

Exploring Social Issues in Contemporary Iraqi Novels

Post-2003

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استكشاف القضايا الاجتماعية في الروايات العراقية المعاصرة بعد ٢٠٠٣

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Abstract

The 2003 invasion of Iraq ignited deep social, political, and economic changes, which gave rise to a host of social problems that are vividly documented in contemporary Iraqi literature. This article compares how novels such as Warid Al-Salem's "Kidnapped" and Ahmed Saadawi's "Frankenstein in Baghdad" address the social changes in Iraq post-invasion. The goal of this research is to look at the narrative techniques and thematic preoccupations defining these two fictions, especially with respect to how they reflect and respond to the social issues from post-2003 Iraq. This is important as it places emphasis on the significance of contemporary Iraqi literature in providing insights into the socio-political challenges that Iraq has faced after the 2003 invasion. The outcome of the paper shows Iraqi novelists employ symbolic and realistic narratives to sharply involve and express complex social realities characteristic of post invasion Iraq. **Keywords:** post-2003, social problems , war.

غزو العراق في سنة ٢٠٠٣ قد ولد تغيرات اجتماعية، سياسية واقتصادية والتي ولدت مشاكل اجتماعية كثيرة وقد جسدت في الادب العراقي المعاصر. وهذه المقالة توضح كيف ان روايات مثل " المخطوف " لوارد السالم و " فرانكشتاين في بغداد " لاحمد السعداوي . ان الهدف من هذا البحث هو لملاحظة التقنيات القصصية والمنظور الموضوعي لهذه الروايات وخاصة كيفية عكس وتجسيد تلك القضايا الاجتماعية وتسليط الضوء عليها. ان نتائج هذا البحث يوضح توظيف الكتاب العراقيين لتوضيح التعقيدات الاجتماعية الواقعية بعد غزو العراق

الكلمات:- بعد ٢٠٠٣ ، المشاكل الاجتماعية ، الحرب

Introduction:

The 2003 invasion of Iraq set off tectonic changes throughout the socio-political and economic landscapes of the country and precipitated innumerable social problems that contemporary Iraqi literature reflects on to a great extent. Actually, such disturbance offered fertile ground for novelists to delve into complex realities faced by Iraqi society and criticize them, thereby offering valuable insights into the post-2003 social scene of Iraq. The present research investigates the representation of social issues in post-2003 Iraqi novels, with a special emphasis on both Warid Al-Salem's "Kidnapped" and Ahmed Saadawi's "Frankenstein in Baghdad". A rose-tinted view of the literary description of kidnapping as an inveterate problem in Iraq can be seen in Warid Al-Salem's "Kidnapped." In fine, hair-raising detail, Al-Salem relates to the massive kidnappings that have become a tragic feature of post-invasion Iraqi society. This book clarifies the psychological trauma such victims and their families go through, besides the greater societal implications of their crimes, which show erosion in law and order, besides demonstrating the pervasive sense of insecurity. The paper explicates, using this work as a critical lens, the socio-psychological dimensions of the problem—the abduction of man in contemporary Iraq. The story of Ahmed Saadawi's "Frankenstein in Baghdad" can itself be seen as a symbolic and allegoric rendering of such themes as violence and disintegration in post-2003 Iraq. The main character, the modern Frankenstein's monster, sewn from the body parts of bomb victims, is transformed into a powerful metaphor for the endless, cyclical nature of violence and retribution. Saadawi's story describes not only the physical horror the war engendered but it also engages in moral and existential questions of identity, justice, and humanity amidst pervasive chaos. The nameless

allegorical characters provide a unique vantage into the social and ethical repercussions of violence in post-invasion Iraq. I want to read both novels with serious intentions and a deep objective to increase the learned understanding of how Iraqi novelists deal with and have reacted to the social problems developing in the post-2003 context. It aims, therefore, to be critical in unpacking the narrative strategies and thematic concerns of Al-Salem and Saadawi in order to bring to light how a literary text might operate as a reflective site for struggling with hard complex social reality. Therefore, this research returns the importance of literary works as the ones that give some profound insights into the socio-political challenges faced by contemporary Iraqi society. This research will answer the question: How do post-2003 Iraqi novels, and specifically Warid Al-Salem's "Kidnapped" and Ahmed Saadawi's "Frankenstein in Baghdad", draw and critique the social problems emanating out of the context of the invasion? This piece of research will therefore focus on the thematic concerns and narrative strategies used to reflect and respond to the situation in post-2003 Iraq in these two novels. The importance lies in the role of contemporary Iraqi literature to allow a nuanced interpretation regarding the many-faced social-political challenges in post-invasion Iraq. The outcome proves that Iraqi novelists have formulated their criticism techniques to symbolically and realistically engage with and articulate the social reality of post-invasion Iraq.

Literature Review

Since the invasion that was carried out against Iraq in 2003, it is possible to assume that the literature of the country is definitely relevant to the development of ideas as to the current deep social problems that rise in the socio-political scene of the country. Anoosh's analysis (2013) provides a panoramic historical and political context sweeping from the creation of the Hashemite monarchy through to Ba'athist rule and into the post-occupation era of 2003. These changes have deepened ideological differences and had a significant influence on the state and writers' relation in Iraq. Anoosh highlights that the sectarian violence of 2006-2007 has altered the thematics of work written by most people and has got their voices to the common public; this has, therefore, intense the narrative trend of social realism. As a way to identify primary figures who have steered Iraqi literature away from traditionally mimetic inclinations and mined new paths in both narrative styles and thematic explorations, Anoosh presents the two writers, Gha'ib Tu'lmah Farman and Luay Hamza Abbas. Works of authors like Mahmoud Saeed in "A Portal in Space" and by Abbas himself provide poignant reflections of human violence, trauma, and questions of identity in the never-ending struggle over the perpetual backdrop of conflict. This is a major argument by Anoosh, that it is the diaspora diaspora who acts together with the traditional narrative. 'Iraqi literature is propped-up by writers who take the critical stance of Najem Wali and Luay Hamza Abbas, writers who were cast proscriptively out of Iraq and reformulated deconstructions of the traditional narrative'. This is an especially important mix of affairs because their works in many cases turn back to Iraq's cultural and political history in an exantiation of concept and articulate and systematize liminal and historical identities in potent manifestos. Adam's study emphasizes the most common themes in today's Iraqi literature, including the perennial quest for identity, experience of war, trauma from violence, and so on. Authors in question, ranging from Ali Bader, Sinan Antoon, and even the old timers like Sargon Boulus, manage to interweave reality with symbolism and historical contemplation to induce deeper reflection. Narratives spanning from Muhsin al-Ramli's "One-Eyed TV" to Salima Saleh's "Mulberry Tree" contrast tragedy with comedy and contain the kind of imaginative wit that makes the reader critically self-problematize existing perception of today's Iraq. Ghareeb (2018) talks about how Iraqi literature from post-2003 is connected with cultural memory, trauma, displacement, and survival. Employing the framework of cultural memory, Ghareeb states that Iraqi fiction finds its manifestation at the same time as recounting traditions. It re-envisions Iraq's national narrative while at the same time breaking official histories in two and developing alternative perspectives on many issues characterizing the country's past and present reality complexities. Conclusively, the development that has characterized Iraqi literature since 2003 is a summary of the history and expressions of the nation. A final word about the studies considered: collectively, we see the return of social realism, new narrative potentials opened by diasporic authors, and the density of themes that typify Iraqi fiction within this period. They shed light on the crucial function and significance of literature for the description of Iraq's complicated past and present, reflected therein with deep insight into socio-political challenges, resilience, and struggle of Iraqi society.

Methodology: This paper is based on the theoretical framework of social realism, allegory, and trauma theory with regard to the representation and engagement of social issues by Iraqi novelists in the post-2003 period. The texts primarily discussed include Warid Al-Salem's "Kidnapped" and Ahmed Saadawi's "Frankenstein in Baghdad.". "Kidnapped" is chosen because it is a grim portrayal of abduction in modern post-invasion Iraq, concerned with the psychological deterioration of the abducted as well as the social effects entailed by

lawlessness. "Frankenstein in Baghdad," on the other hand, makes its allegorical nature explicit in dealing with issues around violence, fragmentation of identity, and moral ambiguity within chaos, setting up a narrative structure that can metaphorically reflect post-invasion societal disintegration in Iraq. Key texts, characters, and narrative techniques used in both novels have been close-read through qualitative analysis. Close reading goes a long way in explicating how authors construct their tales, develop characters, and employ other literary devices in the realization of complex social setups and, in extension, their critique. In sum, the methodology applies a combination of textual analysis, comparative studies, contextualization, ethical considerations, and insights from an interdisciplinary approach to pursue a developed inquiry regarding the ways in which "Kidnapped" and "Frankenstein in Baghdad" each represent and critique social issues in post-2003 Iraq. Investigation into both novels' narrative strategies, thematic concerns, and socio-political contexts comes out with the insight of the role of Iraqi literature in deepening societal critique, cultural representation, and unearthing collective memory.

