

Kleptocracy and Chaos: Exploring Corruption and Governance in Post-Invasion Iraq Through Literature and Reality with special reference to *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and *The Struggle of Iraqi's Future*

Assistant Lecturer. Ihab Mohammed Mahdi

General Directorate of Education of Al-Qadisiyah, Ministry of Education

ihab.mohammed75@gmail.com

Abstract

In this paper we look at the complex issues of corruption and admin in post war Iraq through the lens of how they are presented in fiction and non-fiction. We look at how Kleptocracy and chaos have played out in Iraq since 2003 and what that has meant for the country. We focus on Ahmed Saadawi's novel *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and Zaid Al-Ali's academic work *The Struggle of Iraq's Future: How Corrupt – which detail the role of sectarianism and inefficiency in the breakdown of democracy. Also we look at how magic realist elements in fiction may in fact add to what we get from real world political and social reports. We note that both literary and academic perspectives are important for our analysis of the structural failures, the human cost and the psychological impact of wide spread corruption and a failing government. This research attempts to present a full picture of Iraq's struggle for stability and good governance by putting together creative writing and in depth academic research.*

Key words: Kleptocracy, *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, *The Struggle of Iraqi's Future*, corruption, invasion

الكليبتوقراطية والفوضى: استكشاف الفساد والحكم في العراق بعد الغزو من خلال الأدب والواقع مع إشارة خاصة إلى *فرانكشتاين في بغداد* و*النضال من أجل مستقبل العراق*

م. م. أيهاب محمد مهدي

المديرية العامة للتربية في محافظة القادسية , وزارة التربية

تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية قضايا الفساد والإدارة المعقدة في العراق ما بعد الحرب، من خلال منظور كيفية تقديمها في الأعمال الروائية وغير الروائية. ندرس كيف تجلّت ظاهرة حكم اللصوص والفوضى في العراق منذ عام ٢٠٠٣، وما ترتب على ذلك من آثار على البلاد. نركز على رواية أحمد سعداوي "فرانكشتاين في بغداد"، وكتاب زيد العلي الأكاديمي "صراع مستقبل العراق: كيف يُفسد الفساد"، اللذين يُفصّلان دور الطائفية وعدم الكفاءة في انهيار الديمقراطية. كما نتناول كيف يمكن لعناصر الواقعية السحرية في الأعمال الروائية أن تُثري ما نستقيه من التقارير السياسية والاجتماعية الواقعية. نؤكد على أهمية المنظورين الأدبي والأكاديمي في تحليلنا للإخفاقات الهيكلية، والتكلفة البشرية، والأثر النفسي للفساد المستشري وفشل الحكومة. يسعى هذا البحث إلى تقديم صورة شاملة لنضال العراق من أجل الاستقرار والحكم الرشيد، من خلال الجمع بين الكتابة الإبداعية والبحث الأكاديمي المعمق.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكليبتوقراطية، فرانكشتاين في بغداد، الصراع من أجل مستقبل العراق، الفساد، الغزو

1.Introduction

1.1 Background of Post-Invasion Iraq



In 2003 the US and its allies went into Iraq which was a turning point in the country's history. We were to see the end of Saddam Hussein's rule and the birth of a democratic state. What we got instead was an unstable environment marked by great brutality and a constant struggle to put in place any sort of workable government. We saw the breakdown of state structures and in the void that was left, illegal activities of all sorts took root including corruption which in turn widened already existing sect based divisions. Also we had a very complex political environment which saw new players vying for power and riches which in many cases came at the expense of national unity and the better being of the people. At first there was hope for a democratic and prosperous Iraq, what we got was a never ending war, a standing economic issue and in general a very insecure environment for the people. What Iraq has gone through since the invasion is not just political or economic in nature, it is very much a social issue which has affected all aspects of daily life and in turn how its people think (Al-Ali, 2014).

In the works of Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and Zaid al-Ali's *The Struggle of Iraqi's Future* we see how post 2003 Iraq has dealt with issues of corruption and poor government. We look at which in a very close way how fiction and non-fiction portray the role of corruption and bad government and the results that played out in Iraqi society. Also we look at what these works have to say on the social, political and psychological impacts of kleptocracy and anarchy in Iraqi society.

1.2 Problem Statement: Corruption and Governance Challenges

In Iraq we see that after the invasion what we have is a legacy of kleptocratic rule and a weak government which in turn causes service failure, public money to disappear, and the common man to lose faith. This cycle of corruption which has set in does not allow for stability or growth as officials put their own and sectarian interests before the good of the country (Al-Ali, 2014)

2. Data and Theoretical Background

2.1. Defining Kleptocracy and Corruption

The term "kleptocracy" is from the Greek "kleptes" which means thief, and "kratos" which means rule – thus "rule by thieves". It is a type of government in which the elite, or kleptocrats, use their power to steal national resources and wealth for personal gain which in turn hurts the common good. This goes beyond bribery or small scale corruption. In a kleptocracy what we see is that corruption has become systemic, and that which should be the role of the state is to amass illegal wealth. In a kleptocracy the line between public and private money is blurred and institutions which are supposed to be for the people are used to help those in power steal and clean up that money (Muhibin et al. 2022).



