Postcolonial Nationalism and Contemporary Literary Theory: Algerian and Iraqi Novels from 1962 to the Present

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Abstract

This thesis investigates identity and postcolonial nationalism as expressed in selected Iraqi and Algerian historical novels published after 1960. The study examines eight novels: Assia Djebar’s *Children of the New World* (1962), Muhsin al-Ramli’s *Scattered Crumbs* (2000), Yasmina Khadra’s *The Sirens of Baghdad* (2008), Ali Bader’s *The Tobacco Keeper* (2011), Abdul-Aziz Gramoule’s *Za’een al-Aqaliyah al-Sahiqah* [Leader of the Overwhelming Minority] (2005), Khadair al-Zaidi’s *Valyoom Asharah* [Valium 10] (2015), Rashid Boudjedra’s *The Barbary Figs* (2012) and Ahmed Saadawi’s *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013). Through a critical analysis of the selected data, the study investigates how historical fiction can create and legitimize nationalist discourse on the one hand and counter hegemonic discourses on the other hand. The thesis also explores how, and to what extent, the critical awareness and blindness of postcolonial nationalism contributes to social and cultural formations in a pan-Arabic context, and how nationalist leaders exploit and oppress their citizens. The thesis also explores - through its investigation of literary texts - the perpetuation of Western cultural imperialism in Iraq and Algeria through the imposition of modern cultural apparatus such as nationalism, the religious/secular distinction and military action such as the War on Terror. It concludes that postcolonial nationalism extends colonial imperialism both ideologically and discursively. Postcolonial nationalist regimes in Iraq and Algeria have divided and exploited citizens by perpetuating Western concepts of nationhood and identity. By examining literary responses to postcolonial nationalist states, my critique explores its divisive and exploitative practices and explores authors’ imagined alternative visions for more peaceful multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious societies.
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Introduction

This thesis investigates identity and postcolonial nationalism in Algeria and Iraq in late-twentieth century and post-millennial novels (1962 to present), with a view to understanding how postcolonial identities and nationalisms have been imagined, asserted, and perceived in Algerian and Iraqi societies during various historical phases in these countries as presented in eight novels. I have selected four Algerian and four Iraqi novels for a postcolonial critique. From Algeria, I have selected Assia Djebar’s *Children of the New World* (1962), Abdul-Aziz Gramoul’s *Za’eem al-Aqaliyah al-Sahiqah* [Leader of the Overwhelming Minority] (2005), Yasmina Kh德拉’s *The Sirens of Baghdad* (2008) and Rashid Boudjedra’s *The Barbary Figs* (2012), while from Iraq, I have selected Muhsin Al-Ramli’s *Scattered Crumbs* (2000), Ali Bader’s *The Tobacco Keeper* (2008), Ahmed Saadawi’s *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013) and Khadair al-Zaidi’s *Valyoom Asharah* [Valium 10] (2015).

These novels investigate issues of identity and postcolonial nationalism due to their historical context and their critical reflection upon the way in which history has been represented. Each one of these novels presents a story against the background of some historical event in the history of colonial or postcolonial Algeria and Iraq. These texts examine how various colonial and nationalistic agents have asserted their dominance and identity. This critical investigation becomes all the more relevant due to shifting world-opinion about Islam and the Middle East. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks in America, the Charlie Hebdo attack, and further attacks in Paris and the rise of Islamic State, Islamophobia is on the rise, particularly in America and Europe. As a result, hate crimes against Muslims have manifoldly increased.1

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Identity and Postcolonial Nationalism

Though ‘nation’ and ‘identity’ seem inescapable\(^2\), they are artificially constructed\(^3\) and imagined and mostly ideologically essentialized and artificially homogenized.\(^4\) Postcolonial nationalism is just one expression of identity, as it refers to how a large group of people sees itself in relation to other groups. Postcolonial nationalism most commonly seeks to assert independent group identity as a nation free and different from colonial identity and influences. Nationalist group identity and solidarity is either anchored upon common race and ethnicity (qawmiyyah)\(^5\) or territorial nationalism (wataniyyah) which focuses upon common culture, history and geographical territory.\(^6\) -the qawmiyyah nationalists tend to be hostile against the groups of other ethnicities, tribes, and races living in the same geographical territory while celebrating their own, - shared history and culture -. As a result, the former breeds ethnic tensions and sectarianism and the latter promotes regionalism and patriotism, which often leads to antagonism with the neighbouring countries. In this way, we can understand that ‘State’ is essentially different from ‘nation’, as ‘State’ represents a ruling system in a geographical location while ‘nation’ refers to people acknowledging common culture, history, race, ethnicity and religion. However, the state can promote and subscribe to a certain type of nationalistic discourse that suits the purpose of the ruling regimes of the day.

Since the dawn of modern civilization, the world has been caught between essentially divisive forces of colonialism and postcolonial nationalism, which, though they seem totally different, are similar in their discursive process and effects - divisive and exploitative. Both are affected through subtle discursive practices to create and perpetuate the repressive power and discourse by hegemonizing them for the benefit of the ruler. Both are identical twins under different masks. While colonizers come either masked as tradesmen or harbingers of peace for civilizing the uncivilized through their educational and religious development mission executed through Christian missionary schools to

\(^5\) Qawmiyyah is a socio-political term refers to the common race and ethnicity in Arabic language, whereas, ‘wataniyyah’ refers to the territorial identity (i.e., nationalism).
carry out ‘the white man’s burden’, postcolonial nationalists rally people to their political cause by appealing to their national dignity, shared culture and identity and racial and religious superiority. In the process of establishing their influence, both create social divides among people along the lines of race, culture, community, cast and so forth. Postcolonial nationalism is just an extension of colonialism. Both are equally exploitative, equally threatening for peace and prosperity of the subjects.

Frantz Fanon, in his book *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), offers particularly useful insights into the modern concept of the nation in relation to newly-independent countries. Fanon discusses how the concept of the nation is productive in the evolution of a national culture that fosters awareness of the need for unity in the struggle for liberation from colonisers. Historically, the nation as a uniting element has proved successful, especially in organising nationalist movements and in mobilising the public against forces of colonisation.

Fanon’s discussions, however, identify the challenges implicit in the rhetoric of the nation. He demonstrates how the nation could turn into a ‘masque of neo-colonialism’ by privileging the interests of nationalist leaders and the ‘national bourgeoisie’ over other sections of society. As he explains, the elite are the ‘neo-colonialists’, who have internalised ‘colonialist thought in its most corrupt form’, and have utilised such knowledge only to ‘secure their slices of the cake of independence’. As for nationalist leaders, Fanon finds them as causes for ‘mystifying and bewildering the masses,’ as ‘a power on the awakening consciousness of the people’. Nationalist leaders are the new oppressors who help in controlling and containing the population while obscuring their awareness of the ‘cracks in the edifice’ of the nation and ‘the process of regression’ it is made to take. Fanon posits that the newly independent nation is subject to intracommunal strife, ‘from nationalism […] to ultra-nationalism to chauvinism, and

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7 Rudyard Kipling, *The White Man’s Burden* (Poem), <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/kipling.asp> (1899). Written by Britain’s imperial poet, was a response to the American takeover of the Philippines after the Spanish-American War. [Accessed 10/03/2016]. [there is a problem in the online source especially with https]


9 Ibid., p.122.

10 Ibid., p.124.

11 Ibid., p.130.

12 Ibid., p.138.

13 Ibid., p.135.

14 Ibid., p.129.
finally to racism’. The implication is that the establishment of cultural and political hierarchies in newly independent states is a reworking of the colonialisat politics of ‘divide-and-rule’.

The exclusionary practices of the neocolonialists, in Fanon’s views, are the prime causes for the rending of social fabric and lapse of the nation into sectarian clashes and political infightings. Fanon’s chief insight, thus, is to observe how the concept of the nation is a rhetoric deployed by centres of power in society for the maintenance of their own interests.

In his book *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Edward W. Said emphasises the productive potential of the nation as a powerful resource for uniting the public around causes of the ‘restoration of community and repossess of culture’. Like Fanon, Said emphasises the role of the nation and its ideology (nationalism) in rallying popular support in opposition to colonialism. Both thinkers, however, identify the challenges present in the uncritical use of the rhetoric of the nation. Like Fanon, Said criticises the divisive role of the nationalist ideology, and exposes the exclusionary practices of its leaders: ‘nationalist politics is a politics of identity,’ which ‘turn[s] into doctrine, as if the wish to criticize the myth of white America also mean[s] the need to supplant that need with dogmatic new ones’.

Both thinkers emphasise the betrayal of the people’s dreams through the ideological and political manipulation of the nation, thus recycling the subjugation and oppression of the population. What Said adds to Fanon’s discussions of the nation, nevertheless, is a consideration of the persistence legacy of nationalist thought. Writing about Arab nationalism, Said remarks:

> Lodged at its heart, so to speak, is a complex of hope, betrayal, and bitter disappointment; the discourse of Arab nationalism today carries this complex along with it. The result is an unfulfilled and incomplete culture, expressing itself in a fragmented language of torment, angry insistence, often uncritical condemnation of outside (usually Western) enemies.

Insularity, lack of critical awareness about the causes of internal crises, and the inability to connect with the outside world except through the language of violence are symptoms of the imposition of nationalism on the Arab world. Said’s chief insight, thus, is to

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15 Ibid., p.125.
16 Ibid., pp. 127-129.
18 Ibid., p. 267.
19 Ibid., p. 252.
observe that the nation nurtures separatist identitarian politics that fuels intracommunal strife, sectarian conflict, and political unrest.

The nation also incurs interrogation as an essentially European imposition with subtle implications for countries with a history of colonialism. Questions arise as to the extent to which nationalism is just a duplication of colonialism: ‘The independence of that newly formed state […] may come to be seen as superficial […] because the dominance of the European concept of the nation in the minds of those who led the struggle for independence often meant that newly post-colonial states were closely modelled on that of the former European powers’. In *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (1986), Partha Chatterjee criticises the nation as a derivative discourse of the Western modern paradigm, particularly in relation to postcolonial nation-states, such as India. Chatterjee questions the wholesale adoption of nationalist ideology in the reconstruction of India, particularly in view of the fact that nationalism is borrowed from modernity, the colonial-justifying epistemology: ‘Nationalism produced a discourse in which, even as it challenged the colonial claim to political domination, it also accepted the very intellectual premises of ‘modernity’ on which colonial domination was based.’

The uncritical reliance of anti-colonial nationalist movements on ‘the very intellectual premises of ‘modernity’ ’ implies that nationalism is just a rehash of colonialism. A similar argument is put forward by Leela Gandhi in relation to the derivative nature of nationalism. Gandhi contends that postcolonial India is ‘plagued by anxieties of imitativeness, by the apprehension that Indian nationalism is just a poor copy or derivation of European post-Enlightenment discourse.’

Homi K. Bhabha’s essay ‘DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation’ in his book *The Location of Culture* discloses the incoherence of nationalist representations and thereby dismantles their claims to national unity. According to Bhabha, nationalist representations are fraught with a disruptive ‘double narrative movement’: the ‘pedagogic’ and the ‘performative’: pedagogical narratives are governed by a ‘continuist, accumulative temporality’, performative ones relate to the

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22. Ibid., p.30.
23. Ibid., p.114.
continual rehearsal and repetition of national traditions by individuals.24 While the ‘pedagogical’ represents the fixed, steady, linear movement from past to present to future, the ‘performative’ refers to the variety of individual practices within the domain of the nation. Because of this ‘double’ narrative movement, the discursive strategies of the nationalist narratives are disrupted by ‘conceptual ambivalence,’25 leading to the emergence of different experiences, expressions, and accounts as counter-narratives. The nation, therefore, becomes a ‘site of the hybridity of histories.’26 For Bhabha, the nation is heterogeneous and hybrid by its very nature.

Bhabha’s emphasis on the irreducible diversity of nationalist representations runs parallel to Aijaz Ahmad’s critique of the reductionist approaches to nationalist narratives. Ahmad, in his essay ‘Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the -“National Allegory” - ’, problematises Fredric Jameson’s call for the development of ‘a theory of cognitive aesthetics for third-world literature’ as ‘national allegory.’27 Ahmad questions the criteria for the classification of the world: the First (capitalist) and Second (socialist) worlds are defined in terms of modes of production while the so-called Third World is defined in terms of its ‘experience of colonialism and imperialism,’ ‘externally inserted phenomena.’28 For Ahmad, Jameson’s characterisation of the world is theoretically untenable and is only a reworking of the Orientalist and colonialist modes of knowledge.29 Ahmad also observes that Jameson’s definition of the Third World in terms of its ‘experience of colonialism and imperialism’ gives rise to the political category of the nation.30

What is yet more crucial to Ahmad’s response is the questioning of the dominant tendency (exemplified in Jameson’s argument that ‘all third-world-texts […] are national allegories’) to reduce the rich complexity of national accounts to an all-encompassing ‘metanarrative’ of ‘national allegory.’31 According to Ahmad, nationalism is not a ‘simple some unitary thing with some predetermined essence and value, there are hundreds of

25 Ibid., p. 146.
26 Ibid., p. 169.
28 Ibid., pp. 98-100.
29 Ibid., p. 97.
30 Ibid., p. 98.
31 Ibid., p 103.
nationalisms in Asia and Africa today, some are progressive, others are not’.\textsuperscript{32} That the history of nationalism is diverse in different locations suggests that ‘the ideological conditions of a text’s production are never singular but always several.’\textsuperscript{33} The emphasis on diversity and difference in experiences and expressions in postcolonial nation-states is a strong critique of reductionist understandings of nationalism both from within or without.

Nationalism reworks colonial patriarchy. Gayatri Spivak’s (1988) seminal and much-discussed essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ discusses the dynamics of a subaltern subjectivity silenced by Western paradigms. She addresses the difficulty of finding a voice ‘inside \textit{and} outside the circuit of the epistemic violence of imperialist law and education.’\textsuperscript{34} In her consideration of women’s doubly silenced voices in the wake of colonial rule, Spivak argues that the analysis of power relations in colonial and postcolonial India reveals dramatic and persistent gender inequalities. ‘Both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender sustains patriarchal practices. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow.’\textsuperscript{35} Spivak’s example of ‘Sati’ (widow sacrifice) famously illustrates the ways imperialism codifies and redefines a native practice as a crime, transforming a realm of free choice and power into one of juridical repression. Somewhere in the violent shuttling between tradition and modernity, the female subaltern is silenced. Doubly disempowered, no representation-direct or indirect-can do justice to her condition.

The postcolonial theories and positions discussed above demonstrate the ways in which the concept of the nation masquerades a rhetoric of hegemony. As Fanon and Said after him have pointed out, nationalist ideology reproduces the cultural and political hierarchies that were first established by European colonialism, thereby rending social fabric and fuelling intracommunal conflict. Moreover, postcolonial reinterpretations of

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p. 102.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p. 122.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p. 287.
the nation—by Bhabha and Ahmad, among others—have responded to the reductionist approaches of nationalist representations by emphasising the nation’s contradictions, contestations, and diverse formations. Thus, it is quite obvious that the concept of the nation is marked by an enabling and disabling potential.

**Postcolonial Nationalism**

Complicity between the classification of knowledge and global colonisation is the crux of Edward Said’s thesis, expressed in his seminal study *Orientalism* (1978). As Said explains, Orientalism is a form of knowledge that circumscribes and delimits the East, constructing it in opposition to the West. Said posits that there has been a historically sustained and seemingly well-substantiated difference ‘between the familiar (Europe, the West, ‘us’) and the strange (the Orient, the East, ‘them’). As has been widely discussed, Said identified Orientalism as a discursive activity of Western institutions, which have persistently sponsored research into ‘the East’ with a view to producing and consolidating coherent bodies of ‘knowledge’ about ‘Eastern’ lifeways which have, since the eighteenth century, acquired—and maintained—broad cultural and intellectual authority. Orientalist ‘knowledge’, Said points out, categorises humanity into groups, resulting in the consolidation of power in the hands of a few nations.

Said’s critique of the knowledge-power correlation is elaborated with his interrogations of modern ideology as disembodying human consciousness. In *Culture and Imperialism*, he discusses how modern ideology causes a ‘quite serious split in our critical consciousness’ so that one is made to divorce the aesthetic from the cultural, to separate ‘fiction’ from ‘its historical world’. Said states that modern disembodying of consciousness by giving rise to ‘anachronistic attitudes,’ whereby areas of thought, such as literature, history, science, culture and society, are perceived as isolated entities. Modern disciplinary structures block conversation between fields of knowledge on the one hand, and, on the other hand between knowledge and historical experience. As a result, human colonised consciousness is stunted by various phenomenon, unable to

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37 Aijaz Ahmed’s *In Theory: Classes: Nations, Literatures* (1992) critiques Said’s inconsistency about whether Orientalism a system of representations or misrepresentations. Ahmad also questions Said’s blurring of nonwestern agency in all forms of Third World nationalisms.
40 Ibid., p 216.
connect or critique world events such as the War on Terror. The systematic impoverishment of human critical and creative potential, however, helps safeguard the boundaries of the imperialist empire against assaults from within or without.

Part of Said’s intellectual challenge to the dominant patterns of modernity is devoted to questioning the media’s distortions, particularly in relation to the Arab/Muslim world. In *Covering Islam* (1981), Said posits that the vogue of ‘Islam as traumatic news’ is part of the ways by which world powers maintain their interests. From his standpoint, misunderstanding about Islam owe largely to the widespread rhetoric of reductive and simplistic terms, ‘stigmatizing and heaping invidious abuse on an abstraction called ‘Islam’, consisting of ‘irrational generalizations,’ and emphasizing ‘religion’s inferiority.’ He writes that ‘much of what one reads and sees in the media about Islam represents the aggression as coming from Islam because that is what ‘Islam’ is […] covering Islam is a one-sided activity that obscures what ‘we’ do, and highlights instead what Muslims and Arabs by their very flawed nature are.’ The implication is that the media is a tool of psychological conditioning as well as a strategic agency for propping up dominant powers.

In terms of the effects of culture on the development of postcolonial nationalism, Benedict Anderson in his book *Imagined Communities* (1983) demonstrates how the modern concept of the nation is, at root, a ‘cultural artefact’ which results from ‘the spontaneous distillation of a complex ‘crossing’ of discrete historical forces’. Sometimes, the western modernity puts nationalism in binary opposition with religion by attributing the values of secular modernity, such as freedom, progress, democracy to nationalism and viewing religion as a hindrance to progress. In other words, the emergence of the nation as a political category is an embodiment of the modern imagination wherein the religious is deemed irrelevant.

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42 Ibid., p. xv.
43 Ibid., p. xxxvi.
44 Ibid., p. xxiv.
45 Ibid., p. xxv.
46 Ibid., p. xxii.
Ernest Gellner supports Anderson’s stand on the nature of nationalism when in his book *Nations and Nationalism* (1983), he posits that nationalism is ‘primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit be congruent’.48 Gellner explains, the nation is a product of modernity’s new configurations, such as industrialism and nationalism, which supersede religion.49 Like Anderson, Gellner demonstrates how the nation is a modern construct, which serves as a rhetoric for the consolidation of political visions at the expense of religious traditions, such as Islam. Yet, what Gellner contributes to Anderson’s discussion is a consideration of the role of industrialisation as a catalyst for the imposition of the nation in Western as well as non-western countries. The implication is that the imposition of the nation (especially in non-western countries) ensures the continuance of the hegemony of Western powers on postcolonial states, in particular the Muslim world. In other words, the invention of national symbols and festivals aids in the maintenance of national unity.50

Partha Chatterjee’s attempts to uncover the monologist discourse underpinning nationalist writing in which considerations of race, gender, class, religion or ethnicity are ignored, while a unitary discourse of nationalist sentiment is established as representative of the whole nation.51 Rosemary Marangoly George, in her book *The Politics of Home* (1996), also argues along similar lines when she says that ‘nationalism leads to the interpretation of diverse phenomenon through one glossary, thus erasing specificities, setting norms and limits, lopping off tangentials’.52 In different words, nationalism provides a rhetoric of legitimacy for the totalitarian practices against different voices.53 Roger Owen corroborates it when he notes that the ‘official’ national movement in Iraq in the 1920-1930s took the form of a fascist and totalitarian shape when it tried to enforce its vision of the Iraqi identity and history on the different minorities of Iraq, whereas

49 Ibid., p.41.
50 Paul Gilroy, in *Small Acts: thoughts on the politics of black cultures* (1993), makes a similar argument regarding the construction and maintenance of the nation, stating that ‘through elaborate cultural, ideological and political processes which culminate in [the individual’s] feeling of connectedness to other national subjects and in the idea of a national interest that transcends the supposedly petty divisions of class, region, dialect or caste’ (p. 49).
53 In the same vein, Salman Rushdie considers the postcolonial nation-state as an ‘imaginary homeland’, for the prevalence of what he calls ‘institutional racism’ (p. 136) emphasises that ‘In the new Empire, as in the old, it seems our masters are willing to use the tried and trusted strategies of divide-and-rule’ (p. 138).
historically Iraq did not have a unified identity or history. The implication is that nationalism promotes exclusionary practices that replicate colonial suppression of the masses.

Nationalist narratives privilege men over women, particularly in relation to anti-colonial struggles. ‘In anti-colonial struggles [...] feminist programmes have been sacrificed to the cause of national liberation and, in the aftermath of independence, women have been consigned to their former ‘domestic’ roles’. Representations of the nation as a mother whose modesty is violated by foreign elements: ‘how deeply ingrained has been the depiction of the homeland as a female body whose violation by foreigners requires its citizens and allies to rush to her defense’. The construction of a national people tends to privilege men as the active agents in national liberation and the chief beneficiaries of political and economic power gained through the nationalist struggle.

Thus, postcolonial articulations and interpretations of the modern concept of the nation disclose its enabling and disabling potential. The ambivalent nature of the concept of the nation is suggestive of its complex character that defies simplistic understandings. Yet what is relevant to the present study is the postcolonial emphasis on the concept of the nation-state as a rhetorical construction of high political utility not only for liberationist causes from colonial powers but also for the fascist practices of the ruling classes in newly-independent states. As noted earlier, the rhetoric of the nation is instrumental in the promotion of the exclusive interests of specific groups to the exclusion of the wider sections of society. The exclusionary practices of the elite and the ruling classes is a remodelling of the colonial domination and exploitation of the masses. The nation, therefore, is (and has been) deployed as a façade of neo-colonialism.

This thesis seeks the answers to the following research questions, while investigating the issues of identity and postcolonial nationalism in the novels: How, and to what extent, does discourse presented in the selected novels contribute to creating and

54 Roger Owen, “Nationalists”Positions During the Colonial Period: Ira in the 1920s and 1930s”, in - Al-Qaymiah: Marad al-’asr am Khasasuh?, ed. by Falih Abduljabar (Beirut: Al-Saqi, 1995), pp. (pp. 137-38). -
55 C. L. Innes, in her essay ‘Forging the Conscience of Their Race’, Nationalist Writers’. In Bruce King (Ed.), New National and Post-Colonial Literatures: An Introduction (pp. 120-139). (Clarendon Press, 1996). She elaborates on nationalist writing as a gendered discourse. Do the same above changes here
56 Andrew Parker, et al. (Eds.), Nationalisms and Sexualities (London: Routledge 1992), p. 6. You need to state whether the page you refer their article as they are editors not authors.
hegemonizing exclusion and oppression of Algerian and Iraqi populations? How, and to what end, do Algerian and Iraqi novels explore alternatives to Western modes of modernity in relation to postcolonial identity and nationalism? Is there any cultural fall-out of entertaining Western voices in a pan-Arabic context? What kinds of critical awareness and critical blindness do experiences of postcolonial nationalism contribute to social and cultural formations in a pan-Arabic context? How and in what ways does postcolonial nationalism become oppressive? How is knowledge deployed as a strategic medium for furthering colonialist grip over the rest of the world? How do contemporary Algerian and Iraqi novelists represent local experiences of global phenomenon such as the War on Terror? Is the secular/religious distinction a useful one or does it cause intellectual distortions in discussions about what a Muslim state should look like?

The thesis adopts a comparative approach to investigating the Algerian and the Iraqi novels to seek an answer to the questions above. These two countries have a great deal in common, as both are the countries where Muslims form the majority of the population, both have experienced colonial and postcolonial phases of different durations, and both are participating in ‘War on Terror’. Hence, a comparative approach helped me cross-check the consistency of various colonial and postcolonial phenomena in relation to the issues in question. Furthermore, this approach has also highlighted how the issues in question have been presented and perceived either similarly or differently in Algerian and Iraqi society as presented in the texts. As a result, this work highlights how the people in these two countries perceived their identity as individuals and as nations during various socio-political phases as presented in the selected novels.

In the process, the critical reading of these novels also exposes various subtle discursive processes and practices that created the individual and national identities. Edward W. Said’s postcolonial critique investigates the socio-political themes of identity, nationalism, marginalisation, hegemony, race, ethnicity, and so forth with a view to exposing causes and effects with a critical attitude towards the imperialist and suppressive powers.
The Development of Postcolonial Nationalism in Algeria

In the early decades of the twentieth century, as Rabah Aissaoui demonstrates in his article entitled ‘Politics, identity and temporality in colonial Algeria in the early twentieth century’ colonial Algeria saw profound social, cultural and political tensions during WWI. A political movement known as Jeunes Algériens (Young Algerians) lead by Khaled, started a nationalist movement demanding reforms and more rights for the Algerians. The French saw Young Algerians as proto-Nationalists, as they asserted Muslim brotherhood and Algerian cultural and religious identity and emphasized the need of education in Arabic. The migration of Algerians to France in the early decades of the 20th century also contributed significantly to the Nationalist Movement in Algeria. By early thirties, the number of Algerian migrants in France had reached 85,568. Many of these migrants were nationalists who hoped to return to Algeria to establish a new, independent and democratic Algeria. In due course, this proved true when many Algerian migrants returned to Algeria with a ‘small revolutionary capital’ in the form of new political ideas acquired in France and challenged the colonial order. Some migrants, such as Messali Hadj, organized the Algerian nationalists under Etoile Nord-Africaine (ENA). When agitation became stronger and stronger, the colonialists tried to crush it by arrests, police actions and imprisonments; however, all these measures worked like catalysts inspiring more people to join the unrest. The French communists, who initially helped the freedom fighters, went their separate ways as they found out that Algerian nationalism was rooted in Islam and it conflicted with their secularist agenda.

60 Aissaoui, *Exile and the Politics of Return: Algerian Colonial Workers and Anti-Colonialism in France During the Inter-War Period*. French History, (2011), p. 215. You can refer just to the first part of the article
Three things shaped the Algerian ethno-national identity: firstly, the irreconcilability of North African Muslims’ identity with Frenchness, secondly, the principles of Islam and thirdly, democracy and North African ethnicity and Arabness. The inter-war years saw a great deal of Algerian Nationalist agitation in the form of marches and speeches not only in Algeria but also in France. The surge of nationalism culminated in the 1960s, when various nationalist forces, such as the Mouvement National Algérien (MNA) and the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN), started an armed struggle for freedom leading to the bloody Algerian War for Independence (1954-1962), in which the cruellest face of colonialism was exposed. The common Algerians were caught between colonial oppression and nationalist exploitation -the colonizers killing, jailing, burning villages and brutalizing the colonized, while the nationalists exploiting the public through forced collection of funds, imposition of forced shutdowns and abstention from participating in elections and above all factional conflicts. In France, the Algerian workers joining with other North Africans, Arabs and Muslims had been leading anti-exploitation and anti-racist movements during the seventies and eighties, asserting their identity as Muslims first and then as Arabs and North Africans. Hence it is important because this context will help me understand the role of religion in the assertion of nationalism.

Algerian women experienced the worst crushing effects of colonialism and postcolonial nationalism. During the colonial period, they were captured, brutalized, raped, enslaved and sold by their colonial masters, and since independence, they have been vulnerable to coercion by Islamic nationalists and patriarchs. Despite fighting bravely in the Algerian Freedom struggle alongside men, after their country got freedom, contrary to their expectations of getting more rights and freedom, their legitimate rights, which they already had, were snatched from them by the state through

66 Mahfoud Bennoune, ‘Les Algériennes Victimes de la Société Néopatriarcale’, Une étude socio–anthropologique) - (1999), 154. [if he is the editor ih has to be done in a different way]
legislations such as the Family Code, which was passed under the influence of Islamic Fundamentalists. Despite all odds, Algerian women have been fighting a long battle for identity and equality. Several women organizations such as Collectif 20 ans barakat (20 years is enough!) have been raising their voices against Islamic Fundamentalism that crushes the rights of women’s and unjust laws such as the Family Code of 1984. Therefore, Partha Chatterjee is right when he says, ‘The story of nationalism is necessarily a story of betrayal’, because ‘Nationalism confers freedom only by imposing new controls, defines a cultural identity for the nation only by excluding many from its folds and grants the dignity of citizenship to some because others could not be allowed to speak for themselves’.