Results and discussions

Since 2003, Iraq has been living through deep social and political transformations caused by occupation and internal conflict, exacerbating many social problems reflected in contemporary Iraqi literature. This period offers a fertile context within which to examine how issues at the forefront of recent literary works in this country intersect with the insights provided by feminists, and postcolonialists into various social and cultural phenomena. Psychologists underline the role of conflicts and occupation in personal and collective identity, while highlighting feminists such as Judith Butler, who criticizes essentialism—the idea that women must be defined by a purportedly biological or essential quality—foregrounding multiple and variable gender expressions and identities. At the same time, hooks argues for the new basis of education in 1981 as especially freeing women and other oppressed communities from the shackles of the hegemonic social order. Both provide views on women, gender, and power in conflict and postcolonial societies. Other postcolonial theorists argue that the imposition of exogenous values and norms may undermine traditional ethical and moral structures as the basis of society; such imposition may result in identity crises, which eventually lead to the breakup of these societies. Homi Bhabha (1994) in his famous work 'Nation' and Narration coins the term "Third Space," site of cultural negotiation and ambivalence, out of which spring new social identities with the ability to deviate or transform the pre-existing values in society. They have thus framed possibilities for understanding how colonial policies have interacted with identities and contemporary cultures, therefore enriching the understanding of literature as a means to explore and document these complex social experiences. The novel "Kidnapped" by Warid Al-Salim draws a grim portrayal of the collapse of society and high moral values which depict contemporary Iraq since 2003. Shaimaa is kidnapped for ransom by her husband from her own parents, which becomes an act that illustrates deep erosion in societal value where family members fail to trust and protect each other in the name of money-making amidst stability. The very act of kidnapping within a marital arena is a reflection of a more extensive collapse of the traditional norms and ethical standards that governed Iraqi society. Such collapse is symptomatic of deeper economic desperation and lawlessness exacerbated in the 2003 aftermath where people resort to morally unacceptable acts in desperate circumstances. "but in the end, I was released after seven days for a ransom of 100,000 US dollars that my father paid to the kidnappers, as I found out later" (Al-Salim, 2017, 14). The abduction of Shaimaa points not only to the plight of women in a country in chaos but ultimately also becomes a metaphor for the broader societal injustices and gender-based violence which prevail in post-invasion Iraq. Said's (1978) dismantling of Orientalism and Bhabha's (1994) notion of hybridity and ambivalence offer the theoretical tools to narrativise these social changes as represented in "Kidnapped." Said's work reveals how in the past Western discourse and literature has in some times and cultures distorted non-Western cultures and consequently added to the cultural decay and social disruption of post-colonial societies. Bhabha's cultural hybridity, one may say, those fragments of the identities and moral ambiguities in the level of representation of figures such as Shaimaa, who straddle conflicting cultural norms in their representations amidst societal. "the country had turned out like this and I was a small individual in a forest owned by brutal and ruthless men in a country that had become all militias, warlords, crime and criminals" (Al-Salim, 2017, p.147). These words in Al-Salim's "Kidnapped" are themselves a microcosm of the larger development on the way toward lawlessness and moral disintegration, which reflects great social dislocation after the events of 2003 in Iraq. The narration develops against traditional structures of social and moral integrity that have been torn down, leaving a hapless landscape controlled by intellectual wildness and physical violence. The transformation of the character from an apparently ordinary person to a participant in a heinous act like abduction underlines the breakdown of moral boundaries in a society that has been consumed by instability and economic desperation. But in the case of post-2003 Iraq, as represented