This type of planned theft hurts a state's image, it disrupts economic growth, and also brings out social inequalities which in turn makes people lose faith in the system and the country becomes unstable. In the case of kleptocracy we see that they use off the record financial structures, control key parts of the economy and change laws to protect corruption and to go after those that don't agree. Also these guys don't really care to run the country for the betterment of all, what they want is to maintain their power and wealth via illegal means which in turn creates a self-serving elite that is above the law (Al-Ali, 2014).

Corruption as a whole includes a wide range of illegal and underhand actions from the powerful which usually involve bribery. It takes on many forms – for instance grand corruption which is when top level officials steal large sums of money, petty corruption which is the day to day abuse of power by lower to mid-level public officials, and political corruption which is when policy, institutional and procedural changes are made by political players to access more money and resources.

Kleptocracy – that is when the very worst kind of corruption takes root and the few take all – is the bottom of the barrel. Also all forms of corruption damage the rule of law, the economy, and what people think of their government. What we see is that certain types of corruption have a much worse impact in states that are in the process of change or have just emerged from conflict. At that point institutions are weak, governments are weak which in turn gives illegal activities a field day. In those settings corruption may put a stop to reconstruction efforts, fuel insurgencies, and keep violence and instability alive thus making it very hard to achieve peace and democracy.

2.2. Theoretical Frameworks of State Failure and Governance

After the 2003 invasion which brought down Saddam's regime we had a breakdown of what had been in place in Iraq – to make sense of issues of corruption and weak governance today we must look at many theories that apply. Rentier State Theory, Neopatrimonialism, and Conflict Theory are very relevant to the picture.

Rentier State Theory puts forth that which states which get most of their revenue from external sources – we are talking here about natural resources like oil as opposed to tax moneys or from productive economic activity within the state's borders – tend to develop their own set of political and economic traits. In such countries we see governments which do not have the incentive to put in place strong accountable institutions or to foster a diverse economy as citizen productivity or support does not play a role in the government's sustainability. This in turn weakens the social compact as people are less likely to demand representation or accountability if they are not directly taxation players. Instead what we see in rentier states is that administrations use resource wealth to buy



political loyalty, silence criticism and stay in power via patronage networks. The idea is that which states which rely on external rents for their power play into authoritarianism, a static economy and a lack of political progress as the state becomes insulated from social and economic change (Beblawi, 1987). Iraq is a great example of Rentier State Theory in action. With its vast oil reserves successive governments have been able to remain in power without addressing the people which has made Corruption easily grows.

In neo-patrimonial systems what we see is the blurring of public and private domains and that political power is in the hands of individuals as opposed to bureaucratic institutions. What happens in these regime is leaders use state resources and position to develop personal followings and client networks. They in turn get favors, jobs, and resources out of it which they in return support the leader politically. This does in fact damage institutions like the military, the judiciary, and the civil service which see personnel issues determined by personal ties and loyalty rather than merit or legal processes. What you get is a weak, ineffective government which is also very open to corruption as people use public office for personal profit. Neo-patrimonialism we see in settings where traditional forms of authority meet up with new state structures. That which results is a mixed system which values personal relationships and informal networks over formal laws and regulations (Medard, 1982). Post the invasion of Iraq the state structure broke down and in came new political elites which were often along ethnic or sectarian lines. This set the stage for neo-patrimonial practices to take off. In this we see political parties and armed groups take over state resources and dole them out to their supporters which in turn causes the corruption to grow. Causes government to function less well.

In the wake of Marx's work we have **conflict theory** which views society as a stage for power and resource struggle between social groups. This perspective puts a great deal of focus on how social inequality and power dynamics play out in politics and the structure of society. Also it presents corruption not as an anomaly in power imbalanced systems but as a typical feature of them. It is in the interest of the dominant groups to use their power to get and hold onto resources which in turn they use to keep subjugated groups down. What causes this conflict is many things – wealth difference, ethnic and religious based issues, and the fight for political control. Post invasion of Iraq we see a very public display of that as different political, ethnic and religious groups go at each other for control of the government and its resources which in turn breeds large scale corruption and heightens existing tensions. From this angle corruption is a tool for the elite to maintain their power and money at the expense of the greater society's power and importance. This in turn breeds instability and hinders the building of a true state (Marx, 1867). The ongoing violence and political division in Iraq is Seen in terms of a more fundamental struggle for power and resources in which corruption is a tool used and also a product of that struggle.



These theories we present provide a solid base to analyze what makes up kleptocracy and the issues of poor governance in post invasion Iraq. We see how the past, present economic issues, and political structure all play a role in creating a system which is very much at the mercy of corruption and instability – in turn which impacts the everyday man and women and in turn which does not see the growth towards lasting peace and development.

2.3. Historical Context of Corruption in Iraq (Pre and Post-2003 Invasion)

Corruption in Iraq did not begin at the 2003 invasion's outset; it has very deep historical roots which however took different forms over time. Prior to 2003 which is when Saddam Hussein was in power the state was the primary player in corruption which was also very centralized. Sure there was illegal activity but it was mostly a top down affair which the dictatorship profited from the most. The state controlled many resources above all oil money and also ran patronage networks which included the UN Oil for Food Program. That program in fact created new avenues for corruption as the regime used any gaps and illegal trade to get around sanctions and line the pockets of the inner circle (Al-Ali, 2014). That time also created a culture of secrecy and illegal money flows, what came after 2003 was of a different scale. Post 2003 we saw a great change in the corruption picture. The Ba'ath party state broke down and the Coalition Provisional Authority which replaced it only made matters worse with their de-Ba'athification policy and dissolving of the Iraqi army. That left a power vacuum in which chaos reigned and which in turn was very fertile ground for wide spread corruption to take root. Corruption. What we saw was that the reconstruction money which had been doled out with little control became the main vehicle for illegal wealth accumulation. What the CPA did early on which was to put in place the beginnings of a new democratic structure in fact played into the hands of a very decentralized and wide spread corruption which in turn grew to alarming proportions. In his work on *The Struggle for Iraq's Future* Zaid al-Ali details how corruption took off post 2003. Also according to Transparent International which has been ranking Iraq as one of the most corrupt countries in the world since 2003 (Al-Ali, 2014) Iraq has been at the top of that list.

Since the invasion we have seen large scale embezzlement of public funds which in turn we see in inflated contracts, ghost projects, and illegal money transfers; we also have patronage and clientelism which is a practice of political parties and sects controlling state institutions and resources which they in turn dole out to supporters for political support; also we see corruption which has been used as a weapon, where illegal profits are put towards funding militiamen and thus keeping the violence going. In the oil sector which is a major source of Iraq's income we see great opportunity for corruption which in fact has been taken advantage of. Reports tell us that billions have been wasted due to illegal doings and poor management (Brookings, 2023). This large scale corruption has not only



dried out important resources for reconstruction and growth but also has very much damaged public trust in the government, increased between sects, and made the Iraqi state more unstable and fragile. To understand the issues of poor governance and stability in Iraq today it is important to look at the past of the country's corruption.

2.4. Overview of Key Data and Statistics on Corruption in Iraq

In reports and studies from around the world it is noted that corruption is a large issue in Iraq. The Corruption Perceptions Index from Transparency International which is a very reliable source always places Iraq at the top of the list of the most corrupt countries. In 2024 for instance Iraq scored 26 out of 100 which placed it in 140th out of 180 countries. That is an improvement from previous years which saw a record low of 13 points in 2008, but the issue is still very much present. Also the score does not only reflect the expert's view but that of the public as well which means that indeed corruption is a very large scale problem.

In 2023 Prime Minister at the time, Mustafa Al-Kadhimi reported that since 2003 Iraq has lost over \$600 billion to corruption (via the New Arab, 2023). That is a large sum which comes out of government services, infrastructure development and economic growth which in turn affect the lives of the average Iraqi citizen. Also reports put out by the Rawabet Center in 2025 indicate that over the past 20 years we are looking at hundreds of billions of dollars which have gone into the pockets of the corrupt. Which is a picture that paints a picture of a very large scale issue and a state which is being systemically robbed.

In many areas corruption takes place but what we see is the oil and gas industry is particularly at risk because of the large sums of money involved. Report says that in that sector we are looking at billions of dollars which have gone out the window via illegal deals, smuggling and poor management (OilPrice.com, 2024). Also very much an issue in public procurement, customs and the courts which all play host to a great deal of corruption. What we see is that public services suffer, the market becomes less fair and people less accountable. In the everyday life of citizens, they are asked to pay bribes for basic services which in turn causes them to lose faith in government institutions even more.

Corruption is at a great cost to people. It exacerbates poverty and at the same time reduces access to basic services like health care and education, also it causes social instability. Misuse of money set aside for public services is a direct cause of bad state of our infrastructure and the lack of basic needs which in turn has brought out large scale public anger and protests. Also in the security forces we see connection between corruption and growth of insurgent groups which in turn leaves the government with no capacity to maintain law and order as illegal

profits are used to support armed groups and in that process weakens national security (ISPI, 2023). As for the numbers and facts we have, it is very much the case that Iraq is struggling with very deep seated issues which are eating at the basic structure of the country and which in turn make it very hard for it to turn things around and achieve stability.

3. Literary Analysis: *Frankenstein in Baghdad*

In 2003 which saw the US invasion of Baghdad, came out *Frankenstein in Baghdad* by Ahmed Saadawi which is at once a dramatic and very disturbing piece of work which also puts forward the use of magic realist style. In this piece we see the deep turmoil, corruption and the sectarian bloodletting which took over post 2003 Iraq. The main character is the repulsive “what’s it named” (also referred to as Shusmitu) a monster made up of the remains of people which died in the bombs and the sectarian violence. What this creature is in the story is more than just a literary device; it is a very powerful symbol of the broken and traumatized state of Iraq.