The Development of Postcolonial Nationalism in Iraq

Since the focus of my research is on postcolonial nationalism in Iraq as well as Algeria, it would be appropriate to briefly outline the history of the development of postcolonial nationalism in Iraq as I did with Algeria. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War, Iraq was created in 1920 by the League of Nations, when the Ottoman Empire was divided, and Iraq was given to the United Kingdom under British Mandate. Britain placed a puppet monarch on the throne of Iraq and Iraq gained complete independence from the British in 1932. The Iraqi Republic was created in 1958, when the monarchy was overthrown. In early 1968, the Arab Socialist Ba’ath Party captured power, which ultimately ended in 2003, with the fall of Saddam’s regime following the invasion by the United States. After the parliamentary elections of 2005, Iraq has been struggling to establish itself as a strong democracy while facing multiple challenges of sectarianism, ethnic separatism and above all Islamic State.

Iraq, in its short history of one hundred years, experienced British and American colonial oppression as well as different shades of postcolonial nationalism. In post-Saddam Iraq, Iraqis find themselves crushed under various forces of nationalism and colonialism simultaneously. Some believe that ‘postcolonial Iraq’ does not exist, but what exists is a new colony of the United States. In the middle of the split of national interests

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69 Ibid., p. 122.
70 Chatterjee, Nationalist thought and the colonial world: A derivative discourse, p. 154.
71 Ibid., p.154.
and identities, Iraq finds itself in the middle of violence and tension between Sunnis, Shias and Kurds, and in need of quick measures to control fragmentation by introducing inclusive policies.73

Iraq has experienced many upheavals in political as well as in socio-cultural reorientations. Before its formation under British Mandate in 1920, Iraq was a part of the Ottoman Empire, which fell during the First World War. People considered themselves to be Ottoman Citizens in this Muslim majority multi-cultural, multi-ethnic polity, and habitually identified themselves with their religious sect and native place.74 At the inception of the British mandate, pan-Arab ideas were not widespread in Iraq and people considered themselves to be a multi-linguistic, multi-sectarian society without any strong sense of their nationalistic identity.75 The project of forging Arab Nationalism was launched during monarchical Iraq (1920-1958) by Arab nationalist educationalists, who believed in the idea of pan-Arabism. They used the medium of history instruction for instilling a sense of ‘Arab’ identity in the young Iraqi people.76 The Ministry of Education utilized their capacities for preparing curriculum and appointing teachers to imbue a new generation of Iraqis with pan-Arabism ideas. In so doing, Arab ethnicity was celebrated and prioritized over all other ethnicities. As a result, a generation of Arab nationalists emerged in the Iraq of the 1930s and 1940s, which believed in the potential of the Arab nationalism in addressing Iraq’s internal divisions.

After the revolution of 1958, the state funded project of forging a nationalist identity of the Iraqi people continued, although the focus shifted from *Kawmy* pan-Arab nationalism to *watni* Iraqism. The leaders of the revolution, such as Abd al-Karim Qasim, concluded that Iraq’s interests were best served not by the merger of Iraq with the United Arab but by the preservation of its territorial state.77 Thus, in order to alleviate the tide of pan-Arabism which was high following Nasser’s powerful standing the 1956 Suez crisis, Qasim focused on forging a new Iraqi national identity for which he started promoting

pre-Islamic and pre-Arab history and symbols.\textsuperscript{78} To reshape the public’s sense of themselves as an Iraqi nation, Qasim set up a propagandist Ministry of Guidance (\textit{Wizarat al-Irshad}) which worked on rewriting Iraqi history and inventing Iraqi traditions, mostly by replacing Arab Islamist history by the history of Iraqi revolutions and war heroes. By forging an alliance with the Iraqi Communist Party, Qasim could forcefully propagate his agenda of Iraqization against pan-Arabism.\textsuperscript{79} Under the influence of the communists, the folklore and the historical narratives of the marginalized groups received focus for promoting Iraqiness.\textsuperscript{80}

This project of Iraqization suffered a brief set back when Qasim was overthrown by pan-Arabists in 1963 until the Ba’ath party captured power in 1968. The Ba’ath Party’s focus was on creating the New Iraqi Man, who should carry the pride of his country’s glorious history comprising both pre-Islamic history and Islamic Arabism. For this purpose, history was rewritten, and estate-funded researches were carried out in archaeology and history. Iraqi nationalistic history started teaching the public ideas of a common origin of the ‘Semitic’ in the Arabian Peninsula, and, in this way, ‘Mesopotamians’ were seen as ‘Arabians’ and the gap between Islamic and Pre-Islamic Iraqi affliations could be bridged. The political benefit of this move was that Kurd nationalists-the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Communists - the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) were neutralized as their narratives were purposefully erased from the state funded History of Iraq.\textsuperscript{81} When Saddam became the leader of Ba’ath Party, he doubted the sectarian divide between Shias and Sunnis in the wake of the Islamic Revolution of Shias in neighbouring Iran in 1978-1979, which could influence the Shias of Iraq.

Colonialism and postcolonial nationalism significantly affected the identity and status of women in Iraq. It is important to note that Iraqi women participated in the 1920 revolt against the British occupation and later on also participated in nationalist movements. They collected donations, participated in marches and protests, and dressed

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., p. 111. ; Franzén, \textit{The problem of Iraqi nationalism}, p. 226.
\textsuperscript{79} Franzén, \textit{The problem of Iraqi nationalism}, p. 224.
\textsuperscript{80} Davis, pp. 122-23.; Franzén, \textit{The problem of Iraqi nationalism}, p. 226.
in black and wearing veils they shouted nationalist slogans against British imperialism.\textsuperscript{82} They accompanied fighting men, carrying equipment, providing supplies and encouraging their men to fight with poems and cries.\textsuperscript{83} These occasions of nationalist movements helped women establish their place alongside their men in public spaces. In this sense, Fleischmann was right when he said, ‘nationalism was, in many cases, the midwife for feminism in the Middle East’.\textsuperscript{84}

Post-Saddam Iraqi politics saw a great deal of activism which promoted women’s inclusion in government and decision-making progress. It is interesting to note that the 25-member Interim Government Council (IGC) included only three women, and when the provisional Iraqi cabinet was set up, it included only one woman representing a country where the female population is between 55\% and 65\%.\textsuperscript{85} The struggle of the activists resulted in the provision of one quarter of the female population sitting in the National Assembly.\textsuperscript{86} But the fact remains that women have been marginalized and kept away from the corridors of power. Their ‘representation as presence’ did not result in the subsequent ‘representation of ideas’ hoped for by these activists.\textsuperscript{87} In place of gaining new space in Iraqi patriarchal society, women have to struggle hard to save what they already have. One such example is the government’s attempt to abolish Personal Status Law already in force since 1959. If this law is abolished, matters concerning divorce, marriage, inheritance and so forth will be placed in the hands of religious authorities, which is a patriarchal system. Unfortunately, Iraqi women do not expect justice and impartiality from them.\textsuperscript{88}

**Existing Research**

A sizeable corpus of research on postcolonial Algeria, Iraq and the Middle East is available, and it is desirable to review the relevant works to place my thesis in the context. The research on postcolonial Algeria highlights the clash of cultures and identities

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., p. 164.
\textsuperscript{84} Ellen Fleischmann, quoted in Efrati, p. 115.
\textsuperscript{85} Efrati, ‘Women, Representation and Democracy in Post-Saddam Iraq, 2003–10’, *Representation*, 48:3, 253-265, -706977 (2012), [you have to mention the pages of this article] (pp. 253-54).
between the Algerians and the French both in Algeria as well as in France. In relation to this, a few works are worth mentioning. Lucy Brisley underlines the entangled relationship between Algeria and France as presented in Testimony and Relationality in Boualem Sansal’s *L’enfant fou de l’arbre creux*.\(^89\) The same issue from French authors’ perspective has been explored by Fiona J. Barclay.\(^90\) Barclay analyses how writers from metropolitan France have responded to France’s new status as a nation in an era after colonisation. In her analysis, she finds that the French attitude towards North African immigrants is consistently changing and the relationship between them is under strain due to consequences arising from the arrival of a large number of migrant workers from Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco.\(^91\) But it is interesting to note that the French seem to ignore the fact that these workers are there in France because the French are already there in their countries.

In the continuation of this investigation, I will explore how anti-colonial and pro-nationalist sentiments are represented in Algerian literature. Olivia C. Harrison tries to address this issue in Algerian literature. She tries to demonstrate in her brief reading of the works of Anouar Benmalek, Yasmina Khadra and Rachid Boudjedra how the Algerian novels have become a laboratory of trans-colonial imagination in the twenty-first century.\(^92\) She calls this imagination trans-colonial, as ‘it connects heterogenous (post)colonial sites in a critical and comparative exploration of coloniality’.\(^93\) She argues that the contemporary Algerian novel continues to excavate the traces of the postcolonial in order to establish anticolonial sentiment against all forms of colonial rule. But in her brief article she seems to lack consistency in her demonstration of the process by which trans-colonial imagination has been fostered in the selected novels in her reading. Therefore, she has left space for a deeper and wider critical reading of Algerian novels to understand the literary depiction of not only anti-colonial and anti-European sentiments but also the issues of discursive construction and presentation of identity and postcolonial nationalism in these literary sites.

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\(^91\) Ibid., pp. 3-18.


\(^93\) Ibid., p. 102.
A few researchers, such as Sami Zubaida and Johan Franzén, investigate the issue of Iraqi nationalism. Sami Zubaida,\textsuperscript{94} explores various historical factors which influenced nationalism in Iraq in different ways. He reiterates that in Iraq, it is the state that made the nation. He feels that nation does not essentially imply that it has solidarity and loyalty. On the contrary, state factors, such as administration, education employment, military, media and social and cultural organizations, create the facticity of a nation and compel the cognition and imagination of its members. Zubaida\textsuperscript{95} is corroborated by Johan Franzén, who, in his article ‘The Problem of Iraqi Nationalism’ investigates how the Iraqi national identity was shaped and appropriated by various agents including appropriation of history and the use of historical ethno-symbolism.\textsuperscript{96} In order to forge a national identity, various political actors in Iraq have sought to reshape Iraqis’ historical memory. However, these researchers depended on historical facts to establish their thesis and did not consider literary sources to investigate the process of establishing nationalism.

This gap is addressed to some extent by Ronen Zeidel who underlines Iraqi nationalism in the novels of Maysalun Hadi, a contemporary Iraqi novelist.\textsuperscript{97} In Zeidel’s view Hadi’s Iraqi nationalism as promoted in her novels, is a combination of pan-Arab and Iraqi and devoid of sectarianism. Her nationalism can be considered as a new incarnation of pan-Arabism, as it is feminist, pluralistic and, to some extent, secular as far as Shia-Sunni sectarianism is concerned, but it is anti-American with sympathetic attitudes towards Ba’ath and ideological support for Resistance.\textsuperscript{98} However, Zeidel’s research does not represent the literary representation of Iraqi nationalism due to his focus on just one author.

Other researchers explore the issue of Iraqi identity and nationalism from slightly different perspectives. For instance, Jennifer Chandler explores the representation of masculinities in a corpus of eight novels written on the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88).\textsuperscript{99} She underlines the close socio-political dynamics which exists between gender, literature and

\textsuperscript{95} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., pp. 432-33.
\textsuperscript{99} Jennifer Frances Chandler, ‘No Man’s Land: Representations of Masculinities in Iran- Iraq War Fiction’, in (University of Manchester, 2013).
nation. She exposes how masculinity is a complex phenomenon, whose subjects are often empowered and oppressed in equal measures. The issue of identity and nationalism is studied from the angle of the diasporic authors by Assmaa Mohamed Naguib. She, in her PhD thesis, studies the portrayal of home in the novels of Palestinian, Lebanese and Iraqi writers living away from their countries of origin. She argues that home is no longer a fixed notion as its perception gets affected by people’s personal and national experiences, the context within which migration from the traditional home place occurred, ideological allegiances and identity politics. She emphasizes the centrality of the nation as a referent of identity and people’s ideological stance on issues of nation and nationalism.

One major work dealing with the issue of colonialism and nationalism in relation to Kurds has been undertaken by Hawzhen Rashadaddin Ahmed. He investigates selected literary works to expose how the Kurds are inferiorised, marginalised and brutalised as a result of Kemalist, Persian and Ba’athist nationalisms in modern Turkey, Iran and Iraq. This treatment of the Kurds and their homeland represents an Orient within Turkey, Iran, and Iraq where the Kurds have been reduced to subjecthood in the process of nation-state formation. Ahmed’s main focus is on examining the ways Kurdish literary characters are inferiorised and oppressed by inhumane laws of State and the ways they are rendered homeless inside their own countries. He also underlines the literary depictions of nationalist patriarchy and double marginalization of Kurdish women nationalist struggles. Ahmed, to some extent, achieved success in establishing his thesis of colonization and marginalization of Kurds but it is not just Kurds that suffer oppression and exploitation at the hands of colonial and nationalist forces.

It is against this backdrop that this thesis investigates issues of identity and nationalism as presented and perceived in some selected novels - penned by Iraqi and Algerian writers. I investigate four Iraqi and four Algerian novels with a view to exploring the similarities and differences in the discursive creation, assertion and perception of colonial and postcolonial identities and nationalism in - the two countries. These novels

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101 Hawzhen Rashadaddin Ahmed, “Internal Orient’s”: Literary Representations of Colonial Modernity and the Kurdish’ other’ in Turkey, Iran and Iraq’, [Is this an article or a book?] (University of Leicester, 2015).
were selected considering their historical context and socio-psycho-political themes. Consequently, they can be explored as sites of colonial/postcolonial nationalism as they depict the stories of Iraqi and Algerian people against the background of particular historical events. My study contributes to understanding fiction in general and Algerian and Iraqi fiction in particular as potential sites of discursive construction and assertion of identity and postcolonial nationalism, which results in discursively constructed perception of socio-psychological phenomena such as identity, nation, and gender roles.

**Thesis outline**

This thesis consists of four chapters, and each chapter presents an analysis of one Algerian and one Iraqi novel. This is to enhance and enrich the discussion with historical context that sheds light on the effects of postcolonial nationalism on national identity in both countries. Therefore, the thesis investigates eight novels in total divided into four chapters, two novels for each chapter. This means each chapter supports and strengthens the results and findings of the previous chapter’s findings. Each chapter explores different facets of the conflict between the postcolonial and national identity. Accordingly, chapter one, titled ‘A World of Fragments: Assia Djebar’s *Children of the New World: A Novel of the Algerian War* (1962) and Muhsin al-Ramli’s *Scattered Crumbs: A Novel* (2000)*, studies how contemporary fiction explores suffering of colonial subjects of Algeria and Iraq from 1962 onwards. The rationale behind choosing these novels is that both these novels depict their stories against the background of historical events in the History of Algeria and Iraq. While the *Children of the New World* presents common Algerians of a small town caught between resistance against French colonization, *Scattered Crumbs* depicts the sufferings of Iraqis during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) during Saddam Hussein’s regime. On the one hand this chapter seeks to identify a range of challenges presented by contemporary fiction to postcolonial discourses of nationalism in Algeria and Iraq since 1962 onwards. On the other hand, it exposes how these novels have used historical fiction to legitimise nationalist discourse and practice. While *Children of the New World* highlights patriarchy by connecting it to the colonial oppression of the Algerian people by the French, *Scattered Crumbs* parallels male sexual deviance and complicity with the condition of Iraq during Saddam Hussein’s regime.

Djebar’s *Children of the New World* depicts one day’s events (May 24, 1956) in the small town of Blida, where people have been caught up in resistance against French
colonization. The novel retells the stories of Algerian men and women in the throes of the Algerian revolution, foregrounding women’s participation in the struggle, and envisioning the transformative potential of an independent nation for the Algerian population, thereby bolstering the nationalist ‘order of discourse’. This chapter underlines the ways in which the nationalist order of discourse is privileged over other Algerian narratives in the novels and how the revolutionary movement has been used to blur the exclusions and oppressions of the nationalist order of discourse as the hegemonic paradigm. It also critiques the double victimization of women by both the long-inherited patriarchal traditions of Algerian society and the French colonization.

Al-Ramli’s *Scattered Crumbs* retells the suffering of the Iraqi community during Saddam Hussein’s regime through the depiction of the devastating consequences of Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) for a peasant family located in an Iraqi village. State’s nationalist claims have been exposed through a series of tragic incidents including the ‘martyrdom’ of Ijayel’s soldier son Abdul Wahid and execution of Qasim on the one hand and army deserter Saadi’s promotion to high position in the regime due to his homosexual relations with officers on the other hand. Hence it is a counter-narrative that exposes the authoritarian practices of the Iraqi state, which is, nonetheless, a postcolonial construct. It exposes that Saddam’s nationalist claim has brought nothing for the people but war and execution and the likes of Saadi enjoy power and prosperity. There are a range of discursive strategies and argumentation schemes that this fiction utilises in promulgating nationalist ideologies. Not only do these two novels invite reflections on the fate of individual experiences as manipulated by larger power relations, but they also address the consequences of perceiving the world as shattered and fractured, hence the title of the chapter ‘A World of Fragments’. This chapter responds to my main research question: how, and to what extent, discourse can contribute to blocking critical awareness of the exclusions and oppressions of Algerian and Iraqi populations?

Chapter Two, titled ‘Home Colonies: Abdul-Aziz Gramoule’s *Za’eem al-Aqaliyah al-Sahiqah* (2005) and Khadair al-Zaidi’s *Valyoom Asharah* (2015)’ explores the contemporary articulations of postcolonial nationalism through a postcolonial reading of the Algerian Abdul-Aziz Gramoul’s novel *Za’eem al-Aqaliyah al-Sahiqah* and the Iraqi Khadair al-Zaidi’s novel *Valyoom Asharah*. I found these novels suitable for my study because they are historical novels which reflect on postcolonial nationhood and
focus on the misuse of power by elites. Za’eeem al-Aqaliyah al-Sahiqah attempts to expose the great deal of deception, manipulation and despotism that experiences of postcolonial nationalism have engendered. It criticises the misuse of power by the ruling elite for their own lucrative gains at the expense of the Algerian population. Valyoom Asharah depicts the fall of Iraqi cities, especially Mosul, into the hands of ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria). Apart from the depictions of the elite’s exploitation of resources and oppression of Iraqi society, al-Zaidi’s novel captures glimpses of historical ironies wherein the ISIS Caliph Abu-Bakr al-Baghdad in Mosul and the Iraqi President in Baghdad are simultaneously delivering speeches to their respective populations, justifying their own versions of nationalism and seeking to rally them to war, not caring at all about their sufferings. Therefore, in this chapter, I argue that nationalism is an ideology of crisis, which rends social fabric by promoting spurious narratives all in the name of the nation.

This chapter has been titled ‘Home Colonies’ as it attempts to underline how postcolonial nationalism is just an extension of colonialism. In particular, the chapter will discuss the idea that even the rulers have changed, people as in case of Iraqis and Algerians are still exploited, oppressed and crushed by national leaders as the same way as during the time of the western colonisers, hence they are just Home Colonies. This chapter addresses the questions how and to what extent the critical awareness/blindness of postcolonial nationalism contributes to social and cultural formations in a pan-Arabic context? and how do nationalist leaders become oppressors?

Chapter Three, entitled ‘Transformations and Alternatives: Yasmina Khadra’s The Sirens of Baghdad (2008) and Ali Bader’s The Tobacco Keeper (2011)’, explores the new possibilities for critical reflection that contemporary fiction articulates through criticizing the impact of Western modernity on Arab-majority nations in general and Iraq in particular. The rationale for choosing these novels for my study lies in the historicity of these texts and the issues of postcolonial nationalism and identity presented in them. Each sheds light on the War on Terror, American hegemony and national identity The Sirens of Baghdad problematises the impact of the ideology of Western modernity, particularly in the context of the US imperial intervention in Iraq in 2003. The Tobacco Keeper calls for a categorical redefinition of identity through a critique of the nature and usefulness of postcolonial identity formations, particularly in relation to their impact on the Iraqi society at grassroots level.
The chapter, therefore, addresses the issues of how, and to what end, Iraqi novels explore alternatives to the imposition of nationalism. In the process, this chapter critiques the separatist identity politics implied in the dominant ideology of Western modernity in *The Sirens of Baghdad*, underlines the counter-hegemonic discourse in this novel, which aims to foster greater awareness of ‘the new round of coloniality’ behind the façade of the ‘War on Terror’ in Iraq. *The Tobacco Keeper* depicts the gravity of musician Kamal Medhat’s psycho-socio-political predicaments every time he is made to assume a different identity (he assumes the identities of Jewish, Sunni, and Shiite) in order to escape the persecution of the dominant identity-structure.

The triple personality of the novel’s main character, thus, allegorises the problem of identity in Iraq and other Arab-majority nations. The suitability of the title of the chapter ‘Transformations and Alternatives’ lies in the fact that it explores the transformation of Algeria and Iraq under the influences of Western modernism and people’s compulsion of choosing alternatives of fate and identity when they are caught between equally crushing forces of colonialism and nationalism. This chapter, then, explores how, and to what end, Algerian and Iraqi novelists explore alternatives to Western modes of modernity including imposition of nationalism, and how contemporary Algerian and Iraqi novelists represent local experiences of global phenomenon such as the War on Terror. It also considers the cultural fallout for entertaining Western voices in a pan-Arabic context.

Finally, chapter four, titled ‘Borders of Conquest: Rashid Boudjedra’s *The Barbary Figs* (2012) and Ahmed Saadawi’s *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013)’ critiques the Western project of modernity and explores how knowledge is deployed as a strategic medium for furthering colonialist grip over the rest of the world and of how contemporary Algerian and Iraqi novelists represent local experiences of global phenomenon such as the War on Terror. For these reasons, I found these novels suitable for my study. Rashid Boudjedra’s *The Barbary Figs* tackles questions pertinent to the far-reaching implications of the French colonization of Algeria and its consequences to post-independence states of mind. In contrast to the colonial experiences of violence and mayhem, the characters recount pre-colonial moments and the abundant forms of their lives. Ahmed Saadawi received several awards, such as the International Prize for Arabic Fiction for *Frankenstein in Baghdad* in (2014) and also won Le Grand de Imaginaire in (2017). The
novel portrays the destructive potential of fracturing wholes into colliding fragments. The novel highlights the dire consequences of structuring life out of a fragmentary vision that separates it from Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, fictionality from actuality, 19th century from the 21st century, space from time, nature from culture and science from humanities. Such critique of the colonialist enterprises of disintegration runs parallel to Said’s disclosure of the complicity between modern systems of knowledge and imperialist enterprises as catalysts for promoting Western hegemony.

The title of this chapter, ‘Borders of Conquest’, refers to the hegemonic epistemological power structures of Eurocentrism, which categorize human experiences, cultures and histories in accordance with the interests of imperialist discourses. The title, therefore, suggests the need to cross borders of the empire through critique. In this chapter, I firstly address questions of how knowledge is deployed as a strategic medium for furthering colonialist grip over the rest of the world, and of how contemporary Algerian and Iraqi novelists represent local experiences of global phenomenon such as the War on Terror and secondly, whether the secular/religious distinction is a useful one and whether it causes intellectual distortions in discussions about what a Muslim state should look like.

In this way, my postcolonial reading of the eight Algerian and Iraqi novels underlines the way postcolonial nationalism is an extension of colonial oppression in their discursive construction as well as in their oppressive and exploitative practices. The nationalist order of discourse legitimatizes exploitation and use of force behind the façade of War on Terror. The notions of western modernity, such as racial and ethnic superiority and the religious/secular divide, nationalist/anti-nationalist cause intellectual and historical distortions leading to critical blindness, factionalism and public unrest in the same ways as the colonial rulers did by practicing ‘divide and rule’ for perpetuating their cultural imperialism.

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to identify a range of challenges presented by contemporary fiction to postcolonial discourses of nationalism in Algeria and Iraq since 1962 onwards. I argue that the novels examined in this chapter use historical fiction to legitimise nationalist discourse and practice. The novels are Algerian Assia Djebar’s *Children of the New World: A Novel of the Algerian War* and Iraqi Muhsin al-Ramli’s *Scattered Crumbs: A Novel*. While *Children of the New World* highlights patriarchy but connects it with the colonial assault by the French, *Scattered Crumbs* parallels male sexual deviance and complicity with the Iraqi state of Saddam Hussein’s regime. With this in mind, I investigate the ways in which fiction’s discursive reinterpretations of the ‘nation’ as a concept provide fillip to the nationalist order of rule in Algeria and Iraq (and by extension this legitimizes Arab nationalism more broadly in states such as Iran and other Arab-majority nations). The chapter represents a critique of both novels as ideological formations.

In keeping with the theoretical perspectives discussed above, the chapter moves on, now, to consider Djebar’s *Children of the New World* and al-Ramli’s *Scattered Crumbs*. My discussion of the discursive construction of national identity in the novels is also informed by concepts and perspectives from work by postcolonial theorists and thinkers. I draw on Gurminder Bhambra, Arif Dirlik, Toby Dodge, Anshuman A. Mondal, and Pierre-Alexandre Cardinal for their criticisms of the dominant articulations and interpretations of Western modernity, particularly in relation to the nation-state.¹ I attempt to bring a dialogue between different critical voices and the contributions of the novelists in order to discuss how theoretical insights as well as the articulations of the novelists can contribute to our understanding of the nation as a powerful discourse in our times.

¹ Other postcolonial critics and theorists are discussed elsewhere in my thesis.
Children of the New World

*Children of the New World: A Novel of the Algerian War* was written by Assia Djebar (1936-2015), an internationally-acclaimed Algerian woman writer and a staunch defender of Algerian women’s rights. She lived in France and is part of the Algerian diaspora. Born Fatma-Zohra Imalhayene, in the ancient city of Cherchell, she adopted the pen name of Assia Djebar as a manoeuvre to avoid potential criticism that might be levelled at her as a woman writer in Algeria. Djebar wrote more than fifteen novels in French in addition to poetry and short story. Her work includes *Women of Algiers in their Apartment* (1999 [1979]), *Far from Medina* (1994 [1991]), *The Tongue’s Blood Does Not Run Dry* (2006 [1997]), *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* (1985), *Algerian White* (2001 [1995]), *So Vast the Prison* (2001 [1995]). Djebar’s work has been translated into twenty-three languages and has been recognised for its unflinching support for Muslim women’s struggle for emancipation. In 1979 she was awarded the International Critics’ Prize at the Venice Biennale for her first film, *La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua.* She also won the Neustadt Prize for World Literature in 1996 and is often nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature. As a French-Algerian novelist, Assia Djebar was elected to be the first Muslim North African woman to become an ‘immortal’ or life-long member of the prestigious French Academy.

Djebar’s *Children of the New World* takes the form of a chronicle of one day’s events (May 24, 1956) which occur in the small town of Blida. The novel depicts a series of overlapping stories wherein a host of male and female characters are caught up mostly in the process of resistance against French colonisation: Cherifa, a revolutionary’s (Youssef) wife; Amna, an Algerian police officer’s (Hakim) wife; Salima, a schoolteacher and an imprisoned militant; Lila, a university student whose husband (Ali) joins resistance; Hassiba, a militant about to join the revolutionaries; Suzanne, a French intellectual who supports the anti-colonial cause; Touma, a prostitute and an informant for the French police. The novel retells the stories of Algerian men and women in the

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3*Africa Research Bulletin*, Social and Cultural (John Wiley and Sons Ltd, 2015). [is there no author for this]

4 Lynne Rogers,[title of article or a paper]. <https://www.aljadid.com/content/assia-djebar-elected-french-academy-immortal-sycophant-or-courageous-humanist>, [Accessed 21/06/2018].
throes of the Algerian revolution, foregrounding women’s participation in the struggle, and envisioning the transformative potential of an independent nation for the Algerian population. With this in mind, I argue that *Children of the New World* is a national coming of age narrative, which deploys a set of discursive resources and narrative techniques with a view to bolstering the nationalist ‘order of discourse’. To clarify the term ‘order of discourse’, I refer to Fairclough’s book *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (2003). Fairclough posits ‘an order of discourse’ as ‘a social structuring of semiotic difference - a particular social ordering of relationships amongst different ways of making meaning’.¹⁵ He adds: ‘one aspect of this ordering is dominance: some ways of making meaning are dominant or mainstream in a particular order of discourse, others are marginal, or oppositional, or ‘alternative’’. ⁶ Hence, my reading of Djebar’s novel is a consideration of the ways in which the nationalist order of discourse is privileged over other Algerian narratives such as the Berbers’.⁷

*Children of the New World* provides a melodramatic rhetoric of the Algerian situation so as to mobilise the population towards the nationalist discourse and practice. As the story unfolds, the characters are depicted in a state of psychological disturbance, and the female characters, in particular, are shown as doubly victimized by both the long-inherited patriarchal traditions of Algerian society and the brutalising forces of French colonisation:

> In the coolness of their room, the women sometimes don’t move; they grow tense momentarily, eyes wide, staring into space, hearts pounding like those of the children as each imagines her husband up against a wall in the sun at high noon, no doubt shaking with a fear that he must make every effort to conceal. But the wife recognizes it at night, when everything is over, when the mountain once again assumes its arrogant nakedness…⁸

The female victimisation implied in the passage above is a consequence of colonial patriarchy, wherein the wife’s imagining of ‘her husband up against a wall in the sun at high noon’ goes hand-in-hand with her recognition of her own weakness ‘at night […]

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⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Jane Goodman argues that the Berbers have long been denigrated by the state as ‘backwards’ and incompatible with the modern world. Jane Goodman, ‘Dancing toward “La Mixité”: Berber Associations and Cultural Change in Algeria’, *Middle East Report*, (July-September 1996), pp. 16-19.