in "Kidnapped," it is a society wherein governance and the rule of law had actually broken down to make way for such proliferation of criminal elements to act with impunity. It has broken the very fabric of mutual trust and respect within a community and thrown individuals into norms and actions that were once thought to be unimaginable. The engagement of the character in criminal activity, such as abduction by ransom, becomes a harsh comment on the way human beings driven by helplessness and a sense of no law could tend to adopt such steps as may come drastic in order for a survival in a world without any kind of bearing. More important, the novel probes such social problems as abduction, underlining more global matters of gender-driven violence and feminine vulnerability within a chaotic society. The actions and decisions of the character represent many moral greys and ethical dilemmas that many people found themselves in most of the time where the compromise of one's values and principles was needed for survival. This representation resonates with Edward Said's criticism of Orientalism and how Western interventions, with their aftermath, have turned non-Western societies upside down, rendering them vulnerable to internal strife and external exploitation. In Another place, the father's advice to his daughter proceeds to underline the critique or criticism of the societal and ethical collapse that followed after 2003 in Iraq. By this, the father's advice is redolent with the deep understanding that the social and moral fabric and governmental institutions have become so much degraded. This piece of advice provides keynote criticism of those social problems that emerged in the wake of the invasion of 2003 and subsequent conflicts: "Don't tire yourself, my daughter, this country is inhabited by jinns and demons, and the situation has become frightening. And I don't want you to enter the police and investigations mazes (Al Salim, 2017,p: 130). His advice to the daughter means more like recognition of anarchy which all the norms and values of society have befallen. The father enlightens his daughter to acknowledge that those social positions and moral standards, which had already been established in the past, have caved in. These are symbolic of a number of major social problems such as increasing cases of corruption, lawlessness, and diminishing trust in the state institutions. These are quite evident from the plot of the novel where characters have to deal with a situation full of threats, lack of confidence, and uncertainty in their moral standing. Further, the father's advice can be read in the context of weakening trust in public institutions. Post-2003 Iraq has experienced widespread disillusionment in governmental institutions perceived as either ineffective, corrupt, or subservient to other national interests. This disillusionment carried with it a destabilization of social fabrics and a shrinking of the collective sense of identity and mission. Even more than that, it represents how people like the father make their way through such a fractured landscape, sharing wisdom such that it becomes almost second nature in perpetual uncertain circumstances. His advice is an image of Iraqi society's stamina and flexibility in facing this great challenge of wars and occupations. Thus, critical literary research in Al-Salim's case, through the father's advice, is furnished on the social problems in post-2003 Iraq. He observably notes how the failure of common social and ethical systems has restructured individual lives and the general interactions in society, and hence the need for adaptation and survival amidst turbulence". "Kidnapped" by Warid Al-Salim is an important piece of literary criticism of the doom of the societal values in post-2003 Iraq and sheds light on moral dilapidation and social injustices its characters go through. It is in this very narrative perspective as that of Said and Bhabha that the novel takes on real insight into the complexity of identity, morality, and the struggle for survival in society. In the novel "Frankenstein in Baghdad" by Ahmed Saadawi, Hadi is set upon a group of such young men, one of whom is a journalist, Mahmoud Sawadi. The incident exemplifies how much living in post-2003 Iraq is characterized by deep social decay. Hadi is attacked in totality, landing on the street in a violent way. This violence marks a larger theme of lawlessness and unpredictability in Iraq after the war, where public spaces turned into arenas of unpredictability and danger: Hadi flew with his bag and dinner in the air ... and hardly hit on the asphalt of the street ... A minute passed before Hadi noticed what had happened, and saw a number of young men crossing the street and running towards him, one of them was the journalist Mahmoud Sawadi (Saadawi, 2013, p. 40-41). These young men unexpectedly launched an attack and used it to encapsulate social fragmentation. Their actions signify the expression of discontent of societal norms and a way of using aggression as an avenue for asserting power and surviving amid chaotic circumstances. One sees in it an illustration of this fragmentation, an expression of the break in social cohesion and loss of values of togetherness, which had contributed to an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty among the people of Iraq. The belated realization by Hadi of the attack goes to underline and highlight the shock and disorientation that is typical of people trying to find their way in a post-2003 world. His experience dramatically illustrates just how underthreat ordinary Iraqis felt with the scenes of violence and social disintegration all around them. The addition of Mahmoud Sawadi, a journalist, into the scenario makes it more intriguing, underlining how the press operates in the recording and perhaps even the framing of popular perceptions about social breakdowns of this nature.

Everyone fell back with a moment of explosion and was swept by a storm of dust and gravel. They thought they were wounded, passed a minute or more before regaining their senses to look at the accident, the four ran to the other side in unconscious movement, suddenly moved, they stood him on his legs, and Mahmoud knew him, he was Hadi Al Attag. (Saadawi, 2013, p.60-61) In a way, these could represent the chaos and confusion that the characters are caught up in; the ruination visually reveals the physical aftermath after the explosion and also metaphorically indicates the fragmentation that the societal norms and values went through. They symbolize shock waves of explosion, scars of violence and instability that have been strewn across post-2003-era Iraqi society. Their agitation and confusion echo the smash-up and confusion, which became commonplace in daily life. The dust and gravel storm visually shows the physical destruction that follows an explosion but also metaphorically indicates a disruption of societal norms and fragmentation. As the characters develop their first experience of disorientation, this reflects a society trying to regain a foothold, amid an ongoing world of disturbance and impending danger. The finding of a dead body reveals itself to be Hadi Al Attag and therefore goes to further lengthen the tragic reality that individuals get to experience in post-invasion Iraq. The jerking motion of the corpse, as if it comes back to life through Mahmoud's touch, gives a creepy feeling of surrealism about the scene. This could represent the resilience, or even haunting, of those who have died in the conflict—challenging the living by directly confronting the consequences of violence and war. No longer just a moment's view of private tragedy, this is also an attempt to comment on the wider social issues emanating from post-2003 Iraq. It illustrates themes of insecurity, social disintegration, and the deep influence of war and occupation on lives and social behavior. Fantasies express a longing for an absolute meaning, for something other than the limited 'known' world. Yet whereas 'faery' stories and quasi-religious tales function through nostalgia for the sacred, the modern fantastic refuses a backward-looking glance. It is an inverted form of myth. It focuses upon the unknown within the present, discovering emptiness inside an apparently full reality (p.158). This is the nature of fantasies and the modern fantastic as literary genres that are far-removed from traditional myth and nostalgia. It seems that while tales of the faery and religious narratives search for meaning and transcendence in a known and sacred past, the modern fantastic faces the unknown and emptiness of contemporary reality. This critique is applicable to a better explanation of the social phenomena developed in the post-2003 Iraq era. Introduction of fantasies into the novel brings a powerful reference to related upheaval and disorientation within society by entering into the invasion and consequent conflicts in the context of Iraq after 2003 that wish for absolute meaning. The "unknown about or in the present" is perhaps symbolic for the chaos and misery such communities have gone through as they struggle with the specters of violence, displacement, and the erosion of social cohesion. "the emptiness inside an apparently full reality" perhaps resonates with disillusionment, disharmony, and the loss of trust in institutions and authorities. There is true loss at a deeply personal, community level during continued times of turbulence. What this refusal of any look back, into a longing for sacredness, signals, therefore, is resistance to such efforts to return to the ante—the pre-conflict status quo or to norms that were not reflective of transpired transformation in the post-2003 Iraqi context. Instead, fixation on the present unknown orientates toward the capacity to tackle and deal with new problems, under conditions of uncertainty, caused by the war and its fallout. Thus, this passage assumes an important entry point through which to fathom the new social problems that came to characterize post-2003 Iraq, emphasizing the breaking of traditional social structures, the search for new meanings in changed topographies, along with the generalized sensation of dislocation and hollowness that typified Iraqi society at the time of the great transformation and turbulence.

Conclusion

In general, in the aggregate essence, the two novels, "Kidnapped" by Warid Al-Salem and "Frankenstein in Baghdad" by Ahmed Saadawi, relate to the fact that these works engage in deep explorations of social issues pertinent to post-2003 Iraqi literature. These are critical reflections on a social, moral, and ethical cringe in the general surround of violence, lawlessness, and political instability. "Kidnapped" is unnaturally based on the rampant abductions in Iraq, as it shows the psychological damage on the affected victims and their kin. Channeling her disdain through the character of Shaimaa, Al-Salem directs much criticism for a society that has lost its identity with the encroachment of criminality and corruption where they should be silenced. The novel is a microcosm of general moral degradation and corruption, representing how personal tragedies mirror large failures in governance and social order. On the other hand, "Frankenstein in Baghdad" uses allegory and symbolism to address violence and identity fragmentation. Saadawi's tale—of a grotesque creature assembled from body parts of the victims of bombs—metaphorically states the disintegrated identity and the cycle of revenge that such continuing conflicts feed off. It challenges readers to confront the moral ambiguities and existential

dilemmas one faces living in a world at war. Here is where the works of these novels come to confirm the place of literature in revealing the human cost of such geopolitical turmoil and documenting the resilience of Iraqi society in the face of testing challenges. This paper, evaluating different kinds of narrative strategies, character development, and thematic concerns, contributes to the understanding of the ways in which Iraqi novelists used literature to criticize and interrogate social realities in post-2003 Iraq. Conclusion: Iraqi literature post-2003, basically, plays the role of a powerful medium in articulating the complexities of a nation in flux, mincing critiques to show what is developing but also a sign of resilience. These novels would really make readers face some hard truths about violence, justice, and the human condition that hurt and incriminate so many people, things that really destroy the quality and living conduction in which contemporary Iraqi society is heading.

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