3.1. The Monster as a Metaphor for a Fragmented State

In Iraq we have the story of Hadi the trash man who created what is in fact a monster he called “what’s its name” out of human bones. This monster is a personification of the broken and diverse Iraqi society. The monster is made up of parts from different victims which represent the many ethnic and sectarian groups in Iraq that have all had great pain during the wars’ chaos. Dr. Zainab Abdulkadhim Salman Al Shammari reports the monster is of victims that want retribution. It’s a symbol of the still present inter-tribal violence which is a factor in the illusory peace we have today (Al Shammari, 2020, p. 125). The monster’s unceasing need for new body parts to survive is a mirror for Iraq’s never ending cycle of violence in which each act of aggression breeds new victims and in turn the will for revenge and more bloodshed. Also the monster’s ever changing identity as it takes on many forms is like a nation that is split by internal struggle and outside influence which has lost its sense of national identity.

Also we have this what’s the name quest for justice which at the start was a way to get back at the people that wronged it, but which very soon turned into a killing spree. This shift which we see in Iraq, a country which has become a stage for sectarian agendas and private scores which in turn has corrupted the justice system which was supposed to bring about justice, thus we have an unending cycle of violence which affects the innocent and the guilty. The monster which is this quest, like the Iraqi state itself, has become a force which nothing can stop because of the many issues and hostilities which have been building up over time. That it can’t tell between which are the victims and which are the offenders and that it has no set end to its goal shows the pointlessness of retribution and the very difficult road to peace and security in Iraq. The monster’s presence is a constant

reminder of the unsolved political issues and traumas which are still affecting the nation and which are preventing it from healing and moving forward (Al-Shammari, 2020).

3.2. Portrayal of Sectarian Violence and its Roots in Corruption

In her novel Saadawi presents a picture of what it is like in a society which lives with daily bombings, murders and random killings. What we see is that this violence isn't a sudden burst of hate but is also a product of and in many cases a result of corruption. The monster which the novel presents is made up of people that have been put at the mercy of their religion and which in turn carry out violent actions which are a result of out of hand violence in Baghdad. Also what the book puts forth is that the lines between political, criminal and religious violence are very blurred and it is the corrupt officials and powerful groups which use these divisions to get what they want. Also the characters' constant state of fear and in security tells us that the government is failing its citizens which is a direct result of wide spread corruption in its institutions (Saadawi, 2018).

In the novel we see how corruption plays a role in the perpetuation of sectarian violence. For instance, the use of body parts for the monster's creation which is a common thing from morgues and official channels indicates that the system is rotten at the core which sees human remains as products rather than with respect. We see society breaking down in which death itself is turned into a product for profit. Also that armed militias and criminal gangs run free in the presence of occupation forces which is a clear sign that law and order has broken down, a direct result of a corrupt and inefficient government. Corrupt elements of the government aid these groups in their illegal doings like extortions, kidnap and smuggling which in turn cause them to grow. Thus in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* we have a very dark picture of how violence and corruption are in bed together to maintain a state of perpetual chaos (Saadawi, 2018).

3.3. Breakdown of Social Order and Governance

In his work Saadawi presents a picture of social order's collapse in Baghdad post invasion. The city itself is a character which we see decay into a lawless urban landscape which is a dangerous place to live and navigate. In it there is no basic service and public institutions are either nonfunctional or part of a corrupt system. The police which are meant to maintain peace are shown to be ineffective which we see in the case of Brigadier Sarsour who turns to astrologers for help in predicting attacks. This shows how secure the situation has become and that the security measures put in place are failing. Also this turn to the supernatural by characters in the story present how helplessly people are living in this time and that there is no reliable or rational government at the helm (Saadawi, 2018).

In many of the characters' daily lives fear and uncertainty are present along with a great deal of what they see as unfairness. Hadi the junk man who is the



monster's creator at first wants to put the broken remains of the victims to rest properly. This he does in a bid for some order and respect in a very out of control world. What he doesn't count on is that his actions end up releasing a force which in turn causes the city to fall into even more chaos, thus proving that good intent can still go wrong in a system that is lacking in oversight and accountability. Also brought up is the issue of which groups are taken advantage of, for instance the families of the victims that are just looking for some sort of resolution out of which there is little to be had, and the public as a whole which has a hard time in a falling economy and with violence at every turn. What we see is that this breakdown of social order is a direct result of the lack of government which the invasion brought about. That void was then filled by corrupt elements and sectarian groups which left the average person to their own devices in a state of nature (Saadawi, 2018).

3.4. The Role of Magic Realism in Depicting Iraqi Reality

In *Frankenstein in Baghdad* Saadawi uses magic realism not for a design but as a method to present the Iraq of post invasion which is very strange and at time very much out of grasp. Magic realism is a which he puts familiar settings into which he injects the fantastic or the mythic. Thus he goes beyond what is doable in traditional storytelling and is able to look at the psych and emotional impact of conflict and corruption which is an element of everyday life. Also in the story we see the "what's its name" which is a creature that science can't explain but which is accepted as real by the characters – this is a reflection of the absurd and irrational which has become a feature of life in Iraq. As Saadawi himself has said, "we treat the imaginary as real, ghosts, angels, jinn, roaming ghost -- they are part of our present language. The fantastic is a part of our reality and we use it in our literary work which is only natural. By bringing out the fantastic elements of reality the novel is able to present a more accurate picture of what is transpiring around us. This method of writing allows the novel to present a more in depth truth of what is going on. In Iraq which is a place of trauma and constant instability those between what is real and what is imagined, what is rational and what is not have become less defined.

Magic realism also presents how we as a society break down in the face of constant chaos. In a world which has lost all logic and order what we see as strange becomes the norm, like the acceptance of the monster's existence or the dependence of Brigadier Sarsour on astrologers. It puts forth that in a world of violence and corruption which makes reality hard to put into terms, the fantastic helps us to make sense of or at least deal with what we can't explain. Also magic realism allows Saadawi to critique the politics and society of Iraq without making



direct political statements which may get him in trouble and at the same time reach a wide audience. The book uses the gross and the absurd as part of the fabric of everyday life to get readers to think about how kleptocracy and chaos effect people's minds and society as a whole. This in turn makes the unspeakable horrors of war and corruption more real and emotionally powerful (Saadawi, 2018).

4. Non-Fiction Analysis: *The Struggle of Iraqi's Future*

Zaid al-Ali in his book *The Struggle for Iraq's Future* reports in detail and critically on what has gone wrong in Iraq since the 2003 invasion. An insider's view from someone who was a legal advisor in Iraq after the invasion al-Ali takes on the systemic issues which have prevented Iraq from stabilization and instituting democracy. His work is a great contrast to what you see in literature which tends to tell stories; instead he gives us real world examples and in depth analysis of the political and institutional structures which have brought about what we see today – kleptocracy and chaos.

4.1. Systemic Corruption and its Impact on State Institutions

Al-Ali goes into detail on how in post invasion Iraq corruption has transformed from an issue of some individuals preying on others to a wide spread, systemic issue which has in turn broken down state institutions. He reports that the issue is larger than that of individual cases of bribery and is in fact embedded in how the government functions which in turn makes any reform efforts futile. Also the book reports that a great deal of the money which was to be used in the reconstruction and development of the country has in fact been stolen through illegal means thus causing public services and infrastructure to decline. Al-Ali reports that corruption isn't just an economic issue; it is also a major threat to the state's legitimacy and function. "Corruption has played a big role... Also it isn't just the civilian sector that is affected in Iraq; the security sector is also a large scale issue. In the security sector where we see corruption you can buy info out of it, you can pay people to let in bombs etc. It's very easy in Iraq today. It has always been but it is even easier now" (Al-Ali, 2014). This he says is how corruption is directly hurting. issues of national security and the government's role in protecting citizens.

In his novel the author looks at how political parties and powerful people use their influence to control state resources and institutions for personal gain which in turn makes public office a means to amass great wealth. Also reported is a system which is run by loyalty and ethnic affiliation rather than merit which in turn produces a very inefficient and incompetent administration. Also we see that corruption is used as a tool to get away with breaking the law which is supposed to be the great equalizer in these cases. What we also see is that which is put in place to stop corruption is instead a factor in it – which in turn causes people to lose faith in the government and to in turn continue the cycle of poor

governance. Al-Ali reports that the fight against corruption in Iraq is not a matter of putting a few offenders in jail but a total transformation of the governmental structure and a dedication to true institutional change (Al-Ali, 2014).

4.2. Incompetence and the Failure of Political Elites

In Al-Ali's view what we see is a political class in Iraq which is not only at large with its corrupt practices but also is what you may call a total failure at running the country. What we have post 2003 is a political structure which put in place a power sharing deal between the various sects and ethnic groups which in turn put personal and political gain above what is best for the nation and what is proper governance. What we see is a leadership which rather than dealing with the hard issues at hand what they do is kick the can down the road which in turn causes constant mismanagement and a lack of decision making. Also Al-Ali reports that what determines who gets what position in this political setup is often which group you belong to and how loyal you are which in turn takes the professional and the experienced individual out of the picture. This in turn what we see is a state which is unable to provide for its basic services and to put in place good policy (Al-Ali, 2014).

In many aspects of the Iraqi government we see this incompetence play out – for instance in the lack of safe electricity and clean water for citizens and in the governments' failure to secure their safety. Also the focus of the political elite has been on power and personal profit from the government which in turn has neglected important national issues. What we have is a cycle of under development and instability in Iraq which is a result of there not being a clear future plan for the country and also a resistance to real change. Al Ali reports that while individual flaw plays a role in the political elite's failure, also at issue is the system which is structured to keep a few in power which in turn benefits from the status quo. Also what we see is a very basic breakdown in the government's ability to function which is a result of this systemic corruption and sectarianism. This has in turn caused the public to lose faith in the government and to feel very much without hope (Al Ali, 2014).

4.3. Sectarianism as a Tool of Political Manipulation and Division

In his work Al-Ali goes into detail about how in fact sectarianism is a plaything of the political elite in Iraq which at the same time they present to us as a natural element of our social fabric. What he also reports is that sectarian division did exist in the past, but what we see today is much worse since after 2003 politics became a field in which the players' aim was to amass power for themselves. That which is known as the muhasasa system of government has in that time made these issues permanent. What we are seeing now is that identity within a person's sect or ethnicity takes precedent over national identity or competence. In this zero sum game what we see is political parties fighting it out for control of ministries,



state companies, and security forces and they do so with the support of their large base of the same sect (Al-Ali, 2014).

Al-Ali reports that what we are seeing is a very political form of sectarianism which isn't just breaking down the state, but is also what is putting more division into our societies which in turn is making it difficult to put forward a true national identity or to work towards common goals. What we see is that which is meant to be about sect is taking the focus away from the real issues of corruption and bad governance which in turn is what is allowing political elites to get off the hook and to hold on to their power. Also he gives in depth look at how that which is put forth as sectarian is used to get support for things which may not be so great, to explain away illegal doings, and to silence dissent, in particular that which comes from cross sect groups that are trying to bring in change. What we are seeing is that this play on sectarian identity has very serious results which is to say it is making violence more likely, is what is getting in the way of us getting along as a people and in the end is what is making it less likely that we will see a stable and inclusive democracy in Iraq. Also Al –Ali's research what that which we are to believe is a fixed cultural trait is in fact a political construct which the corrupt elites use to maintain their power and to keep things in a state of disarray (Al-Ali, 2014).

4.4. The Flawed Constitutional Process and its Consequences

In his novel *The Struggle for Iraq's Future* Al-Ali puts forth what is perhaps the most important issue regarding Iraq's 2003 on our constitution: the process which brought it about was very broken and undemocratic. He presents what is in fact a very different story which goes against the official account of a transparent and open process. Al-Ali reports that the constitution did not in fact see a true national consensus but instead was the result of a secret campaign which also saw large input from foreign powers, mainly the US Embassy, and a few Iraqi political groups which had very narrow sectoral goals (Al-Ali, 2014).

In the early days the first committee charged with writing the constitution which pushed for a more centralized government fell apart. A small set of political parties – the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) -- took over. At the time these parties which represented only a small section of the Iraqi population also had very close ties to the U.S. Embassy. Also very much in support of an ethno-sectarian federal system they dismissed the old draft reports and put in a new framework which played up sectarian divides and at the same time weakened the central government. Al-Ali reports that this was a very chaotic and closed off process which saw changes made to the draft constitution right up till the pre referendum stage. Also the Iraqi parliament was left out of the discussion and out of the voting process (Al-Ali, 2014).



In Iraq we see the results of a broken constitutional process which has been very negative for stability and government. To start off, we have a constitution which Al – Ali says is “impossible to apply” due to the way it was imposed and what he sees as its internal contradictions. Also we don’t have a true and enforced legal system in which we have clear rules on running the country. That which does exist is easy for corrupt and inefficient politicians to play into. Also the constitution’s ethno-sectarian structure has made division worse, we have a system which doles out political power along ethnic and religious lines instead of by merit or for the sake of national unity. This in turn has created a culture of patronage and clientelism where political parties control state resources and pass them out to their supporters. That which does exist in terms of anti – corruption efforts are weakened and we see the growth of weak, non-independent institutions (Al – Ali, 2014).

In the end what we see is that the constitution process is what is at issue in terms of legitimacy. When people see that their constitution was a product of secrecy and force which left out real participation what we get is a loss of faith in democratic institutions. This lack of legitimacy which in turn breeds systemic corruption and inefficiency has made Iraq a place which is a breeding ground for instability, protest, and ongoing conflict. This in turn makes it difficult for the country to transition into stability and prosperity. Al-Ali’s look at the constitution is important in that he identifies the structural issues which post invasion Iraq faces. What we see is that which was meant to be a framework for order has in fact produced chaos and poor governance.

5. Intersecting Narratives: Literature and Reality

This study we looked at issues of kleptocracy, corruption, and poor governance in post invasion Iraq through the use of two related yet separate lenses which are Ahmed Saadawi’s *Frankenstein in Baghdad* which is a work of fiction and Zaid Al-Ali’s *The Struggle for Iraq’s Future* which is non-fiction. One which uses the creative power of magical realism and satire and the other which uses real world evidence and legal background. But what they do agree on is the difficult situation in Iraq. This part will look at how the fiction mirrors reality, the human cost of kleptocracy and chaos, and what we may learn from each of these works.

5.1. Bridging the Gap: How Fiction Reflects and Informs Reality

Literary works at times have a unique way of getting to the core of very complex realities which nonfiction may not. *Frankenstein in Baghdad* which puts forth the idea of a monster put together from human parts does just that – it presents the broken and traumatized state of Iraqi society. The What’s its name, a creature born from violence and into a perverted form of justice, is a strong symbol for a country that has been torn apart by sectarian violence and political corruption. This made up idea although strange does in fact ring true to the real life



experiences of Iraqis which have seen violence spring out of nowhere and social order break down. The book's description of a city in which the line between the rational and the irrational is blurred, which has astrologers giving out security advice and the dead walking among the living is very much like what life is like in a conflict zone, everything is absurd and hard to make sense of. In this way Saadawi's fiction doesn't just mirror what is happening in real life it amplifies it and in doing so brings to light deeper truths of how long term chaos affects the human mind and emotion. In 2018 (Saadawi).

In the case of Al-Ali's *The Struggle for Iraq's Future* we present to the reader the facts and analysis which is so necessary for us to understand the system which caused the chaos in Saadawi's novel. Al-Ali does a great job of telling us about the broken constitutional process, the institutionalized corruption, and the political use of sectarianism which in turn gives us the proof and history we need to see why Iraq is in this state. He tells the story of how kleptocratic practices have weakened state institutions and how political elites have put forward their own interests instead of the country's which is a very real dose of reality to the fantastic elements in Saadawi's work. For instance, the fact that What that thing in the book has easy access to body parts makes sense when you think of how corrupted the security and administrative sectors are as Al-Ali reports, in a state apparatus which is compromised which in turn makes illegal doings easier. Thus fiction and nonfiction don't just exist side by side, they inform each other. The fiction work gives us the emotional and metaphoric grasp of how people live with chaos and the nonfiction work gives us the structure and politics which cause it to persist.

5.2. The Human Cost of Kleptocracy and Chaos

In Baghdad and in the struggle for the future of Iraq we see through the eyes of Frankenstein and *The Struggle for Iraq's Future* what broken systems of government and social anarchy does to the Iraqi people. In Saadawi's work we see the everyday issues of which people are made a part of, the worries, the fears, and the moral choices that are made when you lose the people you love and the overall sense of helplessness that brings on hopelessness and misery. We see the ever present issue of bombings and a resignation to it. The characters try to navigate this very dangerous environment which may be through Hadi's sick schemes or the in depth psychological effects of living in a state of constant unease. What the novel does well is to bring to light the daily struggle for routine, to put forward the high rates of violence and corruption, to take very abstract ideas and make them very real experiences of pain and loss. The monster in the works is a physical manifestation of the trauma which many in society are still working through as they deal with their grief and un resolved issues (Saadawi, 2018).

In Al-Ali's nonfiction work he is more analytical but at the same time he brings in the human element which he does by telling how corruption and inefficiency play out in terms of basic service delivery, economic hard ship, and

in the air of overall injustice. He reports on how billions from the public coffers which could go towards better infrastructure, health care, and a better education system instead go toward nothing which in turn has a very real impact on the quality of life for millions of Iraqis. Also he speaks of a system which values favoritism over merit and high youth unemployment which is a very easy mix for frustration to turn to anger. Al-Ali also tells from a very personal level how he was frustrated with the broken constitutional process and that he didn't see a way out for which also brings to light the emotional toll that goes along with trying to rebuild post war Iraq. Both of Al-Ali's works are strong in that they present in great detail the many layers of suffering which a broken and chaotic state causes – from the very personal to the large scale system wide failures (Al-Ali, 2014).

5.3. Comparative Analysis of Themes Across Both Works

Although they are from different genres *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and *The Struggle for Iraq's Future* both deal with the same large issues which present what the main issues were in Iraq post invasion.

- **Fragmentation and Disunity:** In many ways what we see in these two works is a portrayal of a very fractured civilization. In Saadawi's work the monster is a physical representation of this break down, made up of elements from many different victims. It personifies the broken national identity and the issue of sects. As for Al-Ali she looks at the political and institutional causes of this division which she says is a result of the political power sharing agreements between sects and the manipulation of ethnic identities which in turn has made differences permanent and weakened national unity (Al-Ali, 2014; Saadawi, 2018).

- **Widespread Corruption:** In both of these works corruption is a main issue. In Saadawi's book for instance corruption is a part of day to day life in a very subtle way. It is easy to obtain body parts and also the breakdown of the law and order which in turn allows for illegal doings. Al – Ali reports on corruption as a system wide issue which she goes into great detail about how it plays out, how it affects government institutions and how it drains national resources. Also they agree that although corruption is an issue by itself it is also a large scale barrier to progress (Al – Ali, 2014; Saadawi, 2018).

- **Breakdown of Governance and Rule of Law:** In many ways what these authors are saying is that we see great problems with good governance and the rule of law. Saadawi does this by looking at the messy city of Baghdad which is in chaos, the police are ineffective and the people are living in fear. Al-Ali reports on a bad constitution, poor leadership, and the politics which has corrupted state institutions thus leaving the government unable to do what it is supposed to do (Al-Ali, 2014; Saadawi, 2018).

- **Cycle of Violence and Impunity:** In both works we see the same unbroken cycle of violence and a very wide spread feeling of getting away with it. The

Whatsthisnames' revenge in the story is like what goes on in Iraq which has hard to come by justice and which for the most part forgive the guilty. Al-Ali looks at corruption in the security forces and the judiciary's failure which gives us real world example of this trend towards no punishment. She shows how a broken system allows violence to play out unpunished (Al-Ali, 2014; Saadawi, 2018).

• **Disillusionment and Despair:** In both works there is a very present sense of hopelessness and defeat. In Saadawi's novel the characters react to their absurd and miserable situations through fatalism and extreme measures. Al-Ali's personal account and his look at the political climate present how people which once looked to the future with hope for a better Iraq instead saw things fall apart due to structural issues (Al-Ali, 2014; Saadawi, 2018).

5.4. Implications for Understanding Post-Invasion Iraq

In reading both *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and *The Struggle for Iraq's Future* you get a fuller, more complete picture of post invasion Iraq then you would from each book which you read separately. In the stories we see at a very personal level the chaos and the corruption which plays out in people's lives emotionally and social. It brings to life the concepts of state failure and kleptocracy by humanizing them. Saadawi uses magic realism which is a made up style to present that Iraq's reality is so harsh it often defies traditional reporting (Saadawi, 2018).

In contrast Al-Ali's nonfiction work presents the historical, political and structural background which in turn allows us to see the root and systematic issues in Iraq. He does in depth study of the constitution process, how corruption plays out, and the role of sectarianism which in turn is a valuable resource for policy makers and scholars. We see how political choices and institutional breakdown play out in the lives of individuals by looking at the interaction of these two stories. What we have here is an approach from many disciplines which present that in order to truly understand Iraq's case we must go beyond the academic study of it; we also have to look at the cultural and psychological aspects of its unending struggle. At the end what both of these works put forth is that until we see the primary issues of kleptocracy, poor management, and sectarianism addressed Iraq will remain in a state of chaos. This in turn will have large scale impacts on the country's development and the well being of its people (Al-Ali, 2014).

6. Conclusion

In our paper we looked at how in post-invasion Iraq kleptocracy, corruption and poor governance played into each other to create a crisis of wide spread corruption, institutional failure, and also increased sectarianism. We looked at Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2018) and also Zaid al-Ali's *The Struggle for Iraq's Future* (2014) to see how they present corruption and bad governance and what the results of that are for Iraqi society. Also in these we see what they say of the social, political and psychological results of kleptocracy and



chaos on Iraqi society. We looked at the telling of literary stories and the reportage of real world political events as a way to try and get at this issue which is to the destabilization of the country, the erosion of public trust, and the maintenance of a cycle of violence which in turn makes it that much harder for the country to recover and grow.

6.1. Summary of Findings

In our study we note that *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and *The Struggle for Iraq's Future* each present a unique yet interesting perspective of what post-2003 Iraq saw of corruption and poor government. In Saadawi's book a fairy tale serves to display a broken state, the spread of religious fighting, elimination of social order and the human toll these issues play out to be. Out those problems he puts forth that which is the effect of systemic corruption. And the monster that is a tragic picture of a broken Iraqi identity which results from unregulated kleptocracy and which also has no justice is very much a strong symbol. At the same time Al-Ali's work in his nonfiction does a careful job of analysis with use of evidence of the institutional structures of corruption, the political class' which is very much underperforming, the sects which play a manipulative role and the defective constitution which is an issue. Also he details out how these elements have been a brake on democratic growth and have in fact been a cause of instability.

In both studies we see that which we term as kleptocracy in Iraq is not only an economic issue but a very well established political structure which has ruined the basic elements of our social fabric. We see how corruption, incompetence and sectarianism play into each other to create a cycle of chaos which in turn puts the country's reconstruction at a standstill. The literary reportage gives us that emotional and personal feel of what is going on, while the nonfiction analysis gives us the structure and the what and why which is happening. This is to say that for a full picture of what went wrong in Iraq post war we must take an interdisciplinary approach. Also what these works point out is that the issues of kleptocracy and anarchy have had very deep social, political and psychological impacts on Iraqi society which in turn has produced wide spread disillusionment, loss of faith, and a general state of hopelessness among the people.

6.2. Broader Implications and Future Outlook

This study reports on issues which in turn are to do with the issue of state fragility which we have in the post conflict setting in very resource rich countries. Iraq's case is a caution that although military intervention and regime change may bring down a government they also may in fact be the factors which enable the rise of kleptocracy and long term instability. Also reported is the issue of seeing corruption not only as a criminal issue but as a national security and human development issue. As for what the future holds for Iraq, that remains to be seen.

In order to do away with the very entrenched kleptocratic system what we require is a long term multi-pronged approach which includes strengthening of independent institutions, promotion of true political responsibility, increase in transparency, and empowering civil society to push for change. Should the political culture fail to transform and the ruling elite not truly put the country's interest first over their own, Iraq may find itself in a continuous state of flux and of low growth (Al-Ali, 2014; Saadawi, 2018).

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