration, and citizens navigate a world where survival often requires moral compromises. This environment illustrates the psychological toll of continuous crisis, showing how ordinary people become entangled in cycles of violence and retribution. For example, the citizens' responses to al-Fadhi range from fear and hostility to complicity, reflecting the breakdown of communal norms and ethical boundaries under sustained pressure.

Saadawi also employs dark humor and absurdity to underscore the surreal nature of living in a city dominated by instability. The novel's narrative oscillates between realism and grotesque fantasy, which not only reflects the absurdity of the political and social environment but also highlights the deep alienation experienced by Baghdad's residents. This literary technique allows Saadawi to capture the disorientation, trauma, and moral complexity that arise during extended periods of crisis, demonstrating that the impact of violence extends beyond physical destruction to the psychological and ethical realms.

Furthermore, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* explores themes of justice, vengeance, and societal responsibility. Al-Fadhi's actions, though initially aimed at punishing those responsible for violence, often result in unintended harm, illustrating the cyclical nature of retaliation and the difficulty of restoring social order once it has been disrupted. Through this allegorical lens, Saadawi critiques not only the occupation and the ensuing political chaos but also broader human tendencies toward retribution and moral compromise in times of crisis.

In the context of post-pandemic fiction, Saadawi's work resonates on multiple levels. Just as the pandemic exposed systemic vulnerabilities, created widespread fear, and disrupted social norms, the novel portrays a society coping with persistent, pervasive threats. The depiction of crisis in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* emphasizes the fragility of social structures and the profound psychological consequences of prolonged instability, making it a critical text for understanding how literature mediates human experiences of trauma, uncertainty, and moral ambiguity.

2.2 Crisis in Hassan Blasim's Short Stories

Hassan Blasim's *The Corpse Exhibition* (2013) offers a vivid and unsettling portrayal of crisis in contemporary Iraqi literature. Unlike Saadawi's



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allegorical approach, Blasim employs surrealism, grotesque imagery, and dark humor to capture the disorienting and often absurd reality of life amid war, displacement, and political instability. His stories focus on individuals whose lives are continuously disrupted by violence and uncertainty, revealing the profound social, psychological, and ethical consequences of prolonged crises.

A defining feature of Blasim's narratives is their reliance on grotesque and surreal elements to reflect the chaotic and unpredictable nature of post-conflict Iraq. Characters frequently encounter bizarre or horrifying situations—such as corpses interacting with the living or navigating landscapes scarred by bombings and sectarian violence—that blur the boundary between reality and nightmare. This technique mirrors the psychological trauma of living in a society where danger is constant and ordinary life is punctuated by extraordinary acts of violence. The surrealism is not escapist fantasy but a literary mechanism for articulating disorientation, fear, and moral ambiguity in conditions of societal collapse.

Displacement constitutes another central theme in Blasim's fiction. Many characters are forced to flee, either within Iraq or abroad, experiencing exile, alienation, and cultural dislocation. Through these narratives, Blasim explores the crises generated by forced migration, including the loss of identity, the breakdown of social networks, and the struggle to maintain ethical integrity in extreme circumstances. Refugees are often depicted making impossible choices for survival, underscoring the ethical dilemmas inherent in destabilized environments where conventional norms no longer apply.

Blasim also interrogates the human capacity for resilience amid crisis. Despite grotesque and horrifying circumstances, some characters display moral, emotional, and psychological endurance: caring for the vulnerable, preserving human dignity, or resisting oppression. By juxtaposing horror with resilience, Blasim highlights the complex moral terrain of crisis, where vulnerability coexists with ethical agency and resistance.

Furthermore, *The Corpse Exhibition* critically reflects on the consequences of societal collapse beyond immediate physical dangers. Continuous violence and instability erode social cohesion, trust, and ethical norms, leaving characters in situations where survival requires morally ambiguous choices. Blasim thus not only documents the external effects of war and displacement



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but also exposes their internal, human consequences, making crisis palpable and multidimensional for readers.

In the context of post-pandemic fiction, Blasim's stories resonate strongly with global experiences of prolonged disruption, fear, and uncertainty. Just as Iraqis in his narratives confront continuous threats and moral ambiguity, communities worldwide have grappled with the social, economic, and psychological challenges posed by COVID-19. His use of surrealism and grotesque imagery enables readers to engage with crisis on both emotional and intellectual levels, offering insights into resilience, vulnerability, and the moral complexities of survival.

This symbolic dimension of crisis is further emphasized by critics. Murphy (2018) observes that the character of al-Fadhi in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* embodies a metaphor for the fragmented Iraqi state, incapable of controlling itself. Similarly, in *The Corpse Exhibition*, the short story "The Reality and the Record" illustrates the tension between individual memory and collective archive, which, according to Al-Fahham (2024), reflects the difficulty of writing history in times of war. By placing Blasim's grotesque poetics alongside Saadawi's allegorical construction, Iraqi literature reveals not only the external devastations of crisis but also its symbolic, cultural, and historical dimensions.

3. Recovery: Searching for Hope and Rebuilding

3.1 Recovery in Sinan Antoon's *The Book of Collateral Damage*

Sinan Antoon's *The Book of Collateral Damage* (2013) offers a profound exploration of recovery in the context of post-conflict Iraq. Unlike the grotesque surrealism of Hassan Blasim or the allegorical horror of Ahmed Saadawi, Antoon grounds his narrative in the quotidian realities of human suffering and the painstaking efforts to preserve dignity and meaning amid devastation. The novel follows a photographer who documents the aftermath of U.S. bombings in Baghdad, capturing the physical, social, and psychological effects of war on ordinary citizens. Through this lens, the novel presents recovery as multidimensional—encompassing moral, psychological, and social reconstruction.

At the heart of the narrative lies the theme of loss and its enduring impact on individuals and communities. Antoon's characters experience profound grief as they confront the destruction of their homes, the death of loved ones, and the disintegration of their social environment. This grief is not merely personal; it reflects a collective trauma shared by a society scarred by years



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of conflict. The act of documenting destruction becomes both a coping mechanism and a moral obligation: through photography, the protagonist bears witness, preserving memory and asserting the humanity of victims in a world that often seeks to erase them. This act of witnessing has also been theorized by critics. *World Literature Today* (2019) notes that Antoon constructs an “alternative archive” of the war, where each photographed fragment resists forgetting. Similarly, post-COVID-19 literature in other contexts—for example, Arundhati Roy in India—has sought to preserve a memory of the vulnerabilities exposed by the health crisis.

Social reconstruction is another essential dimension of recovery in Antoon’s novel. Despite pervasive despair, characters strive to maintain social bonds and rebuild fragile community structures. Acts of solidarity, empathy, and mutual support emerge even under dire circumstances. The photographer’s interactions with survivors and neighbors illustrate how small gestures—providing shelter, sharing food, offering emotional support—become foundations for collective resilience. These moments highlight recovery as a communal process, sustained by networks of trust and reciprocity.

Psychological recovery is inseparable from this moral and social reconstruction. Characters grapple with guilt, helplessness, and survivor’s remorse. The photographer, by confronting trauma through witnessing and documentation, engages in a form of psychological processing that reconciles horror with ethical responsibility. This illustrates that recovery extends beyond physical survival; it demands an ongoing confrontation with the emotional and moral consequences of crisis.

Antoon also frames recovery as a form of meaning-making. In a city destabilized by violence, characters seek coherence and purpose amid chaos. Photography, memory, and storytelling emerge as tools to reconstruct personal and collective narratives, allowing survivors to reclaim agency over their lives. Literature itself functions as an instrument of recovery, enabling reflection, understanding, and transformation.

In the context of post-pandemic fiction, Antoon’s emphasis on recovery resonates globally. Just as Iraqis in his narrative confront continuous trauma and the struggle to rebuild, communities worldwide have navigated the disruptions, vulnerabilities, and ethical dilemmas exposed by COVID-19. Like war, the pandemic destabilized everyday life and revealed systemic fragilities. Antoon’s novel underscores that recovery is neither linear nor



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singular but an active, continuous process involving moral, psychological, and social dimensions.

Whereas Blasim foregrounds grotesque absurdity and Saadawi constructs allegorical monstrosity, Antoon insists on the quotidian dimensions of recovery, emphasizing memory and dignity as essential resources for resilience. By balancing grief with hope and despair with endurance, *The Book of Collateral Damage* offers a nuanced depiction of how societies and individuals rebuild themselves after catastrophic disruption.

3.2 Post-Pandemic Perspectives on Recovery

Post-pandemic fiction broadly addresses the multifaceted nature of recovery in the wake of crises that affect health, economies, and social structures. Beyond depicting immediate survival, these narratives explore the ways in which individuals and communities adapt to systemic disruptions, negotiate uncertainty, and actively reconstruct social, moral, and personal identities. In the context of Iraqi literature, post-pandemic perspectives on recovery are particularly resonant, as Iraq's history of war, displacement, and political instability parallels the disruptive forces experienced globally during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Iraqi authors writing in English employ fiction to illustrate the layered processes through which societies recover. Recovery is depicted as more than a restoration of material or physical normalcy; it encompasses psychological resilience, ethical reflection, and the reestablishment of community networks. In works such as Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, Sinan Antoon's *The Book of Collateral Damage*, and Hassan Blasim's *Sololand*, recovery often emerges through small acts of resistance, moral courage, and the persistence of cultural practices that sustain identity. These narratives suggest that recovery is deeply relational: individuals rebuild not in isolation, but through collective engagement, mutual support, and the maintenance of shared values.

Economic instability is a key dimension of post-pandemic recovery in these texts. Characters frequently face disrupted livelihoods, scarcity of resources, and the collapse of formal institutions. Literature portrays how communities adapt to these challenges by improvising survival strategies, forming informal networks, and redistributing responsibilities within families and neighborhoods. For instance, scavenging, barter systems, and community cooperation appear as practical mechanisms for sustaining life amid systemic breakdown. Such portrayals highlight the resilience of ordinary people and



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the creative ways in which they navigate instability, emphasizing that recovery is both pragmatic and ethical.

Health crises, including the literal and metaphorical “illness” of societal structures, are another central focus. Post-pandemic fiction often dramatizes vulnerability, fear, and the psychological toll of prolonged exposure to danger. Iraqi narratives extend this exploration by linking physical health crises with the broader social and political environment: trauma, displacement, and violence exacerbate psychological suffering, while community solidarity, moral integrity, and cultural continuity serve as mechanisms for emotional and ethical recovery. Authors emphasize that resilience involves not only physical survival but also the restoration of trust, ethical frameworks, and a sense of purpose in a disrupted society.

Identity reconstruction is a crucial aspect of recovery in post-pandemic fiction. Iraqi authors depict characters negotiating the tensions between past and present, between pre-crisis norms and post-crisis realities. Individuals often confront fractured social roles, altered family dynamics, and the erosion of cultural traditions. Through adaptive strategies, narrative reflection, and engagement with community or cultural memory, characters reconstruct their identities in ways that reconcile trauma with continuity. This process mirrors the global post-pandemic experience, where societies must renegotiate personal, social, and cultural identities in response to disruption.

Finally, post-pandemic perspectives on recovery in Iraqi fiction emphasize the moral and cultural dimensions of resilience. Recovery is portrayed not merely as survival but as the preservation of values, ethical reflection, and social responsibility. Literature highlights that communities endure crises not only through practical adaptation but also through shared moral commitment, empathy, and collective action. This approach situates recovery within a holistic framework that integrates material, psychological, social, and ethical dimensions, demonstrating the interdependence of human well-being, cultural continuity, and moral integrity.

In summary, post-pandemic fiction presents recovery as an active, multidimensional process encompassing adaptation, moral engagement, and identity reconstruction. Iraqi literature provides vivid examples of these processes, illustrating how societies rebuild amid disruption, negotiate uncertainty, and reaffirm cultural and ethical values. Through these narratives, readers gain insights into the complexity of recovery—its



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challenges, possibilities, and the creative human responses that sustain life and community even in the aftermath of profound crises.

3.3 Diaspora and Transnational Memory

A defining feature of Iraqi fiction in English is its production within the diaspora. Authors like **Sinan Antoon**, based in the United States, and **Hassan Blasim**, residing in Finland, write from positions of exile, transforming local Iraqi experiences into narratives accessible to global audiences. Diaspora writing does not detach from national memory; instead, it amplifies and reconfigures it across cultural boundaries. Through fragmented structures, alternative archives, and polyphonic voices, diaspora authors reconstruct Iraq's collective memory in ways that transcend geographical limitations. Their vantage point enables a double perspective: rooted in the traumatic memory of Iraq while shaped by their immersion in Western societies. As a result, Iraqi diaspora literature functions as a transnational archive, mediating between local realities and universal questions of trauma, resilience, and survival. Within the framework of *post-pandemic fiction*, diaspora narratives demonstrate how displacement becomes a creative force, expanding the reach of Iraqi memory to a global stage and reimagining community beyond borders.

4. Social Transformation: Redefining Identity and Society

4.1 Transformation in Hassan Blasim's *Sololand*

Hassan Blasim's *Sololand* (2008) offers a compelling examination of social transformation in the aftermath of prolonged conflict and displacement. Set against the backdrop of Iraq's political turmoil and widespread violence, the novel explores how individuals and communities negotiate radical changes in their social environment, identity, and moral frameworks. Through its vivid portrayal of displaced Iraqis, *Sololand* highlights how crises not only disrupt existing structures but also create spaces for reflection, adaptation, and creative reconstruction of society.

At the heart of the novel are characters grappling with exile and cultural dislocation. Displacement forces them into unfamiliar social and political landscapes, where pre-existing norms and hierarchies no longer apply. The narrative portrays the psychological and ethical challenges of navigating such environments, including the tension between survival and adherence to moral principles. Characters face dilemmas that require negotiating power dynamics, forging new alliances, and making decisions that test both personal and communal values. This negotiation reflects a broader process of social



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transformation: crises destabilize established systems while simultaneously offering opportunities for ethical reflection and societal innovation.

Blasim's use of surrealism and dark humor amplifies this depiction of social upheaval. Exaggerated, bizarre, or fantastical situations illustrate the absurdity and unpredictability of life under prolonged crisis. By blending realism with surreal elements, Blasim captures the emotional disorientation and moral ambiguity experienced by displaced individuals. Characters frequently encounter situations where the ordinary becomes extraordinary, compelling rapid adaptation for survival. These narrative strategies highlight that transformation is not only structural but also psychological: social crises necessitate internal reconfiguration of identity, values, and perception.

Identity reconstruction is central to *Sololand*. Characters must reconcile pre-war identities with the realities of displacement and post-crisis society. The novel explores how trauma, exile, and social fragmentation shape self-perception, community belonging, and cultural continuity. For instance, the struggle to retain linguistic, religious, or cultural heritage in destabilized environments illustrates the interplay between personal memory and collective identity. Blasim suggests that social transformation is inseparable from identity reconstruction: societal change occurs alongside the evolution of individual and communal self-understanding.

Moreover, *Sololand* emphasizes the adaptive strategies that emerge from crisis. Characters develop new social skills, moral reasoning, and coping mechanisms, demonstrating resilience in adversity. Crises compel innovation, whether in forming new communities, redefining ethical codes, or negotiating survival under unpredictable conditions. Transformation is therefore both reactive and creative: destabilizing events dismantle old structures while catalyzing the construction of new social, moral, and cultural frameworks.

Blasim also underscores the relational dimension of transformation. Social change is depicted as a collective process involving negotiation, compromise, and interdependence. Displaced individuals must navigate networks of solidarity, trust, and mutual support to survive and rebuild. As Al-Musawi (2017) notes, Iraqi writers in English contribute to a "literature of resilience," paralleling post-crisis experiences observed in post-apartheid South Africa and post-genocide Rwanda. This perspective situates *Sololand* within a broader, comparative context, extending its relevance beyond Iraq. These interactions demonstrate that recovery and transformation are embedded in



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communal engagement and ethical responsibility, not merely individual endeavor.

In the context of post-pandemic fiction, *Sololand* offers further insights into societal adaptation following systemic disruption. Just as the COVID-19 pandemic forced communities worldwide to renegotiate social norms, economic systems, and cultural practices, Blasim's displaced characters exemplify how societies reconstruct themselves in response to crisis. The novel illustrates that social transformation is continuous and multifaceted, involving moral negotiation, identity reformation, and the creation of new social frameworks that enable survival and resilience.

Overall, *Sololand* demonstrates that crises, while destabilizing, hold transformative potential. By presenting displaced Iraqis navigating ethical dilemmas, cultural dislocation, and identity reconstruction, Blasim highlights how adversity can catalyze reflection, innovation, and the reimagining of society. The novel underscores that social transformation is a dynamic interplay between disruption and creativity, individual adaptation and collective reconfiguration, survival and ethical engagement.

4.2 Pandemic and Societal Change

The COVID-19 pandemic, like war and political instability, has acted as a catalyst for profound social transformation, challenging established norms and exposing systemic vulnerabilities in healthcare, governance, and social cohesion. In post-pandemic fiction, including contemporary Iraqi literature written in English, these disruptions are depicted not merely as crises to be endured but as opportunities to observe, critique, and reconfigure societal structures. Iraqi novels explore how communities and individuals respond to destabilizing forces, negotiating ethical dilemmas, reconstructing collective identities, and envisioning new forms of social organization.

Iraqi fiction portrays the pandemic's effects on both macro and micro levels of society. At the structural level, narratives reveal institutional fragility, highlighting gaps in public health, security, and social welfare. Characters navigate environments where traditional norms and hierarchies are disrupted, compelling them to develop innovative coping mechanisms. These adaptive strategies may include reliance on informal networks, redistribution of resources, or improvisation of social and economic practices to ensure survival. By focusing on such adaptations, literature underscores the resilience and creativity of communities in the face of systemic failure.



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Ethical challenges emerge prominently in narratives that parallel pandemic experiences with wartime disruption. Just as citizens in conflict zones must make morally complex decisions to survive, characters in post-pandemic fiction confront dilemmas regarding personal responsibility, communal welfare, and justice. Iraqi literature foregrounds these questions, illustrating the tension between individual survival and collective ethical standards. For instance, characters may have to prioritize scarce resources, navigate mistrust within fractured communities, or balance self-interest with solidarity—reflecting broader societal negotiations that become urgent during widespread crises. In a broader, global context, several scholars (e.g., Appiah Kubi et al., 2023) have shown that the pandemic highlighted similar ethical dilemmas: how to balance collective safety with individual freedoms. These tensions are mirrored in literature through narratives in which moral choice becomes central.

A central focus of Iraqi post-pandemic fiction is the reconstruction of collective identity. Societal disruptions, whether caused by conflict or a pandemic, unsettle cultural memory, social practices, and community bonds. Novels explore how individuals and groups actively engage in reestablishing cultural continuity and reaffirming shared values. Storytelling, communal rituals, and acts of memory function as mechanisms for preserving identity, even as circumstances force adaptation to new realities. Through these narratives, literature portrays recovery and transformation as intertwined: societal evolution depends on both acknowledging past traumas and imaginatively constructing a shared future.

Solidarity and communal networks are emphasized as vital components of societal transformation. Iraqi fiction depicts how collective action, mutual support, and empathy enable communities to endure disruption and reconstruct social cohesion. Such narratives demonstrate that social resilience is not merely an individual trait but emerges from interconnectedness, shared ethical commitments, and cooperation in the face of adversity. These depictions resonate strongly with post-pandemic experiences worldwide, where communities have had to adapt to uncertainty, manage vulnerability, and find innovative ways to sustain social bonds under unprecedented conditions.

Moreover, post-pandemic fiction highlights the creative potential inherent in disruption. Crises compel societies to rethink established practices, imagine alternative futures, and redefine social norms. In Iraqi literature, characters



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often navigate the tension between continuity and change, negotiating which cultural, ethical, and social practices to preserve and which to transform. This dynamic process captures the essence of societal evolution: disruption does not solely dismantle; it also catalyzes reflection, innovation, and the emergence of new forms of social and moral order.

In summary, pandemic and societal change in Iraqi fiction illustrate how crises provoke ethical negotiation, identity reconstruction, and social innovation. Similar to the disruptions of war, the pandemic exposes vulnerabilities while creating spaces for adaptive strategies, solidarity, and creative transformation. Through literature, readers witness the interplay between disruption and resilience, highlighting how societies evolve in response to sustained crises and ultimately emphasizing the potential for renewal, moral reflection, and collective reconstruction.

4.3 Comparative Perspectives: Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon

Although Iraq constitutes a central case, it is not isolated in the Arab literary landscape. Syrian authors such as Khaled Khalifa (*Death Is Hard Work*, 2016) portray the fragmentation of memory and the collapse of social bonds under civil war. Lebanese writers like Hanan al-Shaykh and Rachid el-Daif have long reflected on the legacies of civil conflict, exile, and reconciliation. Despite distinct political and historical contexts, these literatures share recurring themes with Iraqi fiction: collective trauma, exile, fractured identities, and the search for resilience.

The comparison highlights both similarities and divergences. While Lebanon's literature foregrounds sectarianism and postwar reconciliation, Syria's narratives focus on authoritarianism and civil strife, and Iraq's fiction emphasizes invasion, occupation, and protracted instability. Taken together, these literatures reveal how Arab post-crisis fiction employs allegory, surrealism, and fragmented storytelling to express dislocation and envision renewal. Situating Iraqi *post-pandemic fiction* within this regional constellation underscores its contribution to a broader Middle Eastern and global conversation on trauma, recovery, and social transformation.

5. Conclusion

Post-pandemic fiction in contemporary English-language Iraqi literature offers a nuanced and multifaceted framework for examining the complex relationships between crisis, recovery, and social transformation. By engaging with narratives such as Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, Sinan Antoon's *The Book of Collateral Damage*, and Hassan



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Blasim's *Sololand*, readers gain insight into how literature captures both the immediate and long-term consequences of societal disruption. These works demonstrate that crises—whether stemming from war, political instability, or public health emergencies—extend beyond physical destruction to encompass psychological trauma, moral ambiguity, and the erosion of social cohesion.

A key contribution of post-pandemic Iraqi fiction lies in its exploration of recovery as an active, multidimensional process. Characters navigate grief, loss, and moral dilemmas, while simultaneously seeking to preserve dignity, maintain communal bonds, and reconstruct personal and collective identities. Recovery is depicted not as a return to a pre-crisis state, but as a continual negotiation of moral, social, and cultural values, highlighting the resilience, creativity, and agency of individuals and communities in the face of prolonged adversity. By portraying these processes, literature provides both a record of human suffering and a roadmap for navigating trauma and uncertainty.

Social transformation emerges as another central theme, revealing how crises disrupt established norms and hierarchies while creating opportunities for reflection, adaptation, and innovation. Iraqi authors illustrate that periods of disruption can catalyze ethical deliberation, community solidarity, and identity reconstruction. In *Sololand*, for instance, displaced characters negotiate new social environments, reconcile pre-war and post-crisis identities, and confront ethical complexities arising from dislocation. Similarly, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and *The Book of Collateral Damage* explore how individuals respond to destabilized environments, balancing survival with moral responsibility and the reconstruction of social bonds. Together, these narratives underscore that transformation is both relational and individual, emerging from the interplay between societal forces and personal agency.

Moreover, post-pandemic fiction functions as both a mirror and an imaginative laboratory. It reflects the realities of disrupted societies, illustrating how crises affect everyday life, ethics, and cultural memory, while simultaneously offering spaces to imagine alternative social organizations, ethical frameworks, and forms of communal resilience. Iraqi literature demonstrates that even in contexts of prolonged instability, creative storytelling can foster hope, understanding, and pathways for renewal.



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In a broader, global context, the lessons drawn from Iraqi post-pandemic fiction resonate beyond the local setting. They provide insights into universal human experiences of trauma, adaptation, and social change, making them particularly relevant during global health crises such as COVID-19. By combining attention to cultural specificity with universal themes, these works illuminate the interdependence of individual resilience, communal solidarity, and societal reconstruction.

In this sense, contemporary English-language Iraqi fiction exemplifies how literature can capture the complexity of crisis, recovery, and social transformation. These narratives document the impact of disruption, depict strategies for coping and rebuilding, and envision transformative possibilities for societies grappling with profound challenges. They highlight that even amid trauma and instability, literature can serve as a medium for reflection, moral engagement, and the imaginative reconstruction of human life and social order. Ultimately, post-pandemic fiction underscores the enduring capacity of human communities to endure, adapt, and creatively reimagine the future in the wake of crisis.

In this broader perspective, Iraqi writers participate in a global tradition of crisis literature, comparable to the works of José Saramago (*Blindness*) and Margaret Atwood (*The Year of the Flood*), which likewise explore resilience and transformation in the face of systemic upheavals, situating Iraqi post-pandemic fiction within a worldwide literary conversation.

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دراسة تحليلية لروايات ما بعد الجائحة مع التركيز على العراق: الأزمات والتعافي والتحول

الاجتماعي في الروايات الإنجليزية المعاصرة

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ماجستير اللغة الإنكليزية – فرع الادب

مستخلص البحث:

أعدت جائحة كوفيد-19 تشكيل المجتمعات حول العالم، ليس فقط من خلال تأثيرها المدمر على الصحة العامة، بل أيضاً من خلال زعزعة استقرار الاقتصادات والعلاقات الاجتماعية والإنتاج الثقافي. وبعيداً عن الأزمة الراهنة، فقد ولدت أساليب جديدة لسرد القصص. ألهمت مجموعة متنوعة من الأعمال الأدبية التي تتناول مواضيع الضعف والمرونة والتحول في مواجهة الاضطرابات النظامية. وفي هذا السياق الأوسع من الخيالات العالمية لما بعد الجائحة، يُقدم الأدب العراقي المكتوب باللغة الإنجليزية حالة مُتعمقة بشكل خاص.

تبحث هذه الورقة في أدب ما بعد الجائحة في الكتابة العراقية المعاصرة، مُركزةً على كيفية تعبير السرديات عن الأزمة والتعافي والتحول الاجتماعي في بلدٍ تأثر بالفعل بعقود من الحرب والعقوبات والاحتلال. ومن خلال قراءات مُتعمقة لأعمال أحمد سعداوي وسان أنطون وحسن بلاسم. تبحث الدراسة في كيفية تعامل الكُتاب العراقيين مع الصدمات النفسية والمرونة وإعادة بناء المعنى في ظل ظروف عدم الاستقرار المُستمر. يُعاد تعريف مفهوم أدب ما بعد الجائحة هنا ليشمل ليس فقط الاستجابات للأزمات الصحية مثل كوفيد-19، بل أيضاً الاضطرابات طويلة الأمد الناجمة عن الصراع، مما يُبرز أوجه التشابه بين الأوبئة العالمية والانقسامات النظامية في العراق.

وإلى جانب الأصوات الذكورية التقليدية، تُدمج هذه الورقة وجهات نظر مُراعية للنوع الاجتماعي من خلال تسليط الضوء على مساهمات بتول خضير، وإنعام كجه جي، وهيلين بنديكت، اللواتي تُبرز سردياتهن تجارب النساء في الحرب والنزوح والصمود. كما تُحلل دور الشتات، مُبيناً كيف يُنشئ الكُتاب المقيمون في الولايات المتحدة وأوروبا ذاكرة عابرة للحدود الوطنية تُتوسط بين الصدمات العراقية والجمهور العالمي. وأخيراً، تتبنى الدراسة منظوراً مُقارناً، حيث تضع الأدب العراقي جنباً إلى جنب مع أدب ما بعد الأزمة السوري واللبناني، كاشفةً عن مواضيع مُشتركة كالمنفى والذاكرة وإعادة بناء الهوية.

ومن خلال دمج هذه الأبعاد، تُجادل المقالة بأن الأدب العراقي لما بعد الجائحة يعمل كأرشيف للصدمات الجماعية ومختبر خيالي للمرونة والتجديد الاجتماعي. ويسلط الكتاب الضوء على قدرة الأدب على ربط السياقات المحلية والعالمية، وتحويل التجربة العراقية إلى تأمل عالمي في الأزمة والتكيف وإمكانية مستقبل جديد.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الجائحة، أحمد سعداوي، الأزمة، التعافي، الشتات، الذاكرة العابرة للحدود الوطنية.