⁸ Assia Djebar, *Children of the New World*. Trans. from the French by Marjolijnde Jager. (New York: The Feminist Press, 2005 [1962]), p. 3. All further references to the novel are from this edition and will be marked in parentheses.
when the mountain once again assumes its arrogant nakedness’ (p. 3). In this novel the mountains represent an uncolonisable space, where the resistance hides out and prepares to attack. Algerian women’s both fear for, and subordination by, their male spouses, as the quotation above indicates, is presented as an untold tale of anxiety and repression that the novel intends to unfold and highlight as its subject matter. However, as I demonstrate below, the discourse on female victimisation is often a discursive strategy that the novel uses to promote the nationalist order of discourse. The revisionist agenda concerning Algerian women’s grievances is the novel’s discursive practice for promoting a collective, political imaginary of the nation, hence the legitimacy of the nationalist discourse.

Nationalist rhetoric conceals its own exclusions and exercises its own form of patriarchy. Arif Dirlik, in his essay ‘Rethinking Colonialism: Globalization, Postcolonialism, and the Nation’ (2002), demonstrates that the formal end of colonial rule does not entail a radical departure of independent states from the legacies of the colonial experience. ‘Modern colonialism’, Dirlik argues, ‘has bequeathed its own legacies to the present and the future, shaping the historical trajectories of colonizer and colonized alike’.9 The persistence of the colonial legacies that he criticises (in particular the modern nation-state and global capitalism) ‘makes for an exaggerated view of the hold of the past over contemporary realities, and an obliviousness to the reconfiguration of past legacies by contemporary restructurizations of power.’10 Dirlik, therefore, calls into question the nature and usefulness of reworking colonial legacies.

The Algerian war for independence from French colonisation provides the socio-historical context of *Children of the New World*. The novel situates its characters and events within the nationalist struggle (as the discursive event of the novel) against the colonisers, depicting a moment of transition into ‘the New World’ where Algerians, male and female alike, are children of the nation, because they are the first generation to have freed themselves. I argue that ‘children’ is the novel’s chief metaphor, one which is expressed in its title. It stresses that colonial powers treat Algerians as children even though this is the first generation to belong to an independent Algeria. Nonetheless, the use of ‘children’ proves problematic, particularly in the context of not-yet-independent

10 Ibid.
countries, for ‘children’ as a metaphor is often rooted in the colonial discourse, as noted by Gurminder Bhambra in her book *Rethinking Modernity* (2007). Bhambra discusses how the colonial discourse posits India as a ‘child’ in need of ‘a period of colonial tutelage’:

The presumption of historical deficiency was used politically in India to sanction both intervention and the establishment of a period of colonial tutelage […] in which time it was posited that the population would be brought to eventual self-governance. […] Political subjugation and the denial of rights and representation to colonial populations - depicted by liberals as children - were thus seen as appropriate measures in liberal terms, not as problematic ones.\(^\text{11}\)

In light of the quotation above, I argue that Djebar’s discursive construction of Algerian population as ‘Children of the New World’ is a residue of imperial legacy, for former colonies (whether Algeria or India in Bhambra’s commentary) are made to continue their subservience to their colonisers even in post-independence times. This is more explicit in Bhambra’s remarks that the ‘construction of India as a ‘child’’ implies that ‘India was now what Europe had once been and could, it was believed, offer Europeans a glimpse into their own past’.\(^\text{12}\) Like India, Algeria is discursively constructed by Djebar as a mirror image, a passive receptacle. Nonetheless, I shall state here that, while ‘India as a child’ is to justify ‘intervention and the establishment’ of colonial rule, Algerians as ‘Children of the New World’ sanctions the establishment of a nationalist regime. The use of ‘Children’ as an image stresses that Algerians and Indians are made to experience ‘a period of colonial tutelage’ whether at the hands of foreign colonisers or nationalist leaders.

The novel’s melodramatic rhetoric is coupled with an investment in the material conditions of the struggle for Algerian independence. The mobilisation of the public in the novel to authorize nationalist discourse and practice is politically-motivated and is so often achieved through the foregrounding of the revolutionary moment. The novel deploys the revolutionary moment as a discursive event, which helps background, or blur, the exclusions and oppressions of the nationalist order of discourse as the hegemonic paradigm. I argue that the constitution of the revolutionary moment in the Algerian

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\(^{12}\) Ibid.
context around which the novel’s multiple narrative fragments revolve is extremely useful in stressing the notion of the nation as an overarching narrative of resolution of conflict.

By foregrounding the revolutionary moment, the novel creates a collective imaginary, and therefore an illusion of a homogenous nation. In so doing, Djebar’s fiction assists in extending the nationalist order of discourse at the expense of other Algerian narratives and experiences, such as the Berbers’. My critique of the ways in which the novel imagines the nation as a concept (and its nationalist ideology) as a grand narrative is consonant with Bhabra’s call for ‘rethinking modernity’. As she notes:

One effect of establishing an overarching narrative punctuated by moments of transition is that ‘local’ histories are then subsumed to the ideological parameters and periodization of the general framework, be it colonial, nationalist, or Marxist. This has the consequence of effacing the particularity of the histories under consideration and silencing the subjects who constitute them.13

Bhabra shows that singularities of experience and peculiarities of expression are obliterated by means of an overemphasis on the univocal articulations of the dominant power centres in society. *Children of the New World* is an illustrative example of what Bhabra dismantles in relation to the historiography of the nation. The novel’s main concern is to contribute to the construction of a monolithic nation, paying little consideration to the complex architectonic of Algerian society. The centrality of constructing a monolithic nation is encoded in the fictionality of the novel, thus overshadowing all other concerns, considerations, and aspirations of other sections of Algerian society, in particular the Berbers.14

Djebar’s novel positions itself as a transparent medium, documenting challenges of the moment and anticipating its promising prospects for Algerians. As suggested in its subtitle,15 the novel is positioned as a reflection of a one day’s events in the Algerian war

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of independence. This positioning, I argue, is particularly useful in lending an air of credibility to the novel’s rhetorical constructs of a collective present and future under the façade of the nationalist discourse and practice, because it implies historical fidelity.

The primacy of language as a medium consists in its vital role in the construction of the epistemological reality for its users (order of discourse). The power of language as discourse shapes society and socio-political orientations. Taking this view into consideration, it is not surprising to consider *Children of the New World*’s claim to neutrality (in terms of its depictions of the then existing Algerian situation) as a means of establishing an alliance with postcolonial Algerian nationalism. *Children of the New World* as a discourse ‘actualizes and extends the potential within orders of discourse,’ and thereby helps construct specific structures of social meaning. The novel, therefore, advances the ideal of nationalism as the sole or most desirable alternative, to the exclusion of the Berbers.

The novel reflects one day in the struggle for Algerian independence. However, the day’s events do not progress in a linear fashion in the novel. There is neither character development, nor is there a coherent style of narration. Rather, the novel provides a brief description of the characters’ concerns, worries, and hopes through a fragmentary style of narration. Fragments of stories are portrayed, and the novel weaves them all through its focus on the revolutionary moment. Apart from stressing the fractured experiences and volatile conditions under colonial rule, the novel’s narrative techniques help create a sense of urgency and appeal to all Algerians, male and female alike, to adopt the cause of the nation. The construction of the novel, thus, is concerned with providing snapshots of a nation in formation.

*Children of the New World* advocates the cause of Algerian women within the nationalist order of discourse. The most powerful discursive strategy that Djebar deploys in her implicit advocacy of nationalist discourse and practice is the association she establishes between Algerian women and nationalism. The novel subverts patriarchy but connects it with the colonial assault rather than with nationalist patriarchy. The novel

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depicts female characters across a wide spectrum of positions, highlighting their agency and action in the face of colonial patriarchy. However, women’s empowerment in Djebar’s fiction is articulated as gender in transition, which is catalysed by the consolidation of a nationalist consciousness. The novel’s revisionist agenda of Algerian women’s traditional status (as passive and subordinated) often relies on a hegemonic rhetoric, which helps in the reinforcement of nationalist ideology and politics as a potential corrective to past injustices, in particular colonial patriarchy. Moreover, Stuart Hall, in his essay ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’, argues that those who represent and those who are represented are rarely the same.\(^{18}\) Therefore it is possible to argue that Djebar (an unveiled, modern Parisian, and part of a cultural literati) may have her own sense of self as liberated.

*Children of the New World* opens with the demise of an elderly woman named LlaAïcha caused by shrapnel that flies into the inner courtyard of her house (p. 2). The scene illustrates ‘the war’s senseless cruelty, which could reach everywhere and everyone, even the most feeble and the most innocent in the most secure of enclosures’\(^{19}\) The novel stresses female victimisation not just in the context of the ‘Algerian War’ for independence but also in their traditionally-cloistered domestic sphere. This is mainly because women are often presented as victims in war, rather than active agents. As Augusta C. Del Zotto argues, ‘Women’s experiences of war are highly misrepresented’ [which] ‘inadvertently hide many crucial issues that would otherwise improve the public’s understanding of war.’\(^{20}\) Nevertheless, the significance of the opening scene of the novel lies, in part, in providing a melodramatic rhetoric for the Algerian women’s positions as victims of the violence of both Algerian established traditions and French colonial forces. The scene, therefore, foreshadows the novel’s hidden political agenda, that is, a call for changing the existing state of affairs in pre-independent Algeria through joining the revolution and therefore the nationalist cause. Tad Tuleja states:

\[T\]he politically powerless may also have the power to invent, to apply the creative impulse to their own private heritages, and in doing so to keep their own walls vibrantly renewed. Ethnic groups, regional groups, organizational and

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occupational groups, families: all such groups may find themselves creatively utilizing ‘past practices’—both inherently aged ones and deliberately aged ones—as manipulable markers of a common identity.\textsuperscript{21}

Algerian women’s grievances are portrayed in the novel as a shared cause of ‘a common identity’. The ‘manipulative’ rhetoric underlying such a representation relies on the history of long subjugation of women (the ‘usable past’ in Tuleja’s words), and therefore is a tool of psychological conditioning designed to create an illusion of consensus with respect to the nation and nationalist politics.

*Children of the New World* is a narrative of emancipation.\textsuperscript{22} The nation is depicted in the novel as a site for actualising Algerian women’s potential power and fulfilling their long-repressed desire for freedom. The novel’s assertion of the individuality and agency of its female characters is often contextualised in situations pertaining to the revolution and revolutionaries. Amna, a docile housewife taking care of her twin baby boys, is shown to lie to her husband, Hakim who works for the French army, only to save her neighbour Cherifa’s revolutionary husband, Youssef, from arrest. Amna’s transgression of the held boundaries (for this is the first time that she lies to her husband) is made possible only in the context of a nation in the making. In her turn, Cherifa dismantles the patriarchal traditions of her society by going out into the public sphere all on her own in order to warn Youssef and urge him to flee:

She’d forgotten the danger itself. In truth, it’s perhaps not that which drove her, but rather a gnawing desire to suddenly know whether she could really spend her life waiting in her room, in patience and love. That’s why she crossed the entire town bared her presence to so many hostile eyes, and at the end of her trek discovered that she was not only a prey for the curiosity of men—a passing shape, the mystery of the veil accosted by the first glance, a fascinating weakness that ends up being hated and spat upon—no, she now knows that she has existed. (p.143)

Cherifa is made visible by breaking out of the tradition of segregation for the good of the nation. She does this in order to warn her husband about the colonial powers. Cherifa’s act of self-assertion is an embodiment of the transformative effect that her participation


\textsuperscript{22} Enrique Dussel discusses what he calls ‘the myth of modernity’. He states that ‘emancipation’ as a concept is the ‘rational’ aspect of Eurocentric modernity, which, he continues, often conceals an ‘irrational’ one, that is, ‘genocidal violence’. Enrique Dussel, ‘Eurocentrism and Modernity’, *Boundary*, 2, Vol. 20, No. 3, (Duke University Press, 1993), (pp. 65-76), pp. 65-66.
in the anti-colonial struggle could yield: ‘All the violent emotions that had fed her increasingly strained willpower and that had revealed her temperament, pushed her beyond herself’ (p. 143). In light of the quotation above, I argue that, beneath the novel’s depictions of female individualisation (as exemplified by Cherifa in this context) is an emphasis on nationalist ideology as liberationist.

The force of the novel’s rhetoric for promoting of the nationalist order of practice, in part, consists in providing portrayals of female characters with differing subject positions. In addition to the use of multiple narrative fragments as part of its discourse practice as to indicate the volatile situation in colonised Algeria, the novel sketches female characters with dissonant subjectivities and in diverse situations as to create an illusion of consensus among Algerian women with respect to the national cause. Amna and Cherifa constitute a pair of married women – though the former has children while the latter childless – who contribute in their own ways to the lot of the revolution. The novel provides a parallel pair of female characters, who are not married yet, and who are determined to sacrifice themselves in the name of the revolution: Hassiba and Salima. Despite her young age (16 years), Hassiba is shown as so determined to join resistance forces: ‘I want to shed my blood for the revolution… I can walk! Barefoot if need be. I want to walk with the fighters. I want to suffer with the fighters. Night and day…’ (p. 148). Just as Hassiba relinquishes youthful joys for the sake of the revolution, Salima sacrifices her career as a brilliant schoolteacher, who keeps abreast of latest advances in her field of specialization. Salima is arrested by the French police for her connections with a revolutionary, and despite the torture she is exposed to, and she refuses to provide the policy with any information. The novel’s portrayals of Hassiba and Salima as a pair of female characters, I argue, does not just complement Amna and Cherifa as models of female participation in the Algerian war, but also shows the novelist’s concerted effort to endorse a nationalist consciousness and to connect this with an emerging female liberation and agency. This means that Djebar calls for revising the peripheral position of Algerian women in the dominant historiography of the nation, thus, suggests that colonial Frenchness (to Frenchify) is not the solution in her eyes. This call is reflected in the way that her character Touma is shown as being raped by the men’s eyes:

Touma sits at a table in front of a peche melba. […] She likes this place and comes here almost every day-nice and obvious, easily visible to the customers of the café on either side; she can picture how the desire of the men sizing her up grows
sharper from being able to observe her. […] Touma likes being raped in this way by these men […]. (p. 90)

*Children of the New World* draws parallels between complicity with Western colonisation and a degrading form of prostitution. Here Djebar’s novel often ‘actualizes and extends the potential within [the nationalist] order of discourse’

23 through criticizing collaborators with, or coopted agents by, the colonial regime and depicting them as social wrecks with no sense of dignity, decency, or grace. The novel introduces Touma as a foil to other female characters, whose struggle for the revolution (and therefore the nation) is an honourable act worth emulating by all Algerians. Touma is sketched as a licentious character, who indulges in sexual pleasure with French characters, whether in military service or out of it. In the novel, Touma is referred to as ‘An emancipated Arab woman (Yes, with high heels, short skirt, a permanent wave, just like [French] women! And well stacked, too, an enticing little brunette; she could be from Marseille or Arles…)’ (p. 90).

The bracketing of the descriptive words regarding Touma’s outfits, gait, colour, and place of origin is often meant to make concrete the phrase ‘an emancipated Arab woman’. However, I argue that the bracketing here is a technique that the novel uses in order to negate, or question the validity of, the association between the notion of ‘emancipation’ and the superfluous frills placed within brackets. The novel’s use of bracketing in this context serves as an indicator of the negative association between ‘emancipation’, which the novel aspires to contribute to, and blind imitation of, or subservience to, the cultural artifacts of colonial discourse powers. The novel uses the aforementioned bracketing so as to resist colonial impositions, and thereby promote an Algerian national consciousness. It forges Arab nationalism in contrast with European nationalism. Yet, the novel gives no sense of the Algerian reliance on European concepts nor offers any form of internal critique of nationalism. The novel’s chief concern, nevertheless, is to observe that ‘emancipation’ as a concept is rooted in concepts and practices that function in line and affiliation with the nationalist frame of reference.

The moral debasement of Touma’s character is yet strengthened by her role as an Algerian informant for the French authorities. In the novel, Touma is frequently depicted as a total sellout, and her traitorous behaviour invites the contempt of Algerians towards her. Not only does Touma violate traditional codes of morality and chastity, but she also

commits a felony against Algerian anti-colonial nationalism, and, by extension, against the whole project of pan-Arabism. In view of this discussion, it is not surprising to claim that the depiction of Touma as a licentious and traitorous Algerian female character does not only constitute a binary opposition with other female characters (Cherifa, Amna, Salima, and Hassiba as discussed above) but also serves to revere the nationalist cause as so sacred a mission beyond the moral depravity or the self-centred opportunism of a few individuals, such as Touma. The reverential stance that the novel takes towards the revolution (the nation) is, in part, translated into the kind of end wrought upon Touma. She is shot by her own brother, Tawfiq, in a public place nearby a café where people usually sit. The novel’s main point, thus, is to allegorise the betrayal of the nation.

In sum, Djebar’s *Children of the New World* gives an account of a nation coming of age. The novel constructs nationhood and emancipation as going hand in hand. It deploys a spectrum of discursive practices and argumentation schemes (in particular the parallel drawn between patriarchy and colonial assault) and draws upon a set of sociocultural practices in order to ‘actualize and extend the potential within’ the nationalist order of discourse. The materialist critique by the novel of both the patriarchal traditions of Algerian society and the inhuman practices of the colonial rule is oriented towards a discursive consolidation of an Algerian nationalist consciousness. As noted earlier, the novel’s investment in the materiality of the revolutionary moment helps promote a collective and political imaginary in the greater cause of the nation.

Having identified a range of challenges presented in *Children of the New World*, what follows is an investigation of al-Ramli’s *Scattered Crumbs*. As stated earlier, my reading aims to investigate the elaboration of the national narrative in al-Ramli’s novel by identifying the range of discursive strategies that the novel deploys in order to authorise nationalist discourse and practice in Iraq. In a nutshell, my investigation of the discursive strategies of fiction is meant to desediment the political project of literature,
thereby asserting its role in, and relevance to, the discursive formations of other domains and cultural components in society.

**Scattered Crumbs**

Muhsin al-Ramli is a contemporary Iraqi writer and translator based in Madrid, Spain. Al-Ramli (pseudonym of Muhsin Matlak Rawdhaan al-Jaboori) was born in 1967, in Sidairah, a village in the north of Iraq, to a peasant family. He received his primary education in Iraq, and pursued his higher studies in Madrid, Spain, where he was awarded PhD with Distinction in 2003. Bilingual, al-Ramli establishes his name and fame as a reporter for cultural magazines, and a translator of literary and cultural works from Arabic into Spanish and vice versa. He has more than twenty works to his credit, ranging from fiction and drama to story, poetry, and translation. His contributions to fiction include *Scattered Crumbs* (Arabic version published in Cairo, 2000), *Layali al-Kasf al-Sa’eedah* [The Happy Nights of Bombing] (2003), *Tamr al-Asab’* [Finger Dates] (2008), *Hadaa’q al-Ra’ees* [Gardens of the President] (2012). As a dramatist, he presents a number of plays, including *al-Bahth ‘anQalb Hai* [The Search for a Living Heart] (1993), which was translated into Spanish and English in 2007. Al-Ramli was awarded a number of prizes, including Arkansas Prize (2002) for the translated version of his novel *Scattered Crumbs*, Middle East Journal Prize for the Short Story, in London, 1996.

Al-Ramli’s *Scattered Crumbs* is a local narrative, set during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), and elaborated with depictions of the devastating consequences of the War for a peasant family located in an Iraqi village. The novel’s events are narrated by an unnamed narrator, who left Baghdad for Madrid in search of his lost cousin, Mahmud. The search for Mahmud, however, does not constitute the novel’s main story. The main storyline, as the narrator tells us, relates to Mahmud’s relatives, the Ijayel family. The Ijayel family disintegrates due to the disastrous consequences of the War. The conflict arises in the story out of the different views that the father (Ijayel, a staunch supporter of Saddam’s regime) and his son (Qasim, an artist) have over the legitimacy of the War. The novel portrays a range of tragic events that arise from the oppressive practices of the Iraqi state, particularly in the context of the War. The suitability of the novel’s title is established in relation to the tragic events depicted in the course of the War. In the novel, the War grinds the Ijayel family into ‘scattered crumbs’. The death of AbdulWahid (Ijayel’s soldier-son) is shown in the novel to be caused by his gullible belief in the state’s
nationalist claims as regards the War. The imprisonment and execution of Qasim is because of his desertion from the army. The fragmentation of Ijayel’s family shakes his faith in the regime, and leads to his death, too. The novel’s criticism of the authoritarian state is even strengthened through depicting the promotion of Saadi (another son of Ijayel) to a high office. Like Qasim, Saadi is an army deserter, and is imprisoned as well. Yet, Saadi’s homosexual relations with prisoners and the police warden have helped him establish relations and secure a high position in the regime.

*Scattered Crumbs* encourages a reading of its narrator’s reconstruction of the Ijayel family as an allegory of the atrophy of the dominant discourse and practice of Saddam’s regime. The opening scene of the novel yields insight into its political orientation and frames its articulations within a postcolonial context. The presentation of the novel’s events and characters through the narrative fragment of Mahmud’s loss in exile by an unnamed diasporic narrator often places the novel within the terrain of national narrative identity. The novel, written within the diasporic community, addresses the disintegration of Iraq’s social fabric and the fragmentation of its population into ‘scattered crumbs’. In other words, the novel is a narrative which retells the suffering of the Iraqi community in the reign of Saddam Hussein’s regime. The novel’s reconstruction of a historical moment in the life of the Ijayel family (as well as other families, including the narrator’s and Mahmud’s own) is a counter-narrative that exposes the authoritarian practices of the Iraqi state, which is, nonetheless, a postcolonial construct. With this in mind, I argue that *Scattered Crumbs* as a mode authorises nationalist discourse and practice. I demonstrate the ways in which al-Ramli’s novel reinterprets postcolonial discourses of nationalism (in the Iraqi context) as a narrative of liberation from the totalitarianism and dictatorship of the state security apparatuses.

*Scattered Crumbs* is a national identity narrative, which seeks to reconstitute an Iraqi nationalist consciousness through criticising the existing power configurations and resisting a dictatorship. Depictions of the exclusions and suppressions of Iraqi population by the regime agents and collaborators provide the material grounding for the novel’s political critique of the dominant order of rule. However, I argue that the novel fails to extend its political critique to the ‘nation’ as a concept and nationalist discourse and practice. My critique, nonetheless, is resonant with the discussion of the ‘nation’ as a

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26 Madrid is the mainstay of al-Ramli.
concept by Anshuman A. Mondal, in Nationalism and Post-Colonial Identity: Culture and Ideology in India and Egypt (2003). Mondal provides a useful discussion of the complexity of the ‘nation’ as a concept:

[…] nations must be seen as discursive formations within which many competing ideological positions concerning the ‘idea’ of nationhood must polemically converge in order to attain a ‘hegemonic’ position. They do so in relation to other articulations of nationhood, either by supplementing them, or by attempting to erase them. Any given ‘enunciation’ - whether a novel, or a political tract - must therefore be interpreted within this ideological context. The specific relation of a novel and a political tract to the political field may not be equal or uniform, but they are both nevertheless situated in the discursive terrain of nationalism and will thereby occupy particular ideological positions within it.27

Mondal’s criticism of reductive and simplistic articulation of nationhood is mirrored in my critique of postcolonial Iraqi nationalism, especially as articulated and reinterpreted in al-Ramli’s novel. The novel does not just rely on artificially-reductionist approach to the ‘nation’ as a concept but promotes a one-sided discourse (nationalist), thereby marginalising other Iraqi experiences and expressions, and denying the transnational complex of Iraq’s social and cultural formations. As will be discussed at length below, the imagining of the nation in the novel is fraught with inbuilt-contradictions, of which the Saddam’s regime (the novel’s target) is a product of the history of Iraq’s nationalist configurations. In other words, the novel attempts to expose the enormity of the tragic conditions of Iraqis’ lives during Saddam’s reign; yet, the novel envisages the possibility of transformation only via a renegotiation of nationalist discourse and practice within the frame of nationalism.

Scattered Crumbs presents itself as a reflexive discourse. As indicated in its subtitle ‘A Novel’, the work acknowledges its own constructed nature. The acknowledgement of its own fictionality is often an artistic manoeuvre, which helps safeguard the text (as well as the novelist) against charges that might be levelled by the Iraqi state. The fact that al-Ramli might wish to hedge himself against potential criticism by foregrounding the artifice of his own fiction has a considerable degree of probability,28 since state and intellectuals are often at loggerheads. Amatzia Baram, in Culture, History

28 Linda Hutcheon’s notion of ‘historiographical metafiction’ – though relevant in this context – is discussed in greater detail elsewhere in my thesis.
and Ideology in the Formation of Ba’thist Iraq, 1968-89, notes: ‘The symbiosis between the regime and its artists has not been a voluntary one. An artist who wishes to stay in Iraq and create has little choice but to tow the official line.’29 It is, nonetheless, possible to argue that the novel’s subtitle helps stress its own perspectival angularity. Lynne Rogers reviews Scattered Crumbs, and states that: ‘This brief novel begins as a satire of life in an Iraqi village under an anonymous yet easily recognized dictator and offers a poignant self-examination of impotency and exile. Unlike many novels that deal with the despair of exile, ‘Scattered Crumbs’ never loses sight of the horrific conditions in a lost homeland.’30 That is to say, the novel is an act of retelling of a specific story about a certain family from a particular point of view. In so doing, the novel is presented as a medium, which merely reports events and reinstates facts as they happen. Because it is historical fiction that it refers to real events and is a reliable, historically-rooted comment on real world events.

The Iran-Iraq War constitutes the context in which Scattered Crumbs establishes its characters and incidents. Historically, the Iran-Iraq war was utilised by the state apparatuses to consolidate Saddam’s regime in the name of the nation. The Iran-Iraq War was also promulgated by the Iraqi mainstream media as Qadissiyat Saddam, thereby linking the war to the defeat of the Zoroastrian Sassanian Empire by Arab Muslim forces in A.D. 664. In addition, the Iran-Iraq War was waged at a time when Iraq’s political, economic, and military power was at its height. Toby Dodge’s essay ‘From Bully to Target: Iraq’s Changing Role in the Middle East’ provides useful insights into Iraq’s earlier position.31 In this essay, Dodge argues that the 2003-US invasion of Iraq was designed ‘to eradicate the Ba’athist regime, and to curtail the autonomy that Iraq had accumulated since 1968.’32 Iraq, he continues, was able to stand in front of the international community from 1990 till 2003, precisely because of the ‘political and

32 Ibid., p. 181.
economic autonomy’ that Saddam’s regime had developed domestically and internationally.\textsuperscript{33} He writes:

Politically, the state controlled by Saddam Hussein had brutally broken the majority of organised resistance to it. On the economic front, the nationalisation of its oil industry allowed the regime in Iraq to reap the benefits of the 1973-74 oil price rise and use this new-found wealth to build a coercively dominant state that became a major driver of regional instability from 1980 onwards.\textsuperscript{34} Such powerful resources, Dodge explains, have enabled Saddam’s regime to ‘invade Iran in 1980 and carry on an eight-year war, invade Kuwait in 1990, and withstand 13 years of the harshest sanctions ever imposed upon a state by the international community.\textsuperscript{35} In view of this discussion, I argue that the choice of the Iran-Iraq War as the animating incident in \textit{Scattered Crumbs} is a discursive strategy designed as a reminder of the tragedies visited upon Iraqis as a consequence of the oppression of the state. The appeal to the collective memory (which is part of the novel’s sociocultural practice)\textsuperscript{36} of Iraqi society, therefore, is a tool of psychological conditioning that the novel avails itself of, particularly in the context of its discursive reproduction of the nationalist imaginary.

\textit{Scattered Crumbs} unravels the duplicity inherent to the claims of Saddam’s regime to the nation, particularly in relation to the Iran-Iraq War. The novel identifies itself as enmeshed in the atrophies of the Iran-Iraq War, and thereby lends a certain degree of credibility to its critique of the Iraqi state. In trying to foreground the disastrous consequences of the War, the novel interrogates the state’s claim to the national interest and articulates such a critique by means of a mutually-exclusive structure of views expressed by characters. Qasim/Saadi distinction provides one of the schemes for the articulation of the novel’s critique of the state, particularly in discussions on the national rhetoric of the state in the Iran-Iraq War. As the novel’s unidentified narrators tells us:

Two months before his execution in the middle of the village square, Qasim explained his desertion to me as we stood on the bank of the Tigris…. From what he said, I recall that he rejected the war root and branch because it did not suit his artistic inclinations, because war was a farce he did not savor. As for Saadi, as always when asked his opinion about anything from the taste of tea to war or

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p. 181.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p. 194.
\textsuperscript{36} Fairclough, \textit{Critical Discourse Analysis}, p. 10.
religion, he would say, as do so many, either ‘This is a nice thing,’ or ‘This is not a nice thing.’ I used to call these ‘womanish’ or ‘haremish’ critiques. And when I wanted to affect preciosity, would add, ‘The only critical expressions in the Dictionary of Criteria of Feminine Criticism are ‘Nice’ or ‘Not nice,’ ‘I like it’ or ‘I don’t like it’.37

The grounds that Qasim adduces for his oppositional stance towards the Iran-Iraq War reflect not just a high degree of rational reasoning and an analytical methodology to the crisis of the nation but also an understanding of the manipulative rhetoric of the state in waging the War in the first place. However, the questioning of the nature and usefulness of the Iran-Iraq War is very cautiously expressed via the narratorial constructedness of memory and history, as suggested in the quotation above. The ‘ungenerizable subjectivism of memory and history’ (to borrow a phrase from Neil Lazarus)38 is suggestive of the self-reflexive mode of the novel, and therefore its claim to the poetics of modernity. In contrast to such rigorous reasoning and narrative strategy as embodied by Qasim and the novel itself) are set the haphazardly-articulated views by Saadi. Saadi, depicted in the novel as a lackey to the state, is shown to have neither take nor say in relation to the War, and to stand for a feminised deviant masculinity. Saadi’s deviant views, as the narrators has told us, nonetheless, are shared by ‘a million other people’, a phrase that could be interpreted as ‘the masses’, which is a colonial hangover, for it is a sweeping generalization that does not pay attention to singularities of experience.

The discursive reconstruction of an Iraqi nationalist consciousness in Scattered Crumbs is largely predicated upon articulations of binaristic relationships between the state and the nation.39 The novel’s bi-planar scheme of argumentation privileges the ‘nation’ as a concept at the expense of the state, a materially concrete, and embodied entity. Research, nonetheless, shows that dualistic frameworks often cause demonization of the other.40 Dualistic thinking, I argue, promotes stereotypes, and thereby causes alienation within society. I demonstrate that the novel’s binaristic thinking with regards to nationalist identity discourse is a rehash of colonial schemes of knowledge production,

37 Muhsin Al-Ramli, Scattered Crumbs: A Novel (University of Arkansas Press, 2003 [2000]). (pp. 34–35). All further references to the novel are from this edition and will be marked in parentheses.
which often lead to social and political hierarchies and stratification. Nonetheless, the normative primacy of the ‘nation’ as a concept (and therefore nationalist discourse and practice) in the novel’s discursive practice crystallises in drawing parallels between male sexual deviance and complicity with the Iraqi state. In the novel, Qasim is executed by the authoritarian regime when he refuses to participate in a war that he considers morally unjustifiable. Like Qasim, Saadi is an army deserter, but is admitted into the fold of the state as Head of the League of the Leader’s Beloved. The novel makes clear that Saadi’s sexual deviance is his key to a high-ranking position. His experiences of passive homosexuality and rape are not a cause of disgust and punishment; rather, they are the prerequisite for admission into the state. The novel’s emphasis on the disgraceful nature of Saadi is even articulated through the narrator’s own account of his molestation by Saadi:

I was younger than Saadi and playing with him distracted me from sleep and the sun until he took me aback by touching to my testicles. This startled me, and I backed away until I was cornered against the water tank invisible in the dark corner. Meanwhile Saadi’s face remained expressionless, a static picture as it were, an oafish smile and dead features. […] He whispered to me, ‘Don’t be afraid. I want us to play the chicken and cock game, the bride and groom, the goat and the ram, the dog and the bitch, the donkey and the she-ass. (pp. 63-64)

The narrator’s reconstruction of the story cited above, I argue, helps reinforce the novel’s criticism of the state of Saddam’s regime. The passage above reflects the novel’s equation of the dictator’s state with sexual deviance. This means that the nationalist rhetoric is founded on heteronormativity and the exclusion of homosexuality. This indicates one of the novel’s exclusions and, by extension, a potential exclusion of Iraqi nationalism itself. Nonetheless, just like Touma in Djebar’s *Children of the New World*, Saadi provides al-Ramli’s novel with the means of questioning the moral integrity of the dominant regime. Both novels draw parallels between complicity with the hegemony French colonisers in Djebar’s novel, Saddam’s regime in al-Ramli’s novel and perceived sexual immorality. Yet, the depictions of male rape of Iraqi prisoners by the police officers in al-Ramli’s novel is even more psychologically-forceful than Djebar’s portrayals of female prostitution. Al-Ramli criticises the state as being mired in non-normative acts of violence, in particular male rape in prisons. However, we can gain a better understanding of al-Ramli’s position through historicising the use of tropes of male sexuality in Iraqi fiction.
Melissa Murdock, in her essay ‘A Thousand and One Photographs: A Discussion of Abu Ghraib and the Orientalist Homoerotic’, yields particularly useful insights into the ways in which the binary of heterosexuality and homosexuality are part and parcel of the modern legacy of conceptual categories.\textsuperscript{41} Murdock argues that ‘heterosexuality,’ is the defining focus of modern civilization, strength, power, and normativity. As modernity, identity, subjectivity, and sexuality all fold into and stem from such a circle, ‘homosexuality’ will always be associated with all things opposite: barbarism, weakness, vulnerability, and deviance.\textsuperscript{42} She substantiates her argument with evidence derived largely from the Abu-Ghraib where prisoners were tortured, forced to stand stark naked, and were subjected to sexual humiliation. As she notes, ‘the homoerotic flesh of the Orientalist object is reduced to a function of play and humiliation.’\textsuperscript{43} Murdock stresses that ‘homosexuality’ as a notion is often evoked in discussions about the ‘encounters of ‘East’ and West’, particularly in the context of ‘calamities of colonialism, race, sexuality, and nation.’\textsuperscript{44} With Murdock’s perspective in mind, it is arguable that Scattered Crumbs provides a material manifestation of the oppression of Iraqis by the state security apparatuses. The inhuman torture of Iraqi prisoners during Saddam’s regime is replicated in Abu-Ghraib. However, I argue that al-Ramli’s the reliance on modern notions, in particular homosexuality and heterosexuality, particularly in his depictions of the ‘calamities’ of the ‘nation’ does not illuminate as much as it mystifies Iraqi consciousness. The discursive strategies of Scattered Crumbs come in what Peirre-Alexandre Cardinal calls ‘the Orientalist mode of operation’.\textsuperscript{45}

Cardinal, in his essay ‘Ontologicidal Violence: Modernity/Coloniality and the Muslim Subject in International Law’ demonstrates that the European experience of modernity (in particular the formation of nation-states) is imposed on the world as the exclusive solution to its problems. Cardinal argues that Muslim-majority countries seeking to attain modernity and recognition on the international level have to ‘follow a certain pattern that replicated the European experience’,\textsuperscript{46} which he calls ‘the Orientalist

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., p. 18.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., p. 18.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., p. 103.
mode of operation’.47 This ‘mode of operation,’ remarks Cardinal, is ‘the translation of Orientalist biases in legal variations that misrecognize and thus create the Orient, inscribing international law into the project of modernity/coloniality.’48 With this perspective in mind, I argue that al-Ramli’s *Scattered Crumbs* is often informed by Eurocentric terms and concepts. The novel operates within ‘the Orientalist mode’, which is particularly evident in terms of its articulation regarding the state/nation distinction. In addition, Cardinal’s tracing of the intellectual origins of dichotomous structures and his reflections on their implications have topical relevance to my critique of al-Ramli’s novel’s discursive rearticulation of nationalism as a rehash of the European experience of modernity/coloniality. Cardinal writes:

The cannons of eighteenth and nineteenth century European sciences articulated such a bias, notably found in anthropology in the opposition between the modern and the traditional. This dichotomy opposed Western democracy and Oriental despotism and enshrined the underlying essential opposition of the West and Islam, making the latter’s ‘backwardness’ determined by the former.49

In view of Cardinal’s commentary above, I argue that the articulation of the state/nation distinction in al-Ramli’s novel reworks Eurocentric binaries, in particular ‘the modern and the traditional’ and ‘Western democracy and Oriental despotism’. In the novel, portrayals of the Iraqi state as founded on deception, mired in corruption, and ruled by oppression are Orientalist tropes, or rhetorical constructions, founded on colonial rhetoric. It is also important to state that it was the West which instituted Saddam in the first place, and that Saddam’s regime operates within ‘the nationalist paradigm’ (to borrow from Ulrich Beck).50

The investment of al-Ramli’s novel in the materiality of the Iran-Iraq War involves a consideration of its fatal consequences, particularly in terms of the human cost. In addition to depictions of the state’s execution of army-deserters such as Qasim, the novel demonstrates that the state’s nationalist rhetoric for the War works up popular sentiments and mobilises crowds to join the army. The narrator’s retelling of the Ijayel family as being fractured and ground by the War includes a reference to the loss of one member of the family:

47 Ibid., p. 103.
48 Ibid., p. 103.
49 Ibid., pp. 103-104.
Among all of Nationan Ijayel’s sons, Abdul-Wahid alone supported the war effort and complied with the orders of government to the smallest detail. He participated in most offensives until he was ‘martyred fighting for the homeland, dignity, dominion, honor, glory and soil’ as his father would say, parroting the phrases of the TV, the radio, the district police chief, and the village party head. (pp. 35-36)

One of the aims of the novel is to make evident that the War was waged by the Iraqi state in the name of the nation. Abdul-Wahid is portrayed in the excerpt above as being deluded and bamboozled into sacrificing his life in defence of ‘the homeland, dignity, sovereignty, honour, glory and soil’. The term ‘Nationan’ cited above derives from the national language that is sanctioned and promoted by the state and its institutions. The term, being mispronounced by Ijayel, the father of the family, is suggestive of the development of a vernacular language, which divides the society, thereby excluding others, in particular the Kurds. In this regard, Ofra Bengio in her seminal work *Saddam’s Word: Political Discourse in Iraq* states that ‘Unlike an Iraqi identity, an Arab one denies the separate character of the Kurds, who are ethnically and linguistically non-Arab’. The Kurds were not allowed to use their own language (Kurdish) as social identity and were forced to use Arabic language during the period of Saddam’s regime. Nonetheless, CDA theorists Ruth Wodak, Rudolf de Cillia, Martin Reisigl, and Karin Liebhart, in *The Discursive Construction of National Identity* (2009 [1999]), demonstrate that national identity is at roots a discursive construction, arguing:

> If a nation is an imagined community and at the same time a mental construct, an imaginary complex of ideas containing at least the defining elements of collective unity and equality, of boundaries and autonomy, then this image is real to the extent that one is convinced of it, believes in it and identifies with it emotionally. The question of how this imaginary community reaches the minds of those who are convinced of it is easy to answer: it is constructed and conveyed in discourse, predominantly in narratives of national culture. National identity is thus the product of discourse.

The production and reproduction of discursive constructs such as nation and nationalist identity in fiction and through the media turns the imagined into a real in the realm of beliefs and convictions. The novel suggests that Abdul-Wahid, Ijayel, and many other

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Iraqis are mobilised mentally by the state and its apparatuses only to serve the geopolitical interests of Saddam’s regime. The novel’s chief insight, however, is to observe the fallacious rhetoric of the nation and the national cause as being deployed by the state and its institutions.

The nation is a site of conflict. In light of the discussion above, I argue that, central to the argumentation schemes of Scattered Crumbs is a consideration of a struggle for power between what the novel presents as the dominant state and a section of the Iraqi society exemplified in Qasim’s conflict with his father, Ijayel. While Ijayel is depicted as a specimen of the state (patriarchal power), Qasim is shown to stand for an intellectual brand of dissenting voices. Each has a categorically different understanding of what the nation ought to be like. Each imagines the nation differently, and each conducts his life according to his own ‘order of discourse’. The struggle for the nation is a struggle for meaning, or as Fairclough put it, for ‘the social structuring of semiotic difference.’

The novel’s critical position as regards the ‘nation’ as a concept is anchored in Qasim’s opposition to the dominant discourse. Despite its claim to objectivity and transparency as suggested in its subtitle, the novel produces a counter-narrative to the state’s narrative by means of a range of literary devices, and discursive constructions. On the one hand, the novel’s depictions of the ‘scattering’ of Ijayel family interlock with images of the father as losing power, and growing silent till his death, thus symbolizing the declining grip of the state. On the other hand, Qasim’s refusal to submit to his father as ‘the leader’ overlaps with the state as to military conscription and participation in the Iran-Iraq War. The novel seeks to disillusion Iraqi consciousness of the state’s dominant rhetorical constructs, and so to encourage dissent. As Fairclough writes:

A particular social structuring of semiotic difference may become hegemonic, become part of the legitimizing common sense which sustains relations of domination, but hegemony will always be contested to a greater or lesser extent, in hegemonic struggle. An order of discourse is not a closed or rigid system, but rather an open system, which is put at risk by what happens in actual interactions.

The possibility for bringing about a change in existing asymmetrical power relations hinges upon ‘what happens in actual interactions’. In view of this discussion, it is possible

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53 Fairclough, Analysing Discourse, p. 207.
54 Ibid., p. 208.
to argue that, the anti-state stance of the novel is often implied in an iconoclastic gestures towards patriarchy. The novel’s opposition to the false claims of the state, therefore, does not translate into a creative, or novel, act of imagining as much as it calls for a change from within the nationalist paradigm. Having, thus, identified and analysed the discursive strategies, argumentation schemes, and their means of realisation deployed in *Scattered Crumbs*, it is quite clear that the novel as a mode authorises nationalist discourse and practice. The novel reinterprets postcolonial Iraqi nationalism by means of depictions of the calamities visited upon a rural family by Saddam’s regime. The novel relies upon the state/nation distinction as well as a selective event in Iraq’s modern history (Iran-Iraq War) in both dismantling the state and refashioning the nation (and therefore nationalist discourse and practice). Binaristic modes of characterisation, and a discursive investment in the material consequences of the War are the novel’s main schemes of argumentation. The correlation established between male sexual deviance and complicity with the state oppressive apparatuses is the novel’s discursive practice for exposing the alienating, dislocating, and immiserating effects of the state’s discourse and practice. The novel’s chief concern, therefore, is to perpetuate nationalist discourse.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated the ways in historical fiction is here used as a vehicle for legitimising nationalist discourse and practice. It has identified a range of discursive strategies and argumentation schemes that fiction utilises in promulgating nationalist ideologies. My investigation has shown the extent to which discourse can contribute to blocking critical awareness of the dominant paradigm’s exclusions and oppressions of Algerian and Iraqi populations. My analysis and interpretation have been largely guided by the theoretical insights of postcolonial theory. This conceptual framework has proved extremely useful in helping me identify the subtle ways in which discursive constructs (fiction) can operate as an extension of the dominant order of discourse in society. The framework has been used in the analysis and interpretation of both novels to criticise another order (colonialism and dictatorship). I have found this complementary approach to meaning particularly useful in deepening my literary analysis and asserting its relevance to lived and felt experiences.

In this chapter, *Children of the New World* has been critiqued as enforcing a narrative of national identity. Using the insights of postcolonial theories and concepts, I
have demonstrated that the novel legitimises a unified form of discourse through an investment in the materiality of the revolutionary moment. The novel deploys a range of discursive strategies, which provide fillip to the rhetoric of collective identity and social solidarity in the name of the nation. The positioning of the novel as a reflection of a single day’s event in the Algerian war for independence incurs interrogation, and an examination of the message of the medium ensues, substantiated and contextualised. The advocacy of Algerian women’s rights in asserting their role in the revolution is problematised and interpreted as Djebar’s most powerful means for reinforcing the legitimacy of the nationalist discourse and practice. In other words, the novel’s discourse practice consists in highlighting patriarchal traditions in Algerian society as well as connecting it with the colonial assault. Nonetheless, the association that the novel establishes between Algerian women and the nationalist order of discourse relies on a dichotomous structure between the present grievances of Algerian women and the future promises of national independence and freedom. The novel’s depictions of female victimisation serve as a foil to female individualisation as crystallised in Algerian women’s participation in the revolution. *Children of the New World*, therefore, is a narrative of emancipation.

Al-Ramli’s *Scattered Crumbs* authorises nationalist discourse and practices through criticising the totalitarian state during Saddam’s reign. The novel’s depictions of the crisis-beset situation in Iraq are often premised upon a state/nation dichotomy that the novel promotes in its discursive reconstruction of the nationalist order of discourse. The novel’s critical position on the state/nation binary is explicit particularly in terms of the parallels it draws between male sexual deviance and complicity with the state apparatuses. The novel’s investment in the material and intellectual conditions of Iraqis within and without the country romanticises the ‘nation’ as a concept and provides fillip to the nationalist order of discourse. Even though *Scattered Crumbs* provides depictions of the oppression of Iraqis by nationalist leaders (Saddam’s regime), the novel’s alternative, nevertheless, is restricted. The novel’s re-imaging of the nation is a rehash of the modern nation-state that had been imposed by British colonialism.

The problematic of the ‘nation’ as a concept is often caused by reliance on a static frame of reference. By bringing into dialogue *Children of the New World* and *Scattered Crumbs*—though published 38 years apart—I have been able to identify the critical positions that they take vis-à-vis postcolonial discourses of nationalism in Algeria and
Iraq respectively. Both novels are local narratives elaborated in specific discursive events and embedded in larger conflicts. Both novels are articulated as counter-narratives to patriarchal traditions, colonial oppression, or totalitarian regimes. Both novels present themselves as mediums for providing life-like situations and events. For both novels, the ‘nation’ as a concept is the key to salvation, and therefore nationalist discourse and practice is the fulfilment of the promise of tomorrow.

Postcolonial discourses of nationalism are often replications of the dominant paradigm of modernity/coloniality. The criticism that I have drawn upon in my analysis and interpretations of *Children of the New World* and *Scattered Crumbs* has identified a range of challenges presented by contemporary fiction, particularly in relation to the modern nation-state. The novels’ reliance upon the ‘nationalist paradigm’ in their discursive (re)constructions of nationalist discourse and practice in their respective contexts has imposed certain limited on their visions. The novels are governed by the ‘Orientalist mode of operation’\(^\text{55}\), with the result that intellectual creativity, or novelty, is blocked. In other words, the unproblematic articulation and reinterpretation of the ‘nation’ as a conceptual category often causes intellectual distortions that mystify people’s perceptions and blur awareness of the unspoken exclusions and inhuman practices of the dominant order of discourse. Ulrich Beck criticises the referential methodology that postcolonial discourses follow with respect to what he calls ‘the nationalist paradigm’:

> As prisoners of methodological nationalism, we do not understand Europeanization, we do not understand the new global meta-power game. We do not understand that the nation-state legitimacy of social inequalities is being challenged to its core by universalized human rights, we do not understand the ‘global generation’ and its transnational fragments, and so on.\(^\text{56}\)

Like all discursive fields, the common assumptions which govern analyses of nationalism have hitherto imposed certain limits. It is not surprising then to argue that the conceptual imprisonment of postcolonial discourses of nationalism as implied in Djebar’s and al-Ramli’s novels has constrained the efficiency of such discourses. This understanding is further reinforced by the fact that both novelists are Western-educated intellectuals, and that both novels were written within the diasporic community, in part, accounts for the

\(^{55}\) Cardinal, ‘Ontologicidal Violence’.

mimetic nature of their discourses. Dirlik’s call for ‘rethinking colonialism’ is consonant
with my critique of the ways in which pan-Arab and postcolonial discourses of
nationalism in the context of Algeria and Iraq (and therefore Arab-majority nations) need
to be rethought.

Throughout this chapter, I argue that the uncritical reliance of postcolonial
discourses on the conceptual categories and schemes of European modernity/coloniality
is evident particularly in terms of articulations and reinterpretations of the project of
nationalism itself.\(^{57}\) In so doing, postcolonial discourses of nationalism blocks awareness
of the exclusions and oppressions of alternative narratives, such as the Kurds in Iraq, and
the Berbers in Algeria. Postcolonial articulations of the ‘nation’ as a concept (and
therefore nationalism as an ideology) block intellectual creativity. I demonstrate that the
continuance of power discourses in Arab-majority nations is caused, in part, by the failure
of postcolonial discourses of nationalism in empowering alternative narratives that not
just expose inbuilt-contradictions of postcolonial discourses of nationalism but also prove
their productivity at the grassroots levels of society.

In conclusion, *Children of the New World* and *Scattered Crumbs* operate as
extensions and indicate the modern legacy of Eurocentrism, and an embodiment of the
processes of acculturation. As my readings of the novels have made it quite clear, in both
novels there is no elaboration of the wider implications for the imposition of the ‘nation’
(and therefore nationalism) on Algerian or Iraqi population. Rather, the novels function
as thoughtless replications of modern articulations of the nation-state. The artificially-
reductionist approach to the ‘nation’ as a concept in both novels does not just turn a blind
eye to the singularity of Algerian or Iraqi experiences and expressions but assists in
reinstating the colonial legacy of social and political hierarchies. Both novels ‘encode the
logic of the centre’ (to borrow an expression from Lewis McLeod),\(^{58}\) and therefore seek
to legitimize nationalist discourse and practice.

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\(^{57}\) Partha Chatterjee is a pioneer in revealing the conceptual dependence of postcolonial discourses of
nationalism on modern/colonial conceptual categories. See his classic book *Nationalist Thought and the

\(^{58}\) Lewis MacLeod, “They Just Won’t Do, You Know”: Postcolonial Discourse and Evelyn Waugh’s
Having investigated the extent to which fiction as Fairclough indicates as ‘a form of knowledge’ and therefore a participant in the ‘social construction of reality’ remains within the framings of pan-Arab and postcolonial discourses of nationalism, it is not surprising to claim that radical transformations at the intellectual and material levels in Arab-majority nations are almost impossible. The reliance on the epistemological and ideological models of Western powers of imperialism often signifies that neocolonialism would continue to function, especially behind the façade of the nation-state. The discussion of such claims constitutes part of the next chapter’s critical exploration of the articulations of contemporary fiction, particularly in relation to Algeria and Iraq as modern nation-states.

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59 Fairclough, Critical Discourse Analysis, p. 18.
Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to explore contemporary articulations and interpretations of fiction in relation to postcolonial experience at grassroots level. The chapter’s discussion focuses primarily on the kind of critical awareness and/or critical blindness that postcolonial nationalism contributes to social and cultural formations in a pan-Arabic context. In this chapter, I consider the Algerian Abdul-Aziz Gramoul’s novel *Za’eem al-Aqaliyah al-Sahiqah* [Leader of the Overwhelming Minority] and the Iraqi Khadair al-Zaidi’s novel *Valyoom Asharah* [Valium 10]. *Za’eem al-Aqaliyah al-Sahiqah* aims to foster critical awareness of the transformative potential of self-representation, particularly in relation to the anguish and agony that Algerians have incurred all in the name of the nation and nationalism. Originally, the selected two texts were written in Arabic languages. However, the important sections of these selected texts were translated by me into the English language.

Gramoul’s novel attempts to reclaim an Algerian voice by means of a critique of the misuse of power by the ruling elite. *Valyoom Asharah* interprets the fall of Mosul (Iraqi city) into the hands of ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) as an allotrope of the historical errors that have characterised postcolonial Iraqi nationalism. Al-Zaidi’s novel’s depictions of the ISIS Caliph in Mosul and the Iraqi President in Baghdad is a metaphor which shows the disunity that nationalism promotes. With these perspectives in mind, I argue that these novels show that nationalism is an ideology in crisis, one which perpetuates the colonialist practices of fragmenting invaded societies, distorting histories, and depleting economic, cultural and human resources. I also intend to explore the alternatives or transformative visions that the fiction proposes in order to redress grievances and injustices committed in the name of the nation.

Rawatib Almwataa [The embezzlement of the dead salaries] (2015) and Musahat Franz Fanon [Frantz Fanon’s Sanatorium] (2016). He has been awarded many prizes, in particular the National Prize. Chairperson of ‘Harakat al-Wataniyeen al-Ahraar’ (Free Nationalist Movement), Gramoul’s critical stance towards the maintenance of the status quo in the Algeria situation has caused him many problems.60 According to Algerian journalist Saleema Malisi, Gramoul’s early criticism has so inconvenienced the high authorities in the FLN (National Liberation Front) that he was suspended from his job as a journalist several times.61 However, Gramoul’s oppositional position on the state of affairs, Malisi points out, has popularised him to the extent that ‘he is a pyramid in the eyes of many people, a pyramid of Algeria’s pyramids, he is the man of letters, the politician, the struggler for rights, and the staunch opponent of the regime’.62 Likewise, Balkabeer Bo median states that Za’eem al-Aqaliyah al-Sahiqah is shocking for its courage to address the politically banned in Algeria, making visible the often hidden or masked, in a direct language. ‘The novel,’ he notes, ‘reveals the malady in our society by exposing the deception of the ruling class and disclosing the policies of kings and presidents that help them ensure their continuance in power and authority’.63 I argue that the King in the novel is a personification of the ruling group, the National Liberation Front (FLN). For Bo median, Gramoul’s novel is not meant for providing pleasure to its readers, but rather requires a great degree of concentration and intellectual reflection.


60 Interview by al-Khair Shoar on Al JazeeraTVhttp://www.aljazeera.net/news/cultureandart/, [Accessed 22/06/2015].
62 Ibid.
the new novel is a renaissance project, which requires the assistance of those interested in the literary field more than of institutional patronage.65

Integral to the analysis of each novel is a review of relevant literature. I draw on critical assumptions and formulations advanced by postcolonial critics such as Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm, and James McDougall.66 Yet, the main theoretical focus of the chapter is grounded in critiques offered by a galaxy of contemporary thinkers and critics from the Arab-majority nations: Algerians Mohammed Arkoun and Lahouari Addi, Iraqis Harith Hasan al-Qarawee and Saad Mohammed Rahim, Moroccan Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, Syrian Hashim Saleh, Syrian-Lebanese Adonis. These thinkers have unearthed the residues of colonialism in the dominant patterns of nationhood in the Arab-majority nations, in particular a tendency to replicate the social and political hierarchies that were first established by European colonialism. I therefore bring the critical voices into dialogue with one another and investigate the extent to which the novels’ articulations about the contemporary experience of nationhood (particularly in relation to Algeria and Iraq) confirm and/or contradict the perspectives and theories reviewed in the chapter.

**Za’eeem al-Aqaliyah al-Sahiqah**

*Za’eeem al-Aqaliyah al-Sahiqah* criticises postcolonial Algerian nationalism as a form of rhetoric, which maintains interests of the ruling elite, to the exclusion of other sections of society. Key to the novel is a consideration of the ways in which nationalist ideology enables the articulations and practices of a specific group in society (the leader and his overwhelming minority) to suppress and exploit the vast majority of Algerians. The novel’s events and characters are introduced by the omniscient voice of the King who has been in power for fifty-five years. He discloses how ‘tax collection’ is the primary task of a real king, and how failing to pay tax by any individual leads to his or her demise: ‘No Dinar moves from one pocket to another without levying my tax, no oral agreement is struck between a bastard and another without my percentage, no commodity gets out of its store without paying off my zakat [payment of alms in Islam] in it’.67 In his memoir

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65 Ibid.
66 Elsewhere in my thesis I use theories and concepts from Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Aijaz Ahmad and others.
67 Abdul-Aziz Gramoul, *Za’eeem al-Aqaliyah al-Sahiqah* [Leader of the Overwhelming Minority] (Algeria: Casbah Editions, 2005), p.53. All further references to the novel are from this edition and will be marked in parentheses.
as the novel tells us, the King confesses to his division of Algeria into ‘kingdom of night’ and ‘republic of day’; liquidation of his enemies; fabrications of identities, corporations, festivals, and the nation itself; and his own criterion for the selection of high rank officials-lechery, lust for money, and shrewdness in devising ever new ways for milking up the cash cow of the Algerian society. The insatiable slack for material currency and the abuse of power by the King and his corrupt coterie are the major highlights of the novel.

The structure of the novel is an allegory of the regime’s systemic coercion. The narratives provided by the King are organised in such a way that each chapter of the novel is devoted to a specific issue, with illustrative examples and situations. Each chapter begins with a thesis statement by the King, which he goes on elaborating coherently by providing concrete examples. As will be discussed in greater detail below, the King delineates his arguments in a voice of a sovereign authority who holds together the various threads of the nation in so relaxed and academic a manner. Robert Malley, in *The Call from Algeria*, writes about the Algerian history as told by the FLN (National Liberation Front) is a ‘systematic organization and interpretation of events in order to imbue them with meaning, to replace their seeming arbitrariness with irresistible logic […] as part of a single, coherent historical phenomenon.’ Malley’s remarks about the FLN account for the structural cohesion and thematic coherence that characterise the King’s memoire, and therefore the King is a personification of the FLN.

In my engagement with *Za’em al-Aqaliyah al-Sahiqah*, I argue that nationalism is an ideology of crisis, because its primary function is to help the ruling class accumulate wealth at the expense of the Algerian population at large. In what follows, I intend to demonstrate the ways in which postcolonial Algerian nationalism does not bring about a radical transformation in the material structures of society, but aids in the escalation of internal crises and adds to the miserable conditions of Algerians. Accordingly, I grapple with the major highlights of the novel, examine how they relate to the Algerian situation, and bring Gharmole into a dialogue with other critics and thinkers.

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Fascist Ideology

The critique of postcolonial Algerian nationalism is articulated in *Za’eeem al-Aqaliyah al-Sahiqah* through a consideration of the ways in which the nation and nationalism provide the context in which specific historical narratives come to represent post-independence Algeria. The well-known Algerian thinker Mohammed Arkoun states:

I learned through the Algerian war of liberation how all revolutionary movements need to be backed by a struggle for meaning, and I discovered how meaning is manipulated by forces devoted to the conquest of power. The conflict between meaning and power has been, is, and will be the permanent condition through which man tries to emerge as a thinking being.  

The foregrounding of certain narratives, as the quotation above indicates, is suggestive of their institutional existence and legitimacy, of which other tales or stories fall short and therefore are relegated to the margins of the mainstream culture. I argue that Gramoul’s novel confirms Arkoun’s observation by means of an artificially-reductive approach to Algeria as a nation with a rich, complex historical formations. The novel takes the form of a fabulated memoir of the King of Algeria, wherein he gives an unreflective account of his schemes for seizing absolute power over Algeria-visions, strategies, tactics, classifications, machinations, and conspiracies. The aim of the memoir, as the King states, is ‘to pull into my hand the parts of my kingdom, to touch its boundaries, to take pride in stipulating the hellish ways of my rule, and finally to see the extent to which my hand can go’ (p. 10). The implication is that Algeria since independence in 1962 has been single-handedly ruled by a fascist regime that has devised ‘hellish ways’ in order to ensure its durability. I argue here that the autobiographical approach to the writing of the novel provides an allegory of the fascist regime that nationalist discourse aspires to univocality.

Univocal articulations characterise the dominant patterns of nationalist ideology. The monologic style of Gramoul’s fiction provides a subtle critique of the way in which post-independence Algeria has been ruled through the imposition of one-dimensional visions that characterise authoritarian regimes, in particular colonialist ones. The opening lines of the novel are key to an understanding of how French colonialism of

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Algeria was supplanted by another fascist regime operating under the rhetoric of the nation:

I was the King of Algeria and its suburbs. I ruled my kingdom with power and frivolity. I walk through the streets, bragging with my crown on my head and sceptre in hand. My guards surrounded me, two ahead of me to make way for me while other two watching my back against grudges of the envious. People stampeded to get blessed by kissing my hand, and gifts and prayers garlanded my path. And when I anchored in a restaurant or bar, my subjects raced against each other in order to cater for my needs... I was the wealthiest with my force and licentiousness, nevertheless, they were willing to pay for my desires. (p. 7)

The imperialist tone in which the speaker introduces himself as ‘the King of Algeria’, ‘the wealthiest with my force and licentiousness’, ‘with my crown on my head and sceptre in hand’ is suggestive of the unquestioned status of the ruling class, and therefore the superficiality of the rhetoric of deliverance and democracy. As the passage above indicates, ‘power and frivolity’ are the strategic tools of the regime, so are the state’s security apparatuses its safeguards. Still, the most powerful critique is articulated in the King’s statement: ‘people stampeded to get blessed by kissing my hand, and gifts and prayers garlanded my path.’ Algerians’ over-reverence for their leaders indicates the absence of public awareness of their exploitation and subordination by the ruling class, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the little weight that nationalism as an ideology for liberation has at the grass-roots levels.

Postcolonial Algerian nationalism is a rehash of French colonialism. James McDougall, in his book *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria* (2006), demonstrates the ways in which the practices of the ruling elite in Algeria are a ‘self-refashioning’ of ‘the barbarisms of the [French] empire’. The atrophy of postindependence Algeria, as the argument indicates, is a result of the reliance of the nationalist leaders on the French models of governance. According to McDougall:

nationalist discourse in colonial Algeria was a new kind of ‘practice imposed on things’, a new disciplinary order, changing the structures of thought about and practice of Islam and ‘Algerian’ culture and history, and imposing on them a new ‘principle of their regularity’. [...] In this, though, it was not the expression (again) of some Algerian pathology, but rather the repercussion, mediated through and

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taken up in the self-fashioning practices of Algerian themselves, of the impact of colonialism’s own relentless modernity.\(^{72}\)

The reliance of the nationalist leaders upon the ‘disciplinary order’ of ‘relentless modernity’ that was imposed on Algerians by French colonisers recycles the oppression and exploitation of the Algerian population at large. As McDougall remarks above, the replication of the imperialist ideology subverts ‘the structures of thought about and practice of Islam and ‘Algerian’ culture and history’, and thereby helps nationalist leaders ensure their continuance. The suggestion is that it is a matter of urgency to critically rethink the existing modes of governance; a reconstitution of the laws and rules of governance in accordance with the unique needs of Algerians may produce better possibilities of living and thinking. In light of the quotation above, the King’s one-sided interpretation of Algerian history since independence is an imposition and a falsification of history which has a long, colonial pedigree. Nonetheless, I argue that the novel’s depictions of how nationalist leaders pass off gross injustices as successes aim at laying bare the underlying assumptions of the established order, and thereby identifying its cracks and contradictions.

**Rhetorical Constructs**

The fragile ground of nationalist articulations is evident particularly in terms of its reliance upon invented practices and traditions as sources of cultural capital and therefore strategic safeguards for the established order. *Za’een al-Aqaliyah al-Sahiqah* demonstrates the ways in which leaders invent and utilise a set of rhetorical constructs that help them sustain power and self-interest. The construction of institutions, parties, the press, and even crises is part of the modernisation framework of the Algerian nation that help to lull them into complacency and submission to the articulations and dictates of the dominant power. As stated in the novel by the King: ‘It is but natural that the democratic governments invented in our times are to bamboozle naïve citizens’ (p. 12). In the extract provided below, the King makes explicit the duplicitous nature of modern rhetorical constructs:

> Of course there are several ways of treatment by these pills either through education, political sermons, state-TV programs, local development projects; or through importing big values like democracy, which shoots bullets at people in the streets, transparency, which forges elections long before their due time, and

\(^{72}\) Ibid., p. 8.
freedom of expression, which turns out to be old ladies bumbling on the edge of toilet pool. (p. 125)

Modern ideals (e.g., democracy, transparency, freedom of expression) and institutions (e.g., education, political sermons, state-TV programs) are described above as ‘pills’ of ‘treatment’ prescribed to an ‘ailing’ Algerian society. The image of Algerians as stricken with illness, and in a desperate need for counselling is part of the hegemonic rhetoric that imperialist powers strive to promote in order to justify their interventionist politics and thereby secure their own geopolitical interests. What is at stake, I think, is a whole web of institutionally-governed concepts and practices that aids in blocking awareness of the exclusionary practices of the dominant paradigm (Algerian nationalism in this context).

Gramoul’s dismantling of rhetorical constructions such as the nation, development, and democracy is reminiscent of critiques of modernity, the nation-state, and nationalist traditions as postulated by seminal thinkers such as Benedict Anderson. Anderson, in his book *Imagined Communities* (1983), argues that the nation is ‘an imagined political community,’ where individuals share with one another a ‘deep, horizontal comradeship.’ Nationalism, he continues, is an ideological construct which relies on abstract concepts to provide accounts of the nation as a self-evident unity of a people with a common shared experience and cause. Nevertheless, I think Anderson would very much agree with Gramoul’s interpretation of postcolonial Algerian nationalism that this is all ineffective, and that it is a construction. Still yet, Gramoul’s novel suggests the inadequacy of ‘imported’ solutions to the complex history of Algeria’s unrelenting problems. In addition, Gramoul’s critique of the nation and nationality runs parallel to McDougall’s. In ‘After the War: Algeria’s Transition to Uncertainty’, McDougall questions the nature and usefulness of modern inventions in contemporary Algeria:

> Algeria is not a dictatorship and its regime is not monolithic, but neither has the multiplication of electoral options delivered a transition from the top-down rule of bureaucratic technocracy to one of real political alternatives arbitrated by sovereign popular decision. Nor has the bustle of onstage political business visible

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74 Ibid., p. 7.
75 Ibid., p. 7.
from the spectators’ gallery challenged the seniority of the real deciding powers backstage and in the wings.  

As the passage suggests, modern systems development have been appropriated and instrumentalised by the ruling class to their own self-interests. In fact, McDougall makes this point clearer by pointing out that ‘[t]he functions of elections, as every politically savvy Algerian on the street knows full well, is to effect a periodic redistribution of shares among the majority stakeholders.’ The ‘majority stakeholders’, or the ‘overwhelming minority’ in Gramoul’s novel, thus, are the sole beneficiaries of all sorts of mythmaking, inventions, and nationalist traditions.

Mythmaking is crucial to the functioning of nationalist regimes. The King’s abovementioned depictions of Algerians as stricken with illness and of modern inventions as ‘pills’ of ‘remedy’ are further substantiated with yet another characterisation: ‘It is commonplace that all modern governments have counselors, planning offices, and academic expertise in the manufacturing of illusions that are to be fed into the starving peoples’ (p. 124). The pathologically-disturbed Algerian society, as the King tells us, is a miniature of independent communities, who ‘starve’ in anticipation of ‘illusions’ of development and democracy. In other words, the King’s mock autobiography implies that democracy, development, and independence are concepts of management and containment. Discussing ‘the persistent exclusion of more serious alternative contention’ in contemporary Algeria, McDougall remarks:

These, notwithstanding real disagreements and very real rivalries, are nonetheless essentially superficial, and beneath them is an underlying consensus. After the war, the primary concern of the consensus is the return to a manageable political and social status quo ante. And with recovered stability goes the business like acceleration of those aspects of neo-liberal economic reform that can coexist with the entrenched interests of monopoly importers and keep afloat the bubble that sustains the enrichment of the already rich.

The passage indicates the persistence of the residues of the colonial structures in postcolonial Algerian nationalism. Like Gramoul, McDougall interrogates the usefulness of modern nations and institutions in redressing the grievances of Algerians. McDougall’s

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77 Ibid., p. 39.
78 Ibid., p. 38.
79 Ibid., p. 39.
critique of the ‘superficiality’ of modern inventions as ‘bubbles’ that do not help bring about tangible changes at grass-roots level coincides with Gramoul’s reiterated assertion of the ideologically-motivated and politically-driven applications of modern schemes of democracy and development. The implication is that the ‘invention of traditions’ (to borrow Eric Hobsbawm’s terms)80 is in essence an artifice for the sustenance of the politics of status quoism.

The critique of postcolonial Algerian nationalism in Za’eem al-Aqaliyah al-Sahiqah involves a consideration of opposition as yet another rhetorical construct of the establishment. Gramoul’s novel depicts how the opposition parties are of the King’s own invention, which ‘gives an air of legitimacy to the government that I will set up later’ (p. 119). As McDougall remarks: ‘The logic of the system is that of a factional political class having absorbed competition along party lines as the expression of its own divisions.’81 McDougall suggests that the ruling party quills genuine opposition by enabling the establishment of factions of the regime’s own design. Opposition, in other words, is a coopted agent of the ruling regime. The artifice and unreliability of opposition parties is depicted in the novel by showing how the King of Algeria selects Batool as leader of opposition, a drunkard who attracts others towards him with his funny talks. The King describes the behaviour and conduct of the leader of the opposition party as follows:

Bin Batool was like a grocery store, which sells every customer whatever commodity he wants. This gains Bin Batool a lot of customers, who started to pay him fees for membership in his party, the Party of Hope as he calls it!...He even goes to the extent of distributing beggars in the streets of the republic of day to collect charity from the sentimental and sinners in order to fund his illusory programs… and once seeing a heap of currency rising in front of him, he took pride in his power and licentiousness … He shut the grocery, and took to the marketplaces, announcing to people the arrival of a new prophet named hope. This new prophet would liberate them from the state of the corrupt, and would provide each citizen with a house, a job, a wife who produces children for him…and he would put an end to bribery, bureaucracy, and sale of productive positions, and…and…and throw the ruling band into the litterbin of history. (p.122)

The passage captures important glimpses of the hollow rhetoric of nationalist leaders, especially opposition leaders. Apart from the fact that the opposition party is the King’s own invention and tool for the reinforcement of his own rule, the passage exposes the

hidden agenda of opposition, that is, material investment by means of a melodramatic rhetoric. Bin Batool’s ‘Party of Hope’ is an extension of the practices of the King’s ‘kingdom of night’; both are inventions designed for the accumulation of wealth at the expense of Algerian population. The novel’s aim, thus, is to stress the need for fostering societal awareness not just of the complicitous relationship between opposition and government but also of the serious consequences of blind conformity to the rhetorical constructs of the artifice of power.

**Separatist Framework**

Nationalism is a separatist ideology rooted in identity politics. The force and meaning of the novel’s critique of nationalism emanate largely from its portrayals of the far-reaching implications of social stratifications for the healthy status and structural cohesion of Algerian society. As the King reveals in his memoir, ‘From the outset, I divided my kingdom into two sections, the kingdom of the night wherein I assume absolute authority, … and the republic of the day in which I do not often intervene but to protect my kingdom and increase my power and frivolity’ (p. 11). Quite apart from the fact that the nuts and bolts of the Algerian nation-state are designed by and operated in accordance with the will of the King and in gratification for his lust for ‘power and frivolity’, the privileging of the ‘kingdom of night’ implies that the ‘republic of day) is politically non-existent: ‘Life is distributed into two strata: the day-stratum which just moves the money and yet is contended with bread, water, and some soup and toil…and the night-stratum which rearrange the currency into its iron accounts so as to enjoy its protection and blessing’ (p. 18). I argue that the King’s distinction between the ‘kingdom of night’ and the ‘republic of day) is a reworking of the colonial binary of metropole and colony. In *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (2006), Todd Shepard writes: ‘In Algeria, as elsewhere, decolonization now appeared as wholly consistent with a narrative of progress—the ongoing extension of national self-determination and its corollary values: liberty, equality, fraternity and the Rights of Man—that had begun with the French Revolution’.82 The King’s bi-planar modelling of Algeria, therefore, is a reenactment of the imperialist logic of ‘divide and rule’, and the cultural and political hierarchies that were established during European colonialism.

A radical break with the past is a salient feature of the nationalist politics of Algeria. Gramoull’s novel’s critique of nationalist reinscription of Eurocentrism is articulated through a consideration of how obliteration of cultural memory is crucial to the articulations and practices in Algeria’s postcolonial experience. The novel exposes the hollow rhetoric of the King for his insistence on the erasure of memory. As the extract below shows, the King holds to the view that the obliteration of memory is crucial not just for the proper functioning of the state’s institutions but also for a pragmatic understanding of what it means and takes to be a human being of sense and sensibility to present needs:

The human being is not a past, nor a future, but a present…a present only without dimensions or a priori assumptions…the human being is the one standing right here…moving…working…paying taxes…flirting around with a passerby woman…inadvertently pick pocketing another person..this is the present… but those, as I tell my subjects, who live by the fruit of ancestors or intangible dreams, they hit their beds hungry. (p. 95)

The passage indicates the extent to the struggle for meaning in post-independence Algeria is deeply intertwined with the struggle for power. Implied in the passage is a schematic knowledge which delinks the human being from all his or her background history, ancestral traditions, or ‘filiations’ (to borrow a term from Edward Said). The dismissal of associations with the past is justified by the King as necessary in order not to let ‘historians and archaeologist’, for whom the past is ‘a profession out of which they make their living’, ‘spoil the joy of human beings by reminding them about their disgraceful past’ (p. 98). In light of the quotation above, I argue that the King’s espousal of divorce with the past and obsession with the present forecloses on questions of history, identity, and agency, for it tends to inhibit active participation by denying categories of analysis and interpretation other than the ones devised and adopted by the dominant paradigm. In other words, nationalist ideology is so fixated about its present status as the dominant structure that it fails to recognise the value of other structures and categories of meaning, such as the past and the future, in the reconstitution of Algerian society in the aftermath of the French colonisation.

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83 This point was discussed earlier, particularly with reference to the Algerian thinker Mohammed Arkoun.
Malika Rahal, in her essay ‘Fused Together and Torn Apart: Stories and Violence in Contemporary Algeria’, sheds light on the significant place of the past in the Algerian popular imaginary, arguing that ‘the past still weighs heavily on the present and remains largely unknown, with a (possibly much fantasized) potential for disruption of present political life if secrets were to be revealed.’ Rahal demonstrates how Algerian independence marks a divorce with the past to the extent that there is a ‘dearth’ of literature on the Algerian experience of the post-independence period. The reasons she provides to account for the ‘scarcity’ of historical writing on post-independence Algeria relate largely to the restrictions imposed by the FLN. As she notes: ‘In Algeria, the version of events developed by the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) regime turned into an official history imposing a one-dimensional and linear narrative of the nationalist past.’ However, Rahal’s discussion of the history of contemporary Algeria as artificially reduced to the nationalist narratives of the FLN provides a context and explanation for the King’s univocal articulations and teleological narrative about his self-made Kingdom of Algeria as depicted in Gramoul’s novel. As the King states:

The problem with kings is their past. The more the king is concerned with the past, the more his steps are stuck in muddied grounds… The past is more like old shoes that one wears so that people will not say he walks barefooted… But that old belief that regards one with no past as one with no future is but an illusion used by fathers so that we do not deny their favour. (p. 95)

The suppression of the past, as the passage above indicates, is a top priority on the agendas of dominant postcolonial nationalist leaders. The image of the past as ‘old shoes’ is suggestive of a tendency in the dominant circles to reduce moral values and inherited traditions to disposable objects that have sheer temporary use. In light of the quotation above, the deceptive rhetoric embodied in the King’s words is evident particularly in relation to his emphasis on filial gratitude is ‘but an illusion’. The King’s attempt at disenchantment with the past is part of his rhetoric to safeguard his kingdom, for the past holds a haunting spectre (‘The problem with kings is their past’) that might have the potential to unsettle the status quo by ‘revealing’ ‘secrets’ that would otherwise remain hidden from public consciousness. Both Rahal and Gramoul dismantle the dominant version of Algerian contemporary history as bracketed within the nationalist struggle for

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85 Ibid., p. 119.
86 Ibid., p. 120.
independence. I also argue that the framing of Algeria’s history to the FLN’s heroic revolution and its success in 1962 is a form of intellectual distortion that blocks awareness about the exclusionary practices of the dominant power discourse. As will be discussed in greater detail below, Gramoul’s critique of the dominant erasure of cultural memory provides yet a greater understanding than Rahal’s perspective could offer. The novel’s chief insight is to observe how the reverence of the nationalist leaders for the narrative of independence is an extension of the reverence of the dominant patterns in modern historiography for the colonialist experience as the universal time framework for the history of the world. The novel’s chief insight, however, is to observe that the divorce with the past is in essence a rhetorical construct, which reinstates the separatist identity politics of imperialist discourses by means of a coerced reiteration of nationalist narratives, thus framing cultural production and ensuring social conformity.

The Ruling Mafia

Concealment of Algeria’s post-independence history is a strategic safeguard for the maintenance of power within a specific circle. Za’em al-Aqaliyah al-Sahiqah demonstrates the extent to which postcolonial Algerian nationalism is an extension of colonial practices not just in terms of the geopolitical remapping of Algeria, the racial discriminations among its population, or the erasure of public memory but also in relation to the fate of the entire nation. Nonetheless, I argue that the novel’s critique of the way the regime operates in Algeria extends to involve a consideration of the history of the ruling elite in order to suggest the enormity of the Algerian predicament in the reign of a mafia network. In his talk about the role of binary opposites in the rise and fall of kingdoms down the centuries, the King says: ‘A dreaming man from the down roads of history comes up to accomplish his ambition and exercise his influence like a game of chess before him, dividing his subjects into white and black, and then starting to manage the game’ (p. 22). The phrase ‘a game of chess’ yields insights into the usually-hidden history to the formation and conduct of the nation: the way the nation runs today is like ‘a game of chess’ between rhetorically-constructed players (‘white and black’) under the patronage of the ruler (‘a dreaming man from the down roads of history’, i.e., with no popularity and hence unrepresentative). The King makes a mockery of the whole nation-building processes. Later in the novel, he spells out what he calls the ‘genius of the game of chess’:
Herein lies the genius of the game of chess, as long as the players are in their set places and roles, everyone is defending the King, sacrificing his life to gain his battle…but once they assume roles greater than themselves, they subject their King to danger. This is great to an ambitious king: push them to revolt against their chiefs and to fight one another till the game of chess is stained with blood, then strike your enemies on their machineries. (pp. 31-32)

One of the aims of the novel, I suppose, is to make clear and evident the hidden forces below the official discourse of nation. The passage above suggests that colonial cruelty against colonised societies has protracted into several national regimes of oppression which rely for their continuance on intracommunal conflicts through the promotion of separatist identities based upon racial discriminations (e.g., ‘white and black’). The implication is that all sorts of instability and havoc that Algerian society has been made to experience are contrivances designed and tailored to cater for the avarice of the ruling elite for power and authority.

Self-interest is the driving force for the ruling elite in postcolonial Algerian nationalism. Gramoul’s novel emphasises how the plans and actions of the ruling elite are so motivated by their unquenchable thirst for wealth that the entire nation and its population are measured in material terms. National concerns or social standing are objects of material value according to the King: ‘In order for one to change his social status, he has to take care of his account’ (p. 15). The obsession with wealth-amassing at any cost reflects the Machiavellian character of the King and his clique of tycoons, too. According to the King, ‘Money is the president and holy saint of this kingdom […] why do we learn and make smart of ourselves if we remain blind to the ways to money?’ (p. 64). The King himself makes no bones about the tendency to worship money as a characteristic feature of all the kings of the earth down the centuries: ‘In fact, the craze for money-making is not an invention of mine. Rather, it is a longstanding practice that all the kings of the earth have participated in. While some view such a practice authority, others freedom or glory; yet all have been regrettably crippled by it’ (p. 16). That is to say, the struggle for power in human history is essentially a struggle for wealth at the expense of humanity. The novel’s critique of nationalism as a materially-lucrative ideology for the ruling elite, therefore, implies that material structures of inequality and oppression has remained intact and that no actual progress has been made. The colonial exploitation of the country’s natural and human resources is repeated, albeit through different agents.
The novel provides images of the King’s aides as a coterie of infamous individuals for corruption, embezzlement, prostitution, and swindling people. In his description of his aides, the King says:

They are a group of corrupts, laborious and capable of murder, rape, forgery, and swearing to their innocence like children…they have all met in this great time… With their blood-stained fingers and excessive selfishness as well as with the complicity of apparatuses and men, they have woven the most disturbing days for this people, who is always described as a good and great people. (p. 50)

What is at stake is a police-state of a lawless regime; it is a thuggish order of rule that lives off the toil and moil of innocent Algerians and mushrooms in swamps of corruption. The phrase ‘great time’ is significant, for it suggests that nationalism has provided the context for anti-social elements to unaccountably exercise all sorts of objectionable activities. In Rethinking Islamist Politics: Culture, the State and Islamism, Salwa Ismail refers to a ‘partnership’ forged by the powerful clans in Algeria, constituting what Ismail describes as ‘elite consensus’. As Ismail explains, the elite partnership enables various groups to make advantage of state projects to the extent that they go about ‘privatising its assets’ for their own self-interests. ‘In this context,’ as the argument runs, ‘power was personalised by the holders of office and by those occupying higher positions in the state structure.’ The implication is that nationalist leaders are entrepreneurs and opportunists whose personal investments are secured by the façade of the state power.

Nationalism provides the context in which the objectionable activities of the ruling group carry an aura of legitimacy. The formation of a government comes in the context where the King speaks about the need for inventions that help control the population: ‘It is not possible to tame subjects into useful projects for increasing the tax-collection if you do not smash them down, if you do not humiliate them, if you do not control their cowardice and crime through a strict programme and rules capable of shooting bullets… this requires the existence of a government’ (p. 144). For the government to function as an instrument for the subversion and exploitation of the Algerian people, the King appoints Hajj Kilahum as his Prime Minister. The King justifies his choice of Hajj Kilahum by saying: ‘Since I do not want a government not in the know about what is going on in the streets, I need the dirtiest man both physically and

87 Salwa Ismail, Rethinking Islamist Politics: Culture, the State and Islamism (I.B. Tauris), pp. 115-16.
88 Ibid., pp. 115-16.
conscientiously in my kingdom’ (p. 145). Moral depravity and material rapacity are the King’s criteria for the selection of his ministers. Being a social wreck with no norms of decency and grace, Hajj Kilahum qualifies as the most eligible candidate as Prime Minister.

Women are accommodated within the ‘partnership’ of postcolonial Algerian nationalism. Following on the above-cited speech, the King refers to Hajjah Qumair as an exemplary type of his arms in the administration of the state. I think the incorporation of women in the state’s administration as the novel depicts is indicative of the strategic manoeuvres made by the ruling elite in order to contain potentially dissenting voices in Algerian society as well as represent the state as a democracy on the international level. Nevertheless, Hajjah Qumair, as the King tells us, is an owner of the largest prostitution brothel, which was originally a possession of the King’s ‘supposed’ mother:

The righteous citizen Hajjah Qumair, to whom I secretly sold the house of the thousand rooms which belonged to the one who claimed to be my mother, she changed the house into the biggest brothel in the country. She used to spread her old feelings behind me like wheat seeds into an unharvested field, and in an expression of her special loyalty to me, she adds to her monthly payment to me a 16-year old girl in order to cleanse my feelings with water and soap when I am in a good mood. […] of course, she does that not only for her fear of me […] but also because of my protection for her from the envious and the pimps as well as remedying the side-effects of the nervous collapse that befalls prostitutes who lose clients with the passage of time. I am always there for her. (pp. 44-45)

The irony implied not just in the name ‘Hajjah Qumair’ (hajjah is a term of respect for elderly women and is also used to describe a woman who has performed Hajj, pilgrimage in Islam) but also in the King’s description of her as ‘the righteous citizen’ is striking indeed. The irony implied in the quotation above suggests the reversal of ethical norms and established moral values of society through the imposition of the culturally-insensitive rhetoric of nationalism. The reversal of the longstanding societal morality is even made more explicit in view of the fact that the head of the regime (the King) makes no bones about his ‘protection of her’, ‘I am always there for her’. Still worse, Hajjah Qumair, as we are told by the King, was also in a position to decide on the appointment as well as dismissal of high rank officials from government positions:

For several years, she followed her own rulings in appointing or dismissing any dignitary who entered her house without polished shoes, or a neck-tie unfitting his grey uniform, or even because of a report by one of her girls telling that, for example, Minister of Family Affairs has disappointed her in bed.
Consequently, Hajjah Qumair made up her mind that since the man was sexually impotent, he must be necessarily unqualified for the post he has been wearing. (p. 46)

The authority of Hajjah Qumair indicated in the passage above is suggestive of the enormity of the problems that the Algerian experience of postcolonial nationalism has engendered. Hajjah Qumair’s power of intervention in the affairs of the state is a sign of the endemic corruption in all the apparatuses of the state across the board. In the end of the novel, the King tells us that he has appointed Hajjah Qumair Minster for disrespectful families so as to increase the tax revenue (p. 150). Implied in the King’s articulations mentioned above is the fact that all seeds, forms, and networks of corruption are the brainchild or the instruments of the King and his mafia.

A critical unravelling of the rhetoric of the nation is a crucial step in redressing grievances and repossessing histories. Beneath the novel’s depictions of the cracks and contradictions in postcolonial Algerian nationalism through the King’s own articulations is a subtle critique of the status quo and is therefore a call for Algerians to give vent to their untold tales of suffering. With this in mind, I argue that the King’s memoir fosters greater consciousness of the enormity of the Algerian crisis, and thereby stimulate Algerians to object to what is happening and take action. The key thread of my argument is based on the novel’s description of Algiers via the mouthpiece of the ‘King of Algeria’:

This city appears as if it were kicked, turned upside-down, standing on its head rather than feet... It has all the qualities of magic and life, but it seems to have been neglected like a widow who has not found someone to marry her off... Everything in it [city] is playful and productive, but its heart is dry! [...] A whole city is moving between gangs of plundering and looting, who possess extortionate wealth, prostitution brothels, and hotels adorned with grandeur and reverence. (p. 183)

Like a ‘neglected [...] widow’, Algiers has been abandoned to lapse into insignificance. The city’s original ‘qualities of magic and life’ and ‘playful and productive’ charms have been usurped by ‘gangs of plundering and looting’ (‘the overwhelming minority’ as described in the novel’s title), whose rapacity for self-interests has led to the topsy-turvy condition of Algiers. In light of the quotation above, I argue that the analogy between Algiers and a ‘neglected [...] widow’ reflects not just the persistence of colonial patriarchy in present-day Algeria but also the denial of Algerian women’s role in the resistance to French colonisation. Nevertheless, the rich texture of imagery of the passage
is evident particularly in phrases like ‘but its heart is dry!’, for it signifies a very subtle shift in meaning. Like ‘a widow who has not found someone to marry her off,’ Algiers continues to endure the ravages of the time (i.e., the hedonistic individualism and predatory capitalism of its ruling groups), and ‘is moving’ in search of alternatives. The novel’s implicit reference to the inexhaustible potential of Algiers (and therefore Algeria as well as other Arab-majority nations) is suggestive of low-level resistance at grass-roots levels. Yet the novel’s chief insight is to observe that Algerians’ endurance—though necessary—is not enough, and therefore to suggest the urgent need to articulate grievances.

Spectre of Crisis

I have stated that nationalism is in a state of crisis. *Za‘em al-Aqaliyah al-Sahiqah* offers a consideration of how the production of crises in the Algerian post-independence context is a source of stability and prosperity to the King and his entourage. The need to keep citizens in a turmoil of problems is stated explicitly by the King:

Some subjects for example need spies, others need to have ready-made files for intimidating them. For other subjects I set up traps to embroil them, one of them may need clean money in order to launder his dirty money, and other may as well need scandals that cannot be tolerated by the republic of day. (p. 43)

The quotation suggests that Algeria is a police state of a lawless regime. From the concoction of scandals to the intimidation of innocent individuals and the facilitation of money-laundering, the regime deploys various tactics in order to subvert, control, and exploit Algerians. The creation and aggravation of internal crises is the mode of existence and function of the state. According to McDougall, ‘The most recent reproduction and recoding of the recourse to political violence in Algeria is the product of its own, specific context of crisis, and of the ways in which this crisis has been managed, or mismanaged, exploited and exacerbated, by particular actors.’ In other words, Algerians have been made to live in an atmosphere of national emergency, which ensures the continuance of the existing order of rule.

Lahouari Addi, in ‘The Failure of Third World Nationalism’, discusses the failure of Third World nationalism as a consequence of the absence of ‘civil peace’ in the


90 Lahouari Addi is an Algerian Associate Professor at the Institut d’Etudes Politiques in Lyons, France, and visiting Professor of political science at the University of Utah.
actual experience of nationhood. Addi argues that Algeria lacks ‘a pacified political arena’; precisely because, the allegiance of the majority of the population to the central power is not an act of free will and volition. As he explains, Algerian experience of nationalism is fraught with ‘tensions and conflicts’, and the potential for grievance and strife is built into that experience. The prime causes of the problematic situation in Algeria, as he points out, relate to the inability of the postcolonial state to ‘make power impersonal or tame the influence of clan or clientelist politics.’ For Addi, the crisis in postcolonial Algeria is linked specifically to the dominance of the army:

In today’s society, in order to be politically superior, you have to belong to the army, or more precisely, to the upper ranks of the officer corps. The army uses nationalist ideology, with its penchant for rank ordering, to reproduce traditional society’s unequal political structure. The army unifies the country, but at the cost of profound political inequality. The people exposed to the egalitarianism of official slogans and speeches, chafe at this.

The sceptre of the army, as the extract suggests, lumps together Algeria’s diverse historical and cultural components into a political unity, or ‘an imagined community’ (to use Anderson’s terms). Algerian nationhood, therefore, is predicated upon the coercive practices of the army, whose members (in particular ‘the upper ranks’) are the FLN associates. What is at stake, yet, is the role of ‘nationalist ideology’ as a legitimating narrative to the oppressive practices of the army. The fact that Algerians ‘chafe at’ ‘the egalitarianism of official slogans and speeches’ reveals that the history of postcolonial Algerian nationalism has nothing to do with ‘civil peace’, for it is mired in terrorisation as implied in the quotation cited above. Thus, Addi’s discussion of the causes of the crisis in Third World nationalism (particularly in Algeria) contributes to our understanding of Gramoul’s strident emphasis on the political utility of a crisis-ridden situation to the interests of the King and his coteries.

92 Ibid., pp. 111-12.
93 Ibid., p. 113.
94 Ibid., p. 120.
95 Ibid., p. 120.
97 President Abdul-Aziz Bouteflika is a member of the FLN. The reference to the King’s age, 85 years, in Gramoul’s novel (p. 8) is a textual clue into the actual ‘King of Algeria’, that is Bouteflika. In any case, whether it be Bouteflika or the FLN, they are two faces of the same coin.
Gramoul depicts the psychological warfare that the ruling party launches against Algerians. Throughout novel, the King’s speech reeks with belligerence and intimidation as a means of subverting Algerians and thereby ensuring his continuance. As he states, ‘Kingdoms are built with cool heads and not with the reactions of the mob subjects’ (p. 119). The barbarity of the regime’s practices against Algerians as implied in the King’s own words is a replication of the atrocities committed by French colonisers against the same society. The similarity is even more striking when we consider how the King of Algeria finds in terrorising the population the most appropriate means of control. According to him, ‘fear is the real ruler of peoples’, for he believes that ‘implanting fear’ ‘makes peoples obedient and content’ (p. 36). The King’s words reflect the psychological warfare that Algerians are made to experience since independence, suggesting the scant promise for achieving genuine freedom and liberation from the nightmares of history as wrought on Algerian society by colonisers and neo-colonisers alike. Like Addi suggests, the novel explores this real-world phenomenon by depicting how Algerians are denied basic human rights such as dignity and security.

Addi and Gramoul emphasise the congeniality of a crisis-beset environment to the functioning of nationalist ideology in Algeria. For the tremendous utility of social instability, economic volatility, and individual alienation to the sustenance of the exclusive interests of the ruling elite, crises are a leitmotif in Gramoul’s novel. According to the King of Algeria, the creation of crises is the first task of all kings, simply because ‘comfortable peoples often disturb their leaders! The King has always to contrive whatever bothers them and turns them into slaves of their own problems’ (p. 141). The phrase ‘slaves of their own problems’ is key to an understanding of how the rhetoric of ‘enslavement’ continues to define the way oppressive ideologies, such as imperialism and nationalism, treat populations. Yet, the phrase makes also explicit the difference that nationalism has brought about to peoples: subjugation of societies by means of provoking micro-level crises which help block their awareness about the regime’s oppressive practices. Following on the King’s aforementioned statement, he provides concrete examples of the problems that he has ‘contrived’ against Algerians: ‘I have planned to bankrupt corporations through the creation of dirty unions, to humiliate sovereign domains through the appointment of talkative and unclean ministers, and to decimate the economy of the republic of day through the stock market’ (p. 142). The instrumental value of a crisis-fraught situation is implied in the King’s reference to his machinations
and mechanisms for the subversion and suppression of society. The common denominator between the King’s various conspiracies is the spread of uncommon poverty, which helps ‘humiliate’ and bend down societies by denying them basic needs. The King’s reiterated justification for the maintenance of a permanent condition of wretchedness and misfortune is that ‘comfortable peoples disturb their leaders generally with their comfort’ (p. 181). Thus, the ‘codes of violence in Algeria’ (as discussed below) are inbuilt into the dominant body-politic of postcolonial Algerian nationalism.

McDougall, in ‘Savage Wars? Codes of Violence in Algeria’, discusses the root-causes of the relentless crises in postcolonial Algerian context, arguing that ‘[t]he most recent reproduction and recoding of the recourse to political violence in Algeria is the product of its own, specific context of crisis, and of the ways in which this crisis has been managed, or mismanaged, exploited and exacerbated, by particular actors.’

Indeed, McDougall makes explicit what he calls ‘particular actors’ when he refers to them as ‘a military elite issued from the revolutionary army, while proclaiming that the ‘sole hero’ was indeed the people, lost no time in asserting its right to rule over the people, a right which it considered had been earned in the prosecution of the war.’

Thus, the spectre of crisis is rhetorical construct forged, administered, and utilised by the Algerian army (as pointed out by Addi), by ‘military elite’ (in McDougall’s words), by the FLN (as remarked by Rahal and Malley) or by ‘the leader of the overwhelming minority’ (as eloquently phrased by Gramoul). Yet, what connects these various labels is a critique of nationalist ideology as the first and foremost mediating agency in the aggravation of the Algerian crisis in the post-independence context.

Low-level Resistance

The critique of postcolonial Algerian nationalism in Za’een al-Aqaliyah al-Sahiqah involves a consideration of transformation at the grass-roots levels. The novel-though focussed primarily on the King’s corruption and oppression-sheds light on the ‘republic of day’ as a site of low-level resistance to the prevailing atrocities of the establishment. Algerians’ potential for change is acknowledged by the King himself:

This country which only keeps going, only walking, without a policy in education, health, jurisprudence, and so on, even without an ethical system or identity, or

99 Ibid., p. 125.
language, or religion, or… but it keeps doing, or rather slither on its belly in order to snatch on its way generations and generations of patient mythological creatures. (p. 117)

In the King’s speech above, the Algerian condition cannot be described as modern (for the lack of infrastructures like ‘education, health, jurisprudence’), nor can it be premodern (for the absence of ‘ethical system’, ‘identity’, ‘language’, ‘religion’). The Algerian condition as captured in the above images is that of the Stone Age, a pre-human-civilisation era of ‘patient mythological creatures’. Nevertheless, the passage cited above yields a particularly useful insight into the psyche of Algerians, that is, endurance of adversities: ‘keeps going’. The power of Algerians to live through the calamities forced on them by colonisers and then nationalist leaders is an embodiment of low-level resistance.

The ‘republic of day’ is a ‘strange country’. The estrangement between the ‘republic of day’ and the ‘kingdom of night’, as Gramoul’s novel demonstrates, lies considerably in the former’s determination and loyalty to Algerians’ aspirations for a democracy wherein the rule of law is the ultimate authority. According to the King:

I must confess that I respected with some malice and sympathy the thoughts of the population of the day, which have no value. I put up with their republican system, their whims, that they elect a president every five years, and the president changes his government sometimes five times a year, that they have a constitution that is formulated and reformulated according to the measurements of their president, that they have loud-sounding parties, a parliament, and press.. to the end of the story. (p. 11)

The fact that the Algerians’ relentless struggle to consolidate their newly-constituted nation is registered in the King’s memoir above is an indication of the residual power of the population to bring about a change in the status quo. In my view, the novel suggests the need for a postcolonial intervention at the grass-roots level. Subtly implicated in the above-mentioned words is a hint at the apathetic attitude of the population to the exclusionary practices and manipulative rhetoric of the ruling elite. The Algerians’ turning away from political participation through articulation and interpretation of the way their state had been administered has caused the atrophy of postcolonial Algerian nationalism. The urgency of overcoming internal degeneration is through reclaiming the medium of self-expression.
Gramoul’s consideration of the low-level resistance of Algerian population is a significant contribution to recent critiques of postcolonial Algerian nationalism, which paves the way to born crucial social and political movements as in case of the Arab uprisings of 2011. In this connection, Jessica Ayesha Northey highlights in her article ‘Associations and Democracy in Algeria’ the role of associations in democratisation and political change in contemporary Algeria. She argues: ‘In Algeria, there is a long tradition of religious and local, community-based collective decision making and associational activism.’ She demonstrates the ways in which associative movements played a crucial role during the Arab uprisings of 2011, and succeeded in lifting the state of emergency, launching a new consultation process, and reviewing the Law on Associations. The suggestion is that there is a scope—however meagre and restricted—for change via collective consciousness and mobilisation. Common to Northey and Gramoul, therefore, is the recognition that the seeds of transformation lie dormant in Algerian society. While Northey expresses faith in associative movements as agents of change, Gramoul attaches great weight to societal mobility and critique of the status quo. Gramoul’s approach to change is more inclusive than Northey’s, for his novel, as explained earlier, casts doubt on opposition as an arm of the state.

In its ultimate analysis, Gramoul’s Za’eeem al-Aqaliyah al-Sahiqah criticises postcolonial Algerian nationalism as a grand narrative for the consolidation of a neocolonialist class of Algerians. The novel raises questions over the nature and usefulness of nationalist ideology by depicting how nationalist leaders merely refashion the French colonial dehumanisation, manipulation, and exploitation of Algerian population. The discussion of the novel and the literature reviewed has indicated that the crisis in Algeria’s postcolonial context is largely a ‘repercussion’ of the replication of the modern/colonial ‘disciplinary order’ of ‘regularity’ by the FLN (the ‘overwhelming minority’ as depicted in the novel’s title) under the banner of the nation and nationalist struggle since independence. Like the King’s obsession with the present as the novel depicts, the FLN sustains its interests by reiterating the nationalist narrative (and

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100 Jessica Ayesha Northey, ‘Associations and Democracy in Algeria’, Democratization (Routledge, 2016).
101 Ibid., p. 5.
102 Ibid., p. 15.
103 Ibid., p. 15.
104 McDougall, History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria, p. 8.
105 Ibid., p. 8.
ideology) as a justificatory rhetoric for its exclusions of the majority of Algerian society and distortions of history, too. Hence, postcolonial Algerian nationalism results in the exacerbation of Algerians’ long-endured history of bloodshed and deprivations. In addition, the discussion has identified the novel’s alternative to the status quo: it is time for Algerians to give vent to their historically long-suppressed desire for democracy and equity. The need to make visible and heard Algerians’ untold tales of the state’s injustices to them is a crucial step towards transformation. Gramoul’s chief contribution, thus, is to foster critical awareness of the transformative potential of self-representation, particularly in relation to the anguish and agony that Algerians have incurred all in the name of the nation and nationalism.

Saad Mohammed Rahim,106 in his book Antikat al-Moharrum [Frames of the Prohibited] (2013), raises questions concerning the role of the intellectual in society as imagined and articulated in the dominant patterns of knowledge/power relations. Rahim defines authority as a network of power relations, spheres of influence, and mechanisms of containment,107 contending that the success of authority is measured against the extent to which it manages to hide its mechanisms of control.108 Rahim’s main focus, however, is the challenging role of the intellectual in revealing the hidden mechanisms of the authority (in particular dominant systems of thought and criteria), as well as exposing the exploitation, enslavement, or injustice implied in such mechanisms. The intellectual’s position, as Rahim points out, is oppositional, particularly in relation to the authoritarian practices of power centres in society.109 The intellectual has to uncover the ways in which authority operates and maintains its grip over society; the intellectual’s major concern is the question of freedom as opposed to the authority of control, criticism to dogma, and the self to the institutional authority.110 Having identified the critically-challenging position of Gramoul’s novel on postcolonial Algerian nationalism as well as the creative ways he develops in order to step outside the ‘frames of the prohibited’, I intend to move on now to explore the interpretations of postcolonial Iraqi nationalism as embodied in al-
Zaidi’s *Valyoom Asharah*. In what follows, I attempt to identify the kind of critical awareness and/or critical blindness that *Valyoom Asharah* promotes, particularly in relation experiences of postcolonial Iraqi nationalism. As indicated earlier, I argue that nationalism is an ideology of crisis, by virtue of which nationalist leaders sustain their own interests to the exclusion of the rest of society. Nationalism continues the colonial practices of the fragmentation of invaded societies, the deprivation and dispossession of peoples, and the pauperisation of economic resources.

**Valyoom Asharah**

Al-Zaidi’s *Valyoom Asharah* undermines the dominant patterns of Iraqi nationhood through portrayals of its fatal consequences for the Iraqi society. The novel interprets the fall of Mosul into the hands of ISIS (Islamic State IN Iraq and Syria) as an allotrope of the historical errors that have characterised postcolonial Iraqi nationalism. The timeframe of the incidents referred to in the novel extends from the 1978 to 2014, covering a series of unceasing crises have impoverished the state and transpired into a pervasive sense of defeatism in the Iraqi psyche. The fall of Mosul provides the novel’s background to depictions of a population mired in poverty, individuals forced to flee the oppressive practices of the regime’s elements, opposition centred on the promotion of self-interests, and a nation dogged with problems from within and without. *Valyoom Asharah* critiques the concept of the nation as a rhetoric for the hegemony of nationalist leaders at the expense of the wider sections of Iraqi population.

*Valyoom Asharah* embodies multiple experiences in its depictions of characters and incidents, histories and geographies as a composite of the irreducible whole of Iraq. The multivocal style of the novel is evident particularly in its complex narrative structure that defies linear, sequential modes of reading. The constant shift in the narrative back and forth in terms of geographical locations (Baghdad, Amman, Edmonton, Paris, Beirut); temporal frames (2014, 1996, 1980, 1991, 2003); historical events (Iraq’s war with Iran, economic sanctions on Iraq, retreat from Kuwait, fall of Mosul) is an allegory not just of the nation but also of the complexity of the novel’s form. Furthermore, the questions posed against the Iraqi nation-state in *Valyoom Asharah* reflect the richness, interconnectedness, and relevance of al-Zaidi’s artistic articulations to the crises that have dogged his country as they unfold, particularly in relation to the recent fall of Mosul into the grip of ISIS.
Valyoom Asharah depicts the tragic experiences of Iraqis inside and outside Iraq through the story of Salaam al-Wafi, who has returned to Baghdad from Canada in the wake of Mosul’s fall. Salaam’s return is part of his contract with French Joe Agency, which produces documentaries about crisis-ridden areas in the Middle East, particularly in Iraq. ‘No Tissues for the Tears of the Colonel\textsuperscript{111} is the title of the documentary produced by Salaam and tells the story of the fall of Mosul. However, Salaam watches his documentary on French 24 Channel (Arabic) and finds out that the documentary has been modified so greatly that it focuses on him more than the story of Mosul. Therefore, Salaam intends to complete what the documentary has left undone. As Patricia Waugh notes: ‘When the self-shatters and reason fathom no simple or linear cause, turning voices into the characters of a world allows for externalisation and therefore control of intense but often unfelt emotions, whose acknowledgment and expression open a path for their reintegration.’\textsuperscript{112} Salaam’s misgivings about the documentary as an inadequate and distorted medium of representation offer new opportunities for experience outside the dominant articulations. Although Salaam, I argue, is not presented as a reliable narrator in the novel, his reinterpretation nevertheless helps to identify the cracked and fragmented images of Iraq as embodied in the documentary, and thereby to indicate the need for a major reconstitution in the narrative of the Iraqi nation.

Salaam’s deconstruction of the documentary and reconstruction of the story occurs through a retrospective identification of the events and characters that have puzzled him. He tells us that after his immigration to Canada in 1996, he joins the French agency through the help of an Iraqi living in France, Hatif al-Saraaf, a professional in the media and a man of international resources. Salaam’s main stay is in Canada where he has friends like a Mandaean Iraqi woman, Saleema Handhl, and her daughter Sally; a Somali neighbour, Jaadullah, an addict to sleep-inducing pills. Before his leave for Baghdad, Saleema appeals to Salaam to find her son, Aseel, and to convince him to join her in Canada. Aseel was left as a child by his mother in Baghdad in the care of her Muslim neighbour (Abdul-Hameed) before her abrupt flight to Qatar and then Canada. In Baghdad, Salaam’s elder brother is Colonel Ghassan, the leader of the retreated army

\textsuperscript{111} Khadair Faleeh al-Zaidi. Valyoom Asharah [Valium 10]. (Lebanon: Difaf Publishing, 2015), p. 15. All further references to the novel are from this edition and will be marked in parentheses.

from Mosul. Salaam finds it necessary to help his brother to recover from his psychologically-disturbed state of mind, in particular his tendency to keep silent while smoking heavily. Salaam befriends Aseel, who works as a janitor to the Prime Minister’s Consultant for Economy.

Aseel steals a CD of great significance from the Consultant’s office and asks Salaam to help him. Salaam seeks the help of al-Saraaf, who returns to Baghdad immediately, telling them that he has a fourth partner, the Doctor, who can help them make a great deal of the CD. The Doctor introduces a new partner, an expert in decoding the CD. After a couple of weeks, Salaam, Aseel, and al-Saraaf are ordered by the Doctor to leave for Beirut, for an investigation is conducted by the government to find the accomplices in the robbery of the CD, and that they are being suspected. In Beirut, the four meet and dream of wealth get shattered by the Doctor’s proposal of selling out the CD to an internationally-known Lebanese businessman for $50,000 for each. Yet, the amount can be cashed only after six months. Salaam, Aseel, and al-Saraaf agree to pay the cheques to the Doctor for a cash sum of $38,000 each. Realising that they are deceived by the Doctor with the help of Hatif al-Saraaf, Salaam and Aseel decide to flee to Canada.

**The Defeatist Syndrome**

The critique of postcolonial Iraqi nationalism in al-Zaidi’s *Valyoom Asharah* is articulated through a consistent series of depictions of Iraq as a nation doomed to defeat. The recurrent experience of defeat in the history of the Iraqi state, as alluded to in the novel, is suggestive of the inadequacy of the existing model of Iraqi nationhood. Al-Zaidi’s critique is consistent with Nalini Persram’s contention that postcolonial Iraq does not exist. As Persram explains, Iraq has been so embroiled in a chain of wars that it [Iraq] has ‘become a war culture internationally, and that it is in danger of becoming a culture of war internally.’ Persram’s anguish over Iraq’s potential lapse into ‘a culture of war internally’ has materialised, particularly with the fall of Mosul. Yet, the novel’s emphasis on the defeatist spirit that has pervaded Iraqi society (in particular the military) is reflected in the opening scene of Salaam’s documentary ‘No Tissues for the Tears of the Colonel’. The documentary commences with the historical event wherein the Iraqi President in Baghdad and the ISIS Caliph in Mosul deliver simultaneous speeches to their

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114 Ibid., p. 17.
respective subjects. The opening scene of the novel exposes the failure of the Iraqi nation-
state to honour its sovereignty and safeguard its own cities and people. The simultaneity
of the delivery of exclusively-mutual discourses (President and Caliph) does not just
reflect the enormity of the crisis in the nation but also calls into question its nature and
usefulness. I argue that the significance of the opening scene is to strike the key theme of
the novel, that is, the fall of Mosul is part of the frequent narrative of defeats, and therefore
is a natural occurrence in postcolonial experience of Iraqi nationalism.

Postcolonial Iraqi nationalism causes psychopathology. *Valyoom Asharah* reveals
the extent to which the defeatist syndrome is pervasive in all the strata of Iraqi population,
particularly among army officers and soldiers. Taking his brother Colonel Ghassan to a
clinic, Salaam senses the silenced tragedy that the country has incurred: ‘After years of
stagnation, psychiatrist clinics resume it’s booming, particularly after the return of
psychological defeats and grand breakdowns’ (p. 139). The crowds of psychologically-
disturbed elements of the military in psychiatry clinics is indicative of the gravity of the
defeatist syndrome. I argue that the character of Colonel Ghassan is sketched as a case
study, which helps to provide a better understanding of the primary causes of the defeatist
syndrome. At the psychiatry clinic, Salaam thinks of the case of his brother:

The fall of Mosul and its occupation was not just a nightmare to him, it has also
caused him a unique case of repeated historical horror. He had experienced on-
foot retreat from Kuwait but returned normal, the gravity of the shock was great
to him, but the wounds of the defeat healed with the passage of time. Before
Kuwait, he was in the know about the so-called withdrawal from Khurramshaher
/Iranian city but did not witness it, and so other internal defeats did not affect him
(p. 87)

The series of defeats incurred by the Iraqi army both internally and externally has had a
lesser intensity on the military than the latest one in Mosul, for the fall of Mosul is not
caused by power differentials, as was the case with the Iraqi army’s on-foot retreat from
Kuwait or withdrawal from the eight-year war with Iran. Rather, the ‘unique case’ of the
retreat from Mosul is that it is a long-term consequence of the ‘repeated historical horror’.
Al-Zaidi’s critique of the psychopathology of postcolonial Iraqi nationalism is a critical
unravelling of what Hashim Saleh\(^{115}\) has called ‘historical blockages’.\(^{116}\) Saleh argues
that the paucity of creativity or novelty owes largely to the persistence of historical

\(^{115}\) Syrian intellectual and writer, living in France.

\(^{116}\) Hashim Saleh, *al-Ensidaad al-Tareekhi* [Historical Blockage], (Beirut: al-Saqi, 2010).
blockages: ‘the predominance of a set of absolutist assumptions that are not subject to debate […] that are considered sacred and infallible […] that confer divine legitimacy upon acts of crime and terror.’ Saleh contends that the attempt to identify any crack, however small, in the blocked path of history makes possible the liberation of Arabic consciousness; such an attempt to ‘leap into the unknown’ is a daunting task, ‘costing dearly.’ Thus, the main point in al-Zaidi’s novel is to reveal the loss of Mosul as essentially an effect of the loss of faith in the cause of the nation.

Postcolonial Iraqi nationalism is an embodiment of ‘historical blockage’. The novel’s interpretation of the fall of Mosul as a manifestation of the long-term consequences of the defeatist syndrome is also presented through the portrayal of Colonel Ghassan’s abnormal state of mind. Ghassan is presented in the novel as stricken with acute depression, a chain smoker, almost paralysed to move, unconscious of his surrounding, unable to speak, losing the appetite to eat or drink. In his attempt to find out the causes of Ghassan’s deteriorating conditions, Salaam locates the crisis in the hollow rhetoric of Iraqi nationalism:

He has lost a battle that did not actually take place, but he remained alive, the last of the withdrawers from Mosul, after having lost hope in determination and the fleeing of the soldiers around him, he tried to stand still but was shocked at the fleeing of all around him, he withdrew with whoever remained of his personal guards, returning devastated and defeated. Neither is there a ground beneath him to stand on and fight like brave men, nor is there a nearby solid wall to lean on because of fatigue. (p. 85)

The passage indicates that the psychopathology of Colonel Ghassan is an embodiment of the lost sense of pride and faith in the cause of the nation. The ‘devastated and defeated’ Colonel is made to experience an acute sense of disillusionment with the nation. The ‘fleeing of all around him’ from ‘a battle that did not actually take place’ is symptomatic of a fundamental error that has been sedimented of which Ghassan has been in the dark. His lack of awareness of how defeatism has uprooted Iraqi soldiers’ faith in the cause of the nation as in essence a struggle for land (I will discuss this point at length below) has blurred his vision of the hollow rhetoric of the nation: ‘Neither is there a ground beneath him to stand on and fight like brave men, nor is there a nearby wall to lean on’. In light

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117 Ibid., p. 19.
118 Ibid., pp. 19-23.
119 Ibid., p. 17.
of the quotation above, the fall of Mosul is a concrete example of the superficiality of the nation.

Al-Zaidi’s critique of the artifice of the Iraqi nation-state can be linked to key assumptions made by Harith al-Qarawee, particularly in his book *Imagining the Nation: Nationalism, Sectarianism and Socio-Political Conflict In Iraq* (2012). Here al-Qarawee provides an in-depth analysis of the ‘post-tribal society’ of Iraqi population, particularly in relation to the colonial imposition of the concept of the nation. Al-Qarawee demonstrates the ways in which the introduction of the modern nation-state to the Iraqi population of essentially tribal backgrounds leads to socio-political changes as evident particularly in relation to the people’s migration from rural to urban areas in search of better living conditions. The changes to modernisation do not yet contribute to the promotion of the ‘egalitarian spirit’ of the nation wherein all Iraqis are ‘equal co-nationals.’ Al-Qarawee’s main point, thus, is to observe that Iraqi nationalism is an ‘incomplete modernization’. Nevertheless, I argue that ‘modernisation’ (as a concept) is blind to its own irony as a term. This critique of ‘modernisation’ is evident in al-Zaidi’s novel, particularly through his character Salaam: ‘Modernity, contemporaneity, fleets, and armies retreat in front of bare-footed soldiers from all corners of the world rallying to defeat Ghassan, that disciplined soldier’ (p. 95). Unlike al-Qarawee, al-Zaidi sees the fall of Mosul as a dismantling of the grand narrative of modernity and therefore the collapse of the prevalent concept of Iraqi nationhood. Al-Zaidi’s position on the crisis of Iraq is more down-to-earth than that of al-Qarawee, precisely because the novelist’s perspective is illustrated with the narrative of Mosul, a historical incident that lays bare the superficial rhetoric of modernity and nationalism.

**Delinked Consciousness**

*Valyoom Asharah* provides evidence to substantiate its claim that postcolonial Iraqi nationalism is a narrative of loss and despair as evident particularly in terms of the

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121 Harith al-Qarawee, *Imagining the Nation: Nationalism, Sectarianism and Socio-Political Conflict in Iraq* (Lancashire: Rossendale Books, 2012). A ‘post-tribal society’, as al-Qarawee explains, is ‘a society which is neither tribal (in the traditional sense) nor urban, but a mixture or, more correctly, a unique misrepresentation of the two’ p. 281.

122 Ibid., pp. 281-85.

123 Ibid., p. 290.
effect of the defeatist syndrome on Iraqi society. The novel foregrounds the psychopathology of the existing model of Iraqi nationhood through a consideration of the apathetic attitudes of the people towards the frequent crises that leave no stone unturned. The very title of the novel is an indication of how Iraqis escape the unrelenting tragedies inflicted on them through addiction to drugs that induce kinds of stupor and mental haze, thus nullifying perceptions of existential pain and suffering. In other words, the defeatist syndrome transpires into a pervasive sense of apathy towards the calamities that befall the nation. However, I argue that the novel’s consideration of apathy as a salient characteristic of the wider sections of society reflects the extent to which postcolonial Iraqi nationalism has contributed to the diminishment of social and political activism. This is mainly because the crises that Iraqis incur due to the way the state is governed help in the continuance of specific groups in power and authority. As will be elaborated below, postcolonial Iraqi nationalism obscures awareness about the nationalist leaders’ exclusions, oppressions, and manipulations of the population.

Public disorientation and disengagement are a guardrail to the status quo. The novel’s consideration of the widespread phenomenon of Iraqis’ use of drugs for intoxication and sleep-inducing pills has a political force, for it suggests the control and containment of public consciousness so as to ensure noninterference in the affairs of the body politic. The blocking of people’s awareness about the exclusionary and oppressive practices of the state is embodied in Salaam’s phrase ‘the coma of artificial sleep’ (p. 212). The indulgence in drugs is yet another effect of postcolonial Iraqi nationalism. These pills, says Salaam, ‘heighten the rapture of ‘apathy’ that I keep searching for in Baghdad’ (p. 174). The escapist attitude embodied in Salaam’s words is justified by him as ‘A solution to the ceaseless problems and this ideological ambiguity that storm us’ (pp. 98-99). The phrase ‘ideological ambiguity’ is key to a greater understanding of the cognitive perplexity that obscures awareness by means of anachronistic reflections that bear little relevance to the existential and material conditions of Iraqi population. As Salaam notes:

Sleep is the only means to get rid of reproach and the pressure of memory. Sleep is an integrated world in line of my personal tragedy where I make its dreams according to my measures and draw the spacious horizons in the spot of the pale grain of lentils and be its only hero. (p. 174)
The extract above expresses the anguish and agony of Iraqis over the loss of their nation. Individual self-laceration and collective loss of memory reduce Iraqis’ creative and critical potential into make-believe, irrelevant acts of self-delusion. The diminution of Iraqi intellectual potential is embodied in the image of Iraq as a ‘pale grain of lentils’. I argue that the recurrent metaphor of the ‘pale grain of lentils’ emphasises not just intellectual inertia and loss of health vitality but also the postcolonial abyss of Iraqi nationalist experience. In light of the quotation above, Iraqis’ tendency to ‘sleep’ through the use of drugs like ‘Valium 10’ is a translation of their inability to make sense of, or connect with, the ever-growing complexity of the Iraqi situation. Caught in an ever-widening vortex of ‘repeated historical horror’, ‘reproach and the pressure of memory,’ Iraqis’ thinking potential is being reduced to a drained, or disoriented consciousness. Thus, al-Zaidi’s novel undermines the nature and usefulness of postcolonial Iraqi nationalism, particularly in view of its fatal consequences to the mental sanity and health of Iraqis.

Al-Zaidi’s critique of delinked consciousness as symptomatic of Iraqis’ state of mind is a miniature of a wider crisis in other Arab-majority nations. Mohammed Abed Al-Jabri 124 examines the epistemological causes of the decline of intellectual activity in the Arab-majority nations, and identifies its manifestations, particularly in relation to the Arab mind. Al-Jabri posits that Arab-majority nations are fraught with the problematic of tradition and modernity; with the result that the Arab mind is caught between two opposing worlds: an insurmountable past and an invincible present.125 The individual experiences a vacuum in relation to identity, and is ever subject to anxiety and constant worry so that he/she is powerless to forge an adequate response to the modern storms of change that bear no relevance to the traditional composition of his/her own life.

As al-Jabri notes, the Arab mind is being alienated from his surrounding; precisely because, ‘[t]he present Arabic cultural scene is an arena of an alienated intellect, regurgitating and rechewing materials that are neither digestible nor assimilable or transformable into nutritious blood crucial for growth’126 These symptoms of the problematic indicate that the self is immersed in a cultural atmosphere that favours the

124 A contemporary philosopher and professor at Arts College, Mohammed V University in Rabat.
status quo, wherein doubt and creativity are blocked. Al-Jabri’s discussion of the systematic closure of innovative impulses in the Arab-majority nations is consonant with al-Zaidi’s critique of the impoverishment of Iraqis’ intellectual potential as a consequence of the cognitive perplexity and material oppressions that characterise their postcolonial experience of nationalism. Yet, what al-Zaidi adds to al-Jabri’s discussion is a consideration of the concrete manifestations of postcolonial nationalism in Iraq as a prism of other Arab-majority nations.

**Strangers at Home**

The critique of postcolonial Iraqi nationalism in *Valyoom Asharah* sheds light on the dehumanisation and deprivation of Iraqis. The novel foregrounds the institutional marginalisation and therefore alienation of sections of Iraqi population. The novel depicts the subhuman treatment of Iraqi groups by the state by exposing how basic human rights such as home, security, and dignity are denied to them. The novel’s critique is set in the context of Salaam’s documentary, entitled ‘Representation of Gypsies’. Salaam describes the miseries of Iraqis who live in the outskirts of Baghdad, in a nameless place in huts of tank and mud, and on a land beneath which lie giant petrol pipes. They tell him that they are poor people not gypsies as other claim (p. 134). Salaam tells of how early morning the Iraqi gypsies distribute themselves into groups to beg from car drivers at road intersections. Salaam tells us that in 2005 the gypsies went on rallying a protest demanding the basic needs of life, and a protection of armed gangs that attack them to rob their money as well as representation in the parliament, for their population is over than half a million. However, ‘gypsies’ as a racial slur continues to be used to designate this marginalized section of Iraqi society. Hassan al-Jabori, chairperson of the human rights commission in the Council of al-Diwaniyah Governorate, condemns the unethical life of the Iraqi gypsies, and therefore recommends that they need to be isolated from the rest of Iraqi society because of their unethical life.127 Salaam holds an interview with the gypsies. He manages to shoot a film with one of the gypsies, named ‘Hobby’, along with his family in return to an amount of money.

My name is Hobby. I am a lost Iraqi gypsy. We moved from Samawah Desert to the outskirts of Baghdad after the change of regime of Saddam ‘May God rest his soul in peace’; he had provided us with full security. The group, may God keep them and enlarge their rods, have attacked us with shells like an enemy; they say

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that we are bastards, that we spread depravity and corruption, and that we turn away the Muslim youth from God’s way. This is false; we are tribesmen who sing at night only. I have a family, a wife, and a daughter, and we never approach sinful things, we pray, fast, cook, and walk, but all in vain. We have origins and attested identity cards, we serve in the military, and have donated martyrs to the nation as a tax paid in blood. In this distant place we have been assaulted by gangs more than once. Where shall we go? This is our country since time immemorial. I am of Iraqi ancestry, where shall I go? Even if one of us gets a job, he gets dismissed as soon as they get to know about his gypsy background. We took our voices to the parliament, but no one hears. It is a black plight we have been subjected to in this country. (pp. 134-35)

Hobby’s words cited above are the voice of over half a million of Iraqis whose ‘black plight’ is not of their own but a consequence of institutionally-approved practices of ‘the group’ in the post-Saddam era. Hobby’s use of the word ‘the group’ suggests subtly that the ruling class is just a clique, or a coterie of social wrecks engaged in attacking citizens with shells, libelling them with adultery and prostitution, and denying them citizenship, employment, and even religion. Hobby’s prayer to ‘the group’ (i.e., ‘May God keep them and enlarge their rods’) is also subversive of their superficial religiosity as a veneer for their moral indecency. The implication is that the ruling ‘group’ deploy religion, as they deploy the concept of the nation, as a façade for their corruption. The concepts of the nation and religion, therefore, prove instrumentally useful to the reinforcement of the power and interests of the ruling ‘group’. According to Alain Touraine, ‘Nationalist ideologies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have so strongly influenced our thinking and our political experience that we have almost forgotten that the European idea of the nation had been devised in a sense contrary to the direction taken by nationalist policies.’

Touraine’s remark about the gap between nationalist ideals and practices is captured by al-Zaidi’s depictions of the miserable conditions in which Iraqis are made to experience through successive governments. The novel’s chief insight, thus, is to observe that the dehumanisation of Hobby and group is a miniature of the historical errors that have characterised the postcolonial experience of Iraqi nationalism.

The historical errors inherent in the articulations and practices of the Iraqi state across successive governments are particularly evident in relation to persistent abuses of Iraqi women. Valyoom Asharah exposes the patriarchy embedded in nationalist ideology through depictions of Saleema Handhl as a victim of harassment. The novel illustrates the

patriarchal oppression of Saleema, who is threatened by an Iraqi intelligence officer during Saddam’s regime: ‘Everything on the ground of the nation is our own possession’ (p. 66). In the words of the officer, the nation is interpreted as the exclusive property of the state’s security apparatus, which has the unquestioned right to do whatever it like to ‘everything on the ground’. For the situation was growing too tense for her to stay as she used to, Saleema left Iraq in the 1980s. Nevertheless, I argue that Saleema’s emigration and separation from her son (Aseel) provides an illustrative example of the protracted failure of the Iraqi nation. The oppressions inflicted on Saleema and her family in the reign of Saddam’s regime are extended to the post-Saddam era, entailing the unbroken chain of the nationalist narrative. As al-Qarawee notes: ‘The oppression and discriminatory policies of Saddam’s regime resulted in the construction of a Shia narrative of victimhood. The policies of Maliki’s government and its security forces have played a similar role in constructing a Sunni narrative of victimhood.’¹²⁹ The novel’s depictions of the historical tragedy of Saleema in the context of the fall of Mosul in 2014 stands testimony to the fact that postcolonial Iraqi nationalism along with its exclusionary and repressive practices remains immune to the drastic changes in the geopolitical configurations of power both inside and outside Iraq.

The history of Iraqi nationhood is haunted by structural poverty. Despite the rich oil resources and strategic geographical location of Iraq, Iraqis’ experience of deprivation of basic human needs like bread continues uninterrupted by successive regimes. Valyoom Asharah portrays the failure of the Iraqi state to meet the minimum requirements of its citizens through a consideration of an ‘elegy of bread’. Before his first leave for Canada, Salaam stays briefly in Amman, where he meets many other Iraqis, one of whom is the poet of the ‘elegy of bread’. The elegy, says Salaam, ‘was like our sacred anthem and our daily recitals that we used to reiterate during the seizure period of the 1990s’ (p. 60). A few lines of the ‘elegy of bread’ are provided by Salaam:

We have bread... We will sleep tonight with two loafs of bread under the pillow of each one of us.. the bread that has become black... the bread that is no longer white... Lay to bed my little daughter... Good bread... Do not tear the flag... Do not spit on the teacher of National Education... I beg you, daughter. (p. 59)

In light of the quotation above, I argue that, on the one hand, the ‘elegy of bread’ continues to embody and articulate Iraqis’ untold tales of suffering, starvation, and dehumanisation across decades of different governments. On the other hand, the elegy is a political satire against the deceptive rhetoric embodied in the nation and its invented traditions such as ‘National Education’ and ‘the flag’. However, al-Zaidi’s discussion of the constructed nature of national symbols and traditions is an echo of Eric Hobsbawm’s in *The Invention of Tradition* (1983). Hobsbawm argues that the nation is a modern invention whose force and meaning derive from the production and reproduction of specific traditions and symbols, such as the national anthem and the flag. Yet, what al-Zaidi adds to Hobsbawm’s discussion is a consideration of the wider implications of the reproduction of national traditions for the material structure of Iraqi society. In al-Zaidi, the parent-daughter imagery of the ‘elegy of bread’ connotes not just the warmth and closeness of the song to the Iraqi popular imaginary but also a generational experience mired in penury and deprivation. The novel’s chief insight, thus, is to observe not just the fallacious nature of the concept of the nation and its ideology but also its long-term consequences to future generations, suggesting the need for a categorical rethinking and reimagining of Iraqi nationhood.

**Pragmatist Rule**

Postcolonial Iraqi nationalism is a neocolonial grand narrative. The emphasis in *Valyoom Asharah* on the historical continuity of the hegemonic narrative of nationalism during and after Saddam’s regime is a powerful critique of the concept of Iraqi nationhood as unresponsive to the logic of transience. Historically, Iraqi nationalism originated as a resistance to the British occupation of Baghdad in 1917. In the wake of the popular revolution of 1920, the Iraqi modern state was formed in 1921, yet within the British Mandate and under the Hashemite monarchy of Fayal up to 1958. In the 1960s, Iraqi nationalist leaders presented themselves as ‘sons of the people’ and the Hashemite era as the ‘bygone period’ or the ‘black era’. Since then, the Baath Party reigned supreme.

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131 Roger Owen, in ‘Nationalists’ Positions during the Colonial Period: Iraq in the 1920s and 1930s’, notes that the “official” national movement in Iraq in the 1920-1930s took a fascist and totalitarian shape when it tried to enforce its vision of the Iraqi identity and history on the different minorities of Iraq, whereas historically Iraq did not have a unified identity or history (pp. 137-38).
over Iraq, and the cause of the nation is represented as inextricable from the cause of a pan-Arab nationalism. However, after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, formerly-exiled Iraqi opposition ascend to power, replicating earlier practices of oppressions of society under the name of the nation. The problem, therefore, is the static model of Iraqi nationhood, which al-Zaidi’s novel problematises as a rhetorical construct, for it is masquerading as modernisation but is actually neo-colonialism. As has been variously described, the fact that the constitution of the Iraqi state precedes the nation accounts in part for the fixed frame and limited potential of the nationalist enterprise in Iraq.134 Thereupon I argue that al-Zaidi’s depictions of Iraqi tragedies across the various phases of nationalism are suggestive of the interventional role played principally by the state in the continued muddle of the Iraqi situation. The Iraqi state, being essentially a product of colonial compromise, is implicated in the ‘nationalist’ defeatism, and therefore is an extension of the grand narrative of cultural imperialism and colonial schemes for hegemony. Nonetheless, al-Zaidi’s intricate insight into the complexity of the Iraqi nation-state cut across with al-Qarawee’s discussion of the postcolonial abyss in Iraq as a prism of other Arab-majority nations. Al-Qarawee writes:

The authoritarian rule which shaped the history of the Middle East Region (MER) in the second half of the twentieth century is not only a matter of a ‘bad’ dictator whose removal would magically make life better. It is in fact part of a more sweeping dilemma caused by the failure to develop an inclusive community; a failure that can be traced back long before the seizure of power by the last dictator. While some ‘democratization’ visions are aware of this, the descriptions given by them are very often merely institutional, oversimplified, and de-contextualized.135 Al-Qarawee unearths the residues of colonial practices in Iraq as well as elsewhere in the Arab-majority nations. As he explains, the crisis in the postcolonial experience of nationalism stems largely from the reliance of the ruling elites upon ‘institutional, oversimplified, and decontextualized’ ‘descriptions’ ensures not just their continuance in power and authority but also the status quo. That is to say, the nation (in Iraq and other postcolonial states) is a rhetorical construct of abstract concepts, tropes, and images that

134 Anthony D. Smith makes a useful distinction between the state and the nation as of the former referring to ‘public institutions’ ‘exercising a monopoly of coercion and extraction within a given territory’, while the latter ‘signifies a cultural and political bond, uniting in a single political community all who share an historic culture and homeland’. See his *National Identity*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1991), pp. 14-15.
135Harith al-Qarawee, *Imagining the Nation: Nationalism, Sectarianism and Socio-Political Conflict in Iraq*, p. 5.
gain force and meaning by virtue of their unrelenting reproductions in the state’s institutions. In al-Zaidi and al-Qarawee, the crisis in postcolonial Iraqi nationalism, thus, is a problematique, for it involves a complex of national and transnational forces.

Utilitarian pragmatics is the guiding principle of the dominant articulations and practices in postcolonial Iraqi nationalism. Valyoom Asharah dislodges nationalism as a narrative of legitimation for the sustenance of the exclusive interests of centres of power, be they in opposition or in government. The novel demonstrates the ways in which Iraq as a nation-state is governed by a nationalist ‘group’ of ideologues and sellouts, for whom self-interest takes precedence over any other cause of the nation, no matter how great or urgent it might be. The novel’s depictions of Iraqis as caught in unremitting series of ‘repeated historical horror’, ‘reproach and the pressure of memory’ are further strengthened with images of the nationalist leaders as fighting over their stakes in ‘the pale grain of lentils’. In the narrative of Salaam, the Doctor is presented as a specimen of Iraq’s ruling ‘group’, with powerful resources and influential relations inside and outside the country. The nameless Doctor is a Machiavellian character for whom self-interest is far greater than the cause of the nation. The Doctor is a member of the Islamist Iraqi Opposition, who return to Iraq after the fall of Saddam, and take the lead of the state. Retelling us of what Hatif al-Saraaf, has told him about the Opposition, Salaam says:

Hatif left Baghdad in 1978, moving between different countries. He worked with ‘The Islamist Iraqi Opposition’ for quite a long time, then seceded from them on his own will. As he told me, he found that this opposition, the Islamist in general and the secular, all serve self-interests. They were clashing more with themselves than with the old regime, for joining the opposition then used to provide sufficient security and luxurious life, […] telling me ‘They are not angels but some of them are a band of devils, they know where to get into, and where to evaporate at crucial moments’. (p. 113)

The excerpt indicates that opposition - Islamist or secular - are sellouts and powerbrokers, bereft of national concern or moral conscience. The phrase ‘clashing more with themselves than with the old regime’ is subversive of the conventional understanding of opposition as a counterbalance to the hegemonic practices of the establishment. The implication is that acts of opposition parties (e.g., public mobilisation, rallying protests, demonstrations and strikes) are just a means of staking their (opposition) claim to ‘sufficient security and luxurious life’, securing their slice in the cake of the nation, or
ensuring their share in ‘the pale grain of lentils’. Nonetheless, al-Qarawee provides an extremely useful insight into Islamism:

Islam was re-introduced as an identity and political ideology adaptable to the social contexts of incomplete modernization. It was redefined through new ideological readings that sought to conciliate - or compromise - between tradition and modernity. The new Islamism is not a return to the past; it is the return of the past to serve the present’s conditions.\textsuperscript{136}

Islamism, as al-Qarawee remarks, is ‘an identity and political ideology’ constructed and utilised by some opposition groups for power and self-interest. The slogans and banners raised by Islamist parties are thought-out schemes that reappropriate and recast Islam, or the nation, so as to sustain personal investment. Al-Qarawee’s interrogation of the political investment of religion (in particular Islam) is reminiscent of Adonis’s discussions of in his magnum opus \textit{The Static and the Dynamic: A Research into Creativity and Imitation of Arabs} (1974-79). Adonis (pseudonym of Ali Ahmed Saeed) investigates the primary causes of the material and intellectual deteriorations in the Arab-majority nations, arguing that politically-motivated readings of religion contribute to the longevity of the status quo.\textsuperscript{137} He points out that political groups invest in religion for their own nefarious gains, leading to the perpetuation of oppressions through a melodramatic rhetoric.\textsuperscript{138} Yet, what al-Zaidi contributes to al-Qarawee and Adonis’s discussions is a consideration of the political utility of the concepts of the nation to the agendas of Islamists, particularly in relation to postcolonial Iraqi nationalism. The novel, thus, debunks the idealisation of the nation as a rhetorical construct of empty signifiers, for the nation is not an end in itself but a means for the promotion of the private interests of the Doctor and his elk.

The evident of the Machiavellian character can be seen in the character of the Doctor in the context of the stolen CD. The last two lines of the quotation cited earlier (‘some are a band of devils, they know where to get into, and where to evaporate at crucial moments’) (p. 113) provide a character-sketch of the Doctor. In the episode of the stolen CD (disc ‘C’), the Doctor manages to plan the whole deal of the CD to his own self-interest. First, he distances Salaam and Aseel from Baghdad for good, after having told

\textsuperscript{136} Al-Qarawee, ‘Heightened Sectarianism in the Middle East: Causes, Dynamics and Consequences’, \textit{Analysis}, No. 205, (November 2013), p. 5.

\textsuperscript{137} Adonis, \textit{The Static and the Dynamic: A Research into Creativity and Imitation of Arabs} (Beirut: Saqi, 1974-79), p. 62.

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., pp. 58-62.
them that the story of disc ‘C’ is being investigated by a special committee and that they are being suspected. He orders Aseel and Salaam to leave for Beirut where they all meet to negotiate the deal. In the Beirut meeting, the Doctor includes a new partner, an expert in CD codes, and thereby reduces the share of other partners. The Doctor tells Aseel, Salaam, and Hatif al-Saraaf that in order for them to make the best of the CD deal, there are two ways of which they must one: First is the ‘national way’, which ‘includes the termination of our partnership and the submission of the CD to the Iraqi authorities in return for a written letter confirming no later legal accountability. In addition, we will be allowed to set up a private bank for investment in currencies with the support of the Iraqi authorities and the Central Bank’ (p. 181). Second is the ‘commercial way’, which is ‘to sell out the CD to a Lebanese businessman who can do whatever he wants with it, causing no harm to us at all’ (p. 181). Having stated the options before his partners, the Doctor says he agrees to whichever option they make. Salaam, Aseel, and Hatif al-Saraaf go for the second option so that $50,000 is given to each of the five partners. However, the cheque amount, the Doctor says, is to be cashed only after six months (p. 183), or a less amount of $38,000 to be handed over at the moment. Salaam, Aseel, and al-Saraaf agree to take the deducted amount.

The CD episode reveals the hidden agendas of nationalist leaders. Not only is the Doctor a cunning imposter of partnership, but he is also coopted by foreign centres of power in complicitous relationships against the interests and integrity of the Iraqi nation-state. This reading is substantiated by Salaam’s own remark: ‘The reality of the Doctor (Naem) is disclosed now, he played it well and returned the CD to its owners’ (p. 184). The Doctor’s success in ‘returning the CD to its owners’ is a naked act of treason of his country, Iraq, for the CD contains details of foreign bank accounts and assets that belong to the Iraqi treasury which has no reference bills or documents except the stolen CD. The CD episode is an allegory of how the nation is utilised by sellouts and powerbrokers. The main point of the novel, thus, is to observe that the nation and its ideology is a rhetoric for the promotion of private entrepreneurship at the expense of the population.

The Lie of the Land

The defence of the land of the nation is the first and foremost ideological device that nationalist leaders deploy in fulfilment of their own avarice for power and authority. Postcolonial Iraqi nationalism too is an investment in the myth of the land. Al-Zaidi’s
Valyoom Asharah unravels the halo of the nation’s land by means of a reading against ‘the pale grain of lentils’, an unmaking the lie of the land through portrayals of the defeatism in the military morale, individual self-laceration, dehumanisation of Iraqi society, and pauperisation of economic resources. The novel’s depictions of the tragedies inflicted on Iraqis in the cause of the land of the nation are subversive of the nature and usefulness of the cause itself. Seeing off his brother (Colonel Ghassan) and wife at al-Harari Airport in Beirut, Salaam says to himself:

For me, the Colonel represents a symbol of my wasted Iraqihood by the successive authorities and other oppressors, especially when the country has become just a map eaten up by rats and turning into a pale grain of lentils. Where is the neutral area between us and Saudi Arabia? Where is the passage of the river and its UN-drawn boundaries? Where is the shabby northern zone with Jordan? And we continue to raise the banner of victory in order to deceive the defeated population. (p. 213)

Salaam’s reference to the lost territories of the Iraqi land is inextricable from the recent loss of Mosul at the hands of ‘bare-footed soldiers’ (ISIS). The fact that the Iraqi land is being expropriated from both within and without debunks nationalist claims to territorial sovereignty or struggle for the land as a hollow rhetoric utilised by ‘successive authorities and oppressors’. In light of the quotation above, the struggle for the land is a politically-motivated myth embedded in the abstract language, frozen tropes, and irrelevant concepts of postcolonial Iraqi nationalism. Al-Zaidi’s dismantling of the lie of the land is embodied particularly in the image of Iraq as ‘just a map eaten up by rats’ which reveals the inherent limitations in the nationalist interpretations of the country as ‘just a map’, i.e., a human artifice, or a disposable object, made for a specific purpose (to be ‘eaten up by rats’). The image critiques not just the utilitarian pragmatics that underwrites the articulations and practices of nationalist leaders but also the artificially-reductionist approach of nationalist language to the national land. The novel’s key point, thus, is to observe that the nation is a counter-productive concept, embedded in a set of reifications, in particular the lie of the land.

The demystification with the lie of the land is crucial to a radically-different imaginary of Iraqi nationhood. Al-Zaidi’s novel’s problematisation of the myth that the cause of the land is far greater than the human cause is extremely useful in fostering awareness of the duplicity and complicity of the concept of the nation and its ideology in the aggravation of Iraq’s crisis-fraught situation. However, the novel suggests a different
model of Iraqi nationhood whereby grievances can be redressed, safety and security lived and felt, individual agency reconstituted, and humaneness reclaimed. Salaam’s stay in Edmonton, Canada, is used in the novel as an opportunity to yield insights into a different model of nationhood. Before their leave for Canada, Salaam tells Aseel:

The country is not the land. I was totally mystified. Canada has offered me on a plate of gold an alternative homecountry surrounded by peace, security, and warmth. It has given me back my humaneness in return for nothing, offering for the sake of just humanity. The fervent theories of the nation have changed. The land of ancestors is my birthplace. .. are sheer Iraqi myths. (p. 214)

Salaam’s disillusionment with the lie of the land is an effect of his comparative awareness of the cultural poetics of ‘an alternative homecountry’. One the one hand, postcolonial Iraqi nationalism is built on a series of theories and myths invented, reiterated, and utilised by the dominant social and political forces in society for justifying their manipulation, oppression, and dehumanisation of their people. The lie of the land, as implied in the quotation above, is one of the hegemonic ‘Iraqi myths’ which continues to underpin the static model of Iraqi nationhood, and thereby helps in blocking critical awareness of the exclusionary practices of the dominant powers. On the other hand, the Canadian model of nationhood attaches great weight to the human cause by adequately attending to human needs of ‘peace, security, and warmth’ in all their concrete manifestations. Canadian nationhood is so dynamic that ‘fervent theories of the nation have changed’ in effect to keep pace with global changes and challenges, of which the flux of refugees and immigrants like Salaam are accommodated and included as fellow-human beings. Just as Canada has offered Salaam ‘an alternative homecountry’, France has offered Hashim Saleh (discussed earlier in relation to his critique of ‘historical blockages’) the ‘opportunity’ to understand. Saleh explains that his stay in France since 25 years has enabled him to distance himself from his environment so that he was able to deepen self-knowledge, to acquire a modern European language that is full of sources in all sorts of specialisations and sciences, to experience the freedom of expression. Like Salaam’s emphasis on the humane setting he experiences in Canada, Saleh describes the French Constitutions as ‘it is a cosmopolitan constitution, oriented to the human wherever s/he is, or whatever his/her ethno-religious bases.’ The novel’s chief insight, thus, is to emphasise the need for a new democratic imaginary of Iraqi nationhood, for it is a crucial

139 Hisham Saleh, Historical Blockage, pp. 39-40.
140 Ibid., p. 42.
step in assuaging the pain and suffering inflicted on Iraqis and reclaiming their humaneness.

As is quite clear, al-Zaidi’s *Valyoom Asharah* raises questions about the nature and usefulness of the dominant model of Iraqi nationhood. The discussion has demonstrated the ways in which the novel discloses the inadequacy of the dominant model as to meet the ever-widening schism between the state and the population, the pervasive sense of frustrations, and the historical grievances and injustices inflicted on Iraqi society. The depictions of the post-Mosul Iraqi state as doomed to military defeats, as hijacked by a mafia of power-centres, as inhabited by addicts and psychos, and as cracked by social and political identitarian imperative are keys to the novel’s unmaking of the lie of the land. Al-Zaidi’s *Valyoom Asharah* provides a deconstructive reading against ‘the pale grain of lentils’ by revealing the in-built contradictions of postcolonial Iraqi nationalism. The novel’s critical position is evident particularly in its call for a displacement of the hegemonic paradigm of Iraqi nationhood as well as providing an alternative vision of transformation.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated that the ways in which Gramoul’s *Za’een al-Aqaliyah al-Sahiqah* and al-Zaidi’s *Valyoom Asharah* problematise the dominant patterns of nationhood in their respective contexts. As noted earlier, the novels critique the way in which the nation is deployed as a sceptre of terror against the citizens through the cliques of interest-driven, morally-corrupt, conscience-devoid nationalist leaders. The deprivation and dispossession of Algerian and Iraqi peoples, their crisis-beset living conditions, depredations of their economic resources, fragmentations of their societies, erasure of memories, and denial of human dignity are embodied in the novels as ramifications of the absence of public critique. In addition, the nation and nationalism are interrogated in both the novels and represented as a rhetorical construct embedded in a long, colonial pedigree. The novels’ questioning of the nature and usefulness of the existing models of nationhood in Algeria and Iraq has revealed the complicitous relationship that nationalism holds to the colonial enterprise.

Discussion of the novels has also investigated their visions of transformation as presenting alternatives to the existing models of nationhood. On the one hand, Gramoul’s
Za‘eeem al-Aqaliyah al-Sahiqah emphasises the need for Algerians’ articulations of their grievances and historical experiences. The novel’s use of the King’s memoir as the narrative of the nation is an ironic manoeuvre, suggesting the need for a reversal of roles whereby Algerians become agents in the writing of their history and formative part in the reconstitution of their Algerian nationhood. On the other hand, al-Zaidi’s Valyoom Asharah calls for a revisionism of Iraqi nationhood from the perspective of the grass-roots levels of society. The novel invites Iraqis to rethink the long-term consequences of postcolonial Iraqi nationalism through a posterior, retrospective identification as embodied by the main character, Salaam. Salaam’s reading against the ‘pale grain of lentils’, as the novel suggests, is extremely useful in the unmaking of the lie of the land and in the search of a more humane model of nationhood. Thus, the transformative visions proposed by Gramoul and al-Zaidi are crucial for the integrity and welfare of their countries as well as the alleviation of grievances, particularly at grass-roots levels.

The chapter reveals not only the complicitous relationship between postcolonial nationalism and cultural imperialism but also the urge for a critically-informed/informing critique of intricate systems of intellectual enslavement and material exploitation. The critiques of the status quo in Algeria and Iraq (and therefore in the Arab-majority nations) as articulated by Gramoul, al-Zaidi, and other thinkers and critics in the chapter exemplify the need to foster greater consciousness of the social, cultural, material, and political implications of the nation and nationalism as constructions embedded in the configurations of colonial powers and imperial pursuits. The critiques reviewed in the chapter aim to unveil the concept of the nation and its ideology as an extension of colonialism, and to raise consciousness of the need for a new imaginary of nationhood within the ‘egalitarian spirit’ of equal citizenship, genuine democracy, and freedom of expression. The chapter’s discussion thus contributes significantly to producing a greater understanding of the unceasing crises of the postcolonial experience in Algeria, Iraq, and other Arab-majority nations.

**Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to explore the new possibilities for critical reflection that contemporary fiction articulates through criticising Western modernity’s impact on Arab-majority nations in general and on Iraq in particular. In this chapter, I argue that writers problematize postcolonial experiences of nationalism in Arab-majority nations by pursuing alternative visions of social and political transformation. With this aim in mind, I discuss Algerian Yasmina Khadra’s novel *The Sirens of Baghdad* and Iraqi Ali Bader’s novel *The Tobacco Keeper*. *The Sirens of Baghdad* problematises the impact of the ideology of Western modernity, particularly in the context of the US imperial intervention in Iraq in 2003. *The Tobacco Keeper* calls for a categorical redefinition of identity through a critique of the nature and usefulness of postcolonial identity formations, particularly in relation to their impact on the Iraqi society at grassroots level. The chapter, therefore, addresses the questions of how, and to what end, Iraqi novels explore alternatives to the imposition of nationalism.

The chapter examines the critical positions of the novels on the postcolonial experience of the nationalist order in Iraq. I focus primarily on the fluidity of boundaries and identity as well as the flawed concept of identity. I bring generalities into dialogue with specifics through an integration of the novels’ critical positions with a range of postcolonial critiques of the ideology of Western modernity. The literature that I draw on in my analysis and interpretation of the novels include work by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, William T Cavanaugh, Toby Dodge, Issa Boullata, and Sally Bland. I intend to examine how theoretical insights as well as literary articulations of the novelists under study can contribute to fostering greater awareness of the need to forge new possibilities for critical discussion beyond the frames of empire.
Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, in their book entitled *Empire* (2001), use the concept of ‘Empire’ to refer to the hegemonic paradigm of the contemporary world. Hardt and Negri argue that ‘Empire’ as a concept captures the reconfigurations that modern imperialism assumes in the context of globalisation, and therefore signifies a new global form of sovereignty:

Empire is materializing before our very eyes. Over the past several decades, as colonial regimes were overthrown and then precipitously after the Soviet barriers to the capitalist world market finally collapsed, we have witnessed an irresistible and irreversible globalization of economic and cultural exchanges. Along with the global market and global circuits of production has emerged a global order, a new logic and structure of rule—in short, a new form of sovereignty. Empire is the political subject that effectively regulates these global exchanges, the sovereign power that governs the world.  

‘Empire’ is comprised of agencies which function on different levels yet overlap with one another in order to constitute one framework of governance for the whole world. They argue that ‘sovereignty has taken a new form, composed of a series of national and supranational organisms united under a single logic of rule.’ The chief insight of Hardt and Negri is to show that the dispersion of power and the breaking down of boundaries signals the arrival of a different -yet related - order of imperial domination.

In keeping with Hardt and Negri’s perspectives discussed above, my analysis and interpretation of *The Sirens of Baghdad* and *The Tobacco Keeper* seeks to articulate a counter-hegemonic discourse by negotiating a range of alternatives. To address alternatives, I argue, is a crucial step in restoring cultural confidence and authority in histories and experiences that occupy the margins of the grand narrative of empire. In so doing, a greater awareness of the possibility and desirability of critique arises, and a transformation in the way in which grievances should be redressed is made possible.

*The Sirens of Baghdad*

*The Sirens of Baghdad* was written by Algerian Yasmina Khadra (pseudonym for Mohammed Moulessehoul), a former officer in the Algerian army. In an interview, Yasmina Khadra points out that, in 1989 the military leadership turned him to a

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2 Ibid. p. xi.
3 Ibid., p. xii.
4 Ibid., pp. xiv-xv.
disciplinary board for his publication while in-service.\(^5\) Khadra adds that writing under a pen name was his wife’s suggestion, and that Yasmina is his wife’s real name.\(^6\) Khadr’s other novels include *The Attack* (2005), *The Swallows of Kabul* (2004) and *Dead Man’s Share* (2009).

Khadr’s *The Siren of Baghdad* depicts the predicament of a first-year student of the humanities at Baghdad University, who finds himself compelled to return to his village, Kafr Karam, because of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. The nameless narrator portrays Kafr Karam as a desert village, inhabited by a number of related families, and guided by the inherited values of Bedouin codes of conduct. The village - though initially unaffected by the US occupation - receives its share of the mayhem and bloodshed. The young narrator recounts three tragic incidents that ravage the whole village, and therefore motivate the youth, including the narrator himself, to join resistance groups in Baghdad in defence of their honour. The shooting down of Sulayman, a mentally-disabled son of the village’s blacksmith; the bombing of a wedding reception; and the outrage committed by some US troops against the narrator’s own family, especially the humiliation of his physically-disabled father, are the prime causes for the narrator’s recruitment in a resistance group in Baghdad. The narrator tells us how his body is injected with a virus, with which he is to infect all people in London. Before leaving Beirut for London, the narrator finds himself unable to board the plane, giving up the whole idea of the terrorist mission, and as a result is taken away by the group to a distant place.

The US intervention in Iraq provides the context in which *The Sirens of Baghdad* does not just deconstruct the myth of national sovereignty but also asserts the continuity of imperialist enterprises. The novel’s reinterpretation of the nature and usefulness of modern ideology potentially contributes substantially to contemporary debates. Arturo Escobar,\(^7\) in his essay ‘Beyond the Third World: Imperial Globality, Global Coloniality and Anti-globalisation Social Movements’, discusses how coloniality does not end with


\(^6\) Ibid.

\(^7\) Arturo Escobar is in the Department of Anthropology, CB 3115 University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC 27599, USA.
colonialism, but is rearticulated in terms of the post-World War II imaginary of three worlds. Escobar writes:

It is important to start thinking in earnest about the new mechanisms introduced by the new round of coloniality of power and knowledge. So far, this rearticulation of globality and coloniality is chiefly effected through discourses and practices of terrorism. These are not completely new, of course; in some ways, they build (still!) on the regime of classification that took place at the dawn of modernity [...].

Escobar’s consideration of ‘the new round of coloniality of power and knowledge’ reliance of the ‘unipolarity’ is pertinent to the claim of Hardt and Negri concerning ‘Empire’. As will be discussed in greater detail below, the novel questions the structure of terror deployed by the US troops on the Iraqi ground deploy on the one hand, and on the other hand, it argues that the justifications for US War on Terror are enmeshed in the dominant ideology of Western modernity. In addition, the novel’s focus on the impact of modern ideology runs parallel to what Escobar perceives as the ‘new mechanisms’ of neocolonialism. Nonetheless, I argue that Khadra’s novel is a counter-hegemonic narrative, which aims to foster greater awareness of ‘the new round of coloniality’ behind the façade of the War on Terror in Iraq (as well as other Arab-majority nations).

**Imperial Continuity**

*The Sirens of Baghdad* critiques the separatist identity politics implied in the dominant ideology of Western modernity. The novel foregrounds ‘intellectual racism’ as an embodiment of the divisive criteria of modern ideology, which entails the marginalisation and denial of non-western intellectuals (in particular Arabs and Muslims) from due recognition for their contributions. It is for the crucial significance of intellectual racism that the novel opens with a conversation between the narrator and Dr Jalal at a hotel in Beirut. Dr Jalal is an eloquent speaker for the cause of fundamentalists against the West. The opening scene, I argue, captures one of the main undercurrents of the novel: ethnocentric arrogance of Western imperial powers. Explaining to the narrator how the

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9 Ibid., p. 225.
10 Yasmina Khadra, *The Sirens of Baghdad*, trans. John Cullen (London: Vintage, 2008), p.10. All further references to the novel are from this edition and will be marked in parentheses.
11 Fundamentalists are hardliners who do not tolerate different views or cultures or religions as the narrator describes Dr Jalal in the novel.
West uses Iraqi intellectuals as puppets in its hand, Dr Jalal says: ‘The West loves only itself and thinks only of itself. It throws us a line, so it can use us as bait. It manipulates us and sets us against our own people, and then, when it’s through toying with us, it files us away in its secret drawers and forgets us’ (p. 9). Dr Jalal is denied due intellectual recognition by modern institutions of knowledge. The ‘intellectual racism’ (p. 10), to which Dr Jalal is subjected, is symptomatic of the Western racially-based devaluation of the intellectual potential of non-Westerners. To this point Dr Jalal says: ‘The West will never acknowledge our merits. As far as Westerners are concerned, Arabs are only good for kicking soccer balls or wailing into microphones. The more we prove the contrary, the less they’re willing to admit it’ (pp. 9-10). Alienation, therefore, is caused by Western stereotypes (in particular ‘intellectual racism’) against Arab population.

Khadra’s critique of ‘intellectual racism’ is pertinent to Dipesh Chakrabarty’s discussion of the predicament of non-Western intellectuals. Chakrabarty, in his well-known essay ‘Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History’, addresses the question of the university as a modern institution, which operates within the ‘knowledge protocols’ of the ‘master narrative’ of the ‘history of Europe’. Yet, what Khadra adds to Chakrabarty’s discussion is a consideration of how the enactment of ‘intellectual racism’ causes antagonism towards the West, and thereby provides an air of legitimacy to the causes of terror. The link between ‘intellectual racism’ and terror is articulated in the novel wherein the narrator, having heard Dr Jalal’s grievances, feels so reassured of the profound meaning of his mission that it ‘will be the greatest operation ever carried out on enemy territory, a thousand times more awesome than the attacks of September 11….’ (p. 11). Thus, the novel stresses the need to revise the legacy of colonialism, in particular institutional forms and practices of knowledge production. I subscribe to the novel’s critical position concerning the revision of the ways in which modern institutions operate, for, I argue, it is of paramount significance in transforming how we think grievances should be redressed, and histories repossessed.

The Sirens of Baghdad investigates the extent to which colonial hangovers continue to govern the attitude of the neo-colonisers of Iraq. The novel depicts how the

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Americans’ use of racial slurs against Iraqis is suggestive not only of the brutish and brutalising nature of Western worldviews but also of the Westerners’ ignorance of Iraq’s pioneering role in the advance of human civilisation. On his way from Kafr Karam to Baghdad, the narrator in Khadra’s novel happens to meet a driver who was an interpreter for the US troops in Iraq. The driver tells him how he was ill-treated by Americans, who used to describe him as a ‘sand nigger’ (p. 126), and who ‘got their kicks making fun of me and treating me like shit’ (p. 127). The redeployment of racially-pejorative terms of the European colonisers does not reflect any tangible refinement in the neocolonial attitudes but implies a blindness at the base of their conception of modernity. The misunderstanding of modernity by the neo-colonisers and their predecessors is articulated by the driver-interpreter below:

They think all Arabs are retarded. Imagine: Arabs, the most fabulous creatures on earth. We taught the world table manners; we taught the world hygiene and cooking and mathematics and medicine. And what do these degenerates of modernity remember of all that? A camel caravan crossing the dunes at sunset? Some fat guy in a white robe and a keffiyeh flashing his millions in a gambling casino on the Cote d’Azur? Clichés, caricatures …. (p. 128)

The reference of the facile stereotypes of Arabs in the passage above is suggestive of the profound impact of such ‘clichés, caricatures …’ on the psyche of the driver (as a member of Iraq and therefore of Arab-majority nations). The ellipsis in the end of the quote indicates that the promotion of modern prejudices has become commonplace to the extent that it no longer grabs the attention of the public, for the alienation caused by Western stereotypes has been naturalised and internalised in modern consciousness. Nevertheless, Khadra’s disclosure of the reliance of the new empire on the ideological heritage of its predecessor resonates with Toby Dodge’s ‘The Ideological Roots of Failure: The Application of Kinetic Neo-liberalism to Iraq’ (2010). As the title of his essay indicates, Dodge points out that the US foreign policy is framed by a set of ideological positions. The failure of the American invasion of Iraq, as he explains, owes largely to the ‘ideational categories’ of the Western discourse of modernity:

Individuals in the White House or indeed anywhere do not react to neutral, objective’ situations. Instead, the range of choices they consider to be viable have

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been shaped-limited or widened-by the analytical categories through which they impose meaning on the world. [...] Decision-makers are both empowered and constrained by the ideational categories they have inherited from within their own societies and through which they make sense of the world.  

Dodge’s commentary cuts across with Khadra’s critique of the impact of the ideology of Western modernity. Both of them relate the failure of the US occupation of Iraq to the ideological formations of Western modernity. Yet, what Khadra adds to Dodge’s discussion is a consideration of the role of the ideological dominant in the perpetuation of intellectual and cultural distortions of other civilisations, particularly of Arabic-majority nations. In light of the quotations above, I argue that one of the novel’s aim is to observe that modernity is misused and misappropriated by European and American ‘degenerates’, for modernity entails not self-aggrandizement at the cost of other sections of humanity but contribution to the improvement of the living and thinking conditions of humanity in its entirety.

Postcolonial Iraqi nationalism is problematised in The Sirens of Baghdad, too. The novel demonstrates the ways in which postcolonial Iraqi nationalism does not just continue the oppressive practices of British colonialism but also fails to safeguard the nation’s sovereignty in the face of American neocolonialism. The critical position that the novel takes towards the reliance of the Iraqi state on Western modern ideals such as secular democracy and global capitalism is articulated by the Kafr Karam villagers in their conversations at the barbershop. While some ascribe the US invasion in Iraq to the crimes committed by Saddam Hossein, others have different perceptions about the national tragedy. According to Bashir the Falcon:

[Saddam] was a monster, yes, but he was our monster. He came from among us, he shared our blood, and we all contributed to consolidating his megalomania. Do you prefer infidels from the other side of the world, troops sent here to roll over us? The GIs are nothing but brutes and wild beasts; they drive their big machines past our widows and orphans and have no qualms about dropping their bombs on our health clinics. Look at what they’ve made of our country: hell on earth. (pp. 32-33)

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The passage above indicates the extent to which the divisive criteria (‘our’ and ‘their’, ‘we’ and ‘they’) implied in the ideology of Western modernity has penetrated the common parlance of everyday language even in the ‘desert village’ of Kafr Karam. The use of the phrases ‘from among us’ and ‘shared our blood’ reworks the Eurocentric claims of racial superiority; the separatist identity politics of Eurocentrism has been internalised by many Iraqis. In other words, the phrases used above suggest the extent to which the ideological indoctrination of Eurocentric values and categories has had a powerful impact on Iraqi society, particularly at the grassroots levels. However, it awards moral equivalence to Saddam and the US forces. In light of the quotation above, I argue that Khadra’s novel dislodges postcolonial Iraqi nationalism as an extension of the ideology of the Western discourse of modernity, for the spectre of terror against Iraqis continues to frame the attitude of the establishment towards the population.

Khadra’s novel posits that the structure of terror implied in the modern, colonial ideology remains intact in the postcolonial and neocolonial epochs of Iraq. In response to the Falcon’s speech cited above, one of the villages says: ‘Saddam made it a mass grave’ (p. 33). The appalling image of a genocide (‘mass grave’) is supplemented with other images. The Falcon answers back: ‘It wasn’t Saddam; it was our fear. If we had shown a minimum of courage and solidarity, that cur would never have dared become such a tyrant’ (p. 33). Then a third villager intervenes by saying: ‘You’re right’ […] ‘we let ourselves be pushed around, and he took advantage of the situation. But you won’t make me change my mind: The Americans freed us from an ogre who threatened to devour us raw, all of us, one after the other’ (p. 33). The phrases ‘a mass grave’, ‘cur’, ‘tyrant’, and ‘ogre’ are indicative of the atrocities committed by Saddam regime all in the name of the nation and nationalism. Nevertheless, the two-way argument presented above suggests that the novel promotes neither of them. A key concern of the novel, I suppose, is the need to move from blaming discourses, for they do not help in effecting change. The novel’s chief insight, however, is to observe how the language and practice of violence is intrinsic to the modus operandi of the modern secular state.

The counter-hegemonic discourse in The Sirens of Baghdad is evident particularly through depictions of the humiliation, loss, and suffering that Iraqis are made to experience due to the US-led War on Terror. The novel’s critique of the ideological underpinnings of Western modernity makes clear that the US invasion of Iraq is informed
by the Eurocentric claims of racial superiority. The force of the critique is based on the novel’s portrayals of the violation of all norms of decency by the American troops in Kafr Karam. It is the Americans’ violation of the narrator’s honour that drives him to remind them that this was an assault in his father:

I’d never seen him in such a state. With his threadbare undershirt hanging loosely from his thin shoulders and his stretched-out drawers fallen nearly to his knees, he was the very image of boundless distress, walking misery, an affront personified in all its absolute boorishness. [...] With a final effort, he pivoted on his heels and tried to go back to the bedroom to fetch his robe—and the blow was struck. [...] My father fell over backward; his miserable undershirt flapped up over his face, revealing his belly, which was concave, wrinkled, and gray as the belly of a dead fish.... And I saw, while my family’s honor lay stricken on the floor, what it was forbidden to see, what a worthy, respectable son, an authentic Bedouin, must never see [...] That sight was the edge of the abyss, and beyond it, there was nothing but the infinite void, an interminable fall, nothingness. (p.101)

The passage captures in lucid terms the barbaric conduct of the American soldiers, which is an allegory for their frame of reference (Western modernity). The novel’s main point is to observe that it is the American terrorisation of the narrator’s family (in particular the outrage of his father’s honor) that pulls the narrator into circles of terror. He joins a terrorist group in Baghdad, for he believes that ‘it was my duty to wash away the insult, my sacred duty and my absolute right’ (p. 160); ‘an obligation I couldn’t ignore was mobilizing me’ (p. 160); ‘the only reference point I had was the certainty that I would carry out to the fullest extent the oath my ancestors had sealed in blood and sorrow when they placed honor above their own lives’ (p. 160). The narrator’s revenge for his honour - though expressed in religious terms as in ‘sacred duty’ - is caused by the American transgression of the most-cherished ideal of the narrator’s culture, that is, ‘honor’. The savagery of the US forces, thus, is an embodiment of a moral deficiency in the dominant ideology of Western modernity.

The devaluation of human norms of decency and grace by the US forces in Iraq is the breeding ground of terror. Khadra’s novel devotes attention to the cultural crisis introduced by the imposition of the dominant ideology of Western modernity through depictions of the disruption of social mores and outrage of modesty.¹⁶ The novel’s

¹⁶ Saba Mahmood, in her book *Politics of Piety*, examines the Islamic values of modesty in the context of present-day Egypt. Mahmood asserts that modesty, like other Islamic ethical and moral values, is not
particular focus on the dehumanisation of Iraqis in the hands of the US troops suggests that modern ideals of human rights to a life of dignity are fallacies behind which are Euro-American hubris and avarice for power and glory. In the novel, the narrator, now in Baghdad to fulfil his ‘sacred duty’, has a conversation with his fellow-countrymen, Sayed and Yaseen, two leaders of a resistance group. Talking of how Americans have exposed the honour of narrator’s family, Sayed says:

They arrive here from an unjust, cruel universe with no humanity and no morals, where the powerful feed on the flesh of the downtrodden. Violence and hatred sum up their history; Machiavellianism shapes and justifies their initiatives and their ambitions. What can they comprehend of our world, which has produced the most fabulous pages in the history of human civilization? Our fundamental values are still intact; our oaths are unbroken; our traditional points of reference remain the same. What can they understand about us? (p. 175)

The significance of the conversation cited above is that it lays bare the moral vacuum in the ideological framework of Western modernity. Apart from foregrounding the cultural crisis implied in the sharp contrast between the traditional culture of Iraqis and the modern culture of Americans, I argue that the conversation above is critical of the impact of the separatist identity politics of modernity. The reiteration of the italicised pronoun ‘our’ is an effect of the binaristic thinking in the hegemonic paradigm of modernity. The reiteration of such binaries is to justify demonization of the Other. As D.N. Nelson (2003) notes, ‘It is discourse that justifies inhumanity and demonizes the enemy.’17 The novel’s chief insight, thus, is to observe how anti-American (anti-European) groups rely in their proclamations on racial distinctions, thus suggesting the impact of the ideology of Western modernity on the ground of Iraq.

Islam’s correlation with violence is a modern myth.18 The Sirens of Baghdad emphasises the fact that the violence committed by Iraqi resistance groups is a result of the outrageous acts of the invading forces against Iraqis. The novel’s focus on the

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humiliation of Iraqis as a prime cause for the phenomenon of terror is a subtle refutation of Islam’s correlation with violence.\(^{19}\) While watching the tragedy of Fallujah on al-Jazeera TV Channel, Malik, who is one of Kafr Karam youth sitting at the cafe, says:

> What I see on that screen is a city under siege. I see Muslims buried in its ruins, I see fugitives at the mercy of a rocket or a missile, and, all around, I see faithless, lawless brutes trampling on us in our country. [...] Infidels subjugating Muslims, demeaning their leaders, throwing their heroes into cages where sluts in fatigues pull their ears and their testicles and pose for posterity. (p. 77)

One of the aims of the novel is to make clear and evident that it is the denigration and oppression of Muslim Iraqis by the US forces that leads to the rise of terror. The words ‘infidels’ is interesting because it goes along with framing the conflict in terms of a clash of civilisations and even hearks back to the Crusades. Nonetheless, William Cavanaugh,\(^{20}\) in his essay ‘Colonialism and the Myth of Religious Violence’, dismantles the notion of ‘religious violence’, which Cavanaugh sees as a ‘myth’ inscribed in the modern rhetoric of the superiority of the West over the rest.\(^{21}\) Cavanaugh demonstrates the ways in which ‘the myth of religious violence’ is an offshoot of the modern distinction between secularity and religion,\(^{22}\) arguing that ‘The religion-secular dichotomy was a creation of the modern state, which secured its unrivalled sovereignty by domesticking the church’.\(^{23}\) The secular/religious dichotomy, as the argument runs, justifies all kinds of practices in the secular domain: ‘The argument that religion causes violence sanctions a dichotomy between non-Western, especially Muslim, forms of culture […] and Western culture. [...] This dichotomy […] can be used to legitimize the use of violence against those with whom it is impossible to reason’.\(^{24}\) According to Cavanaugh:

> The West is a monolithic reality representing modernity, which necessarily includes secularity and rationality, while the Muslim world is an equally monolithic reality that is ancient, that is, lagging behind modernity, because of its essentially religious and irrational character. This opposition of rational and

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\(^{19}\) Nilufer Gole critiques the ‘monocivilizational narrative of Western modernity’ and discusses how both Islam and modernity are modern in their own right. See Gole’s ‘Snapshots of Islamic Modernities’, in *Multiple Modernities Daedalus*, (Routledge, 2017), pp. 91-117.

\(^{20}\) William Cavanaugh is Professor of Catholic Studies and Director of the Centre for World Catholicism and Intercultural Theology at DePaul University, Chicago.


\(^{22}\) Ibid., p. 242.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., p. 254.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., p. 241.
irrational, secular and religious, Western and Muslim is not simply descriptive, but helps to create the opposition that it purports to describe.25

Underlying Cavanaugh’s argument is the assumption that the concept of religious violence is a rhetoric which seeks to isolate and thereby dominate artificially-classified sections of humanity, in particular the Muslim world.26 In other words, the presence of ‘religious violence’ is a source of legitimation for the existence and continuance of the secular state. The construction of the ‘myth of religious violence’ is inseparable from the story of the rise of the modern sovereign state, whose justification is the containment of religiously-inspired conflict. For Cavanaugh, ‘There is no reason to suppose that so-called secular ideologies such as nationalism, patriotism, capitalism, Marxism and liberalism are any less prone to be absolutist, divisive and irrational than belief in, for example, the biblical God’.27 As has been theorised,28 the distinction between religion and state is a rhetorical construct, which justifies the oppression of religious groups (in particular Muslims) by the state. The implication is that the perpetuation of misunderstandings about Islam is an embodiment of the impact of the hegemonic ideology of modernity.

*The Sirens of Baghdad* unearths the hidden agenda of the US intervention in Iraq. The novel’s critique of imperial continuity is articulated through a consideration of the geopolitical interests and power relations that the US invasion of Iraq is designed to reinforce. At the barbershop in Kafr Karam, the villagers exchange views about the reasons for the invasion of the American forces into Iraq. For Bashir the Falcon, it is material gain that drives the Americans into his country:

Why do you think they’re here, the Americans? Is it Christian charity? They’re businessmen, we’re commodities, and they’re ready to trade. Yesterday, it was oil for food. Today, it’s Saddam for oil. And what do we get out of all this? If the

25 Ibid., p. 258.
26 Robert Pape’s (2003) study of the ‘strategic logic of suicide terrorism’ revises the expectation by shifting the focus from Islamic fundamentalism to the presence of Western forces in Arabia as the prime cause of the largest cases of ‘suicide terrorism’. Pape’s revision of expectations states that the prime causes of most acts of suicide terrorism are not associated with Islamic fundamentalism but have to do with the geopolitical utility of the War on Terror for the Western dominant forces in Arabia. Robert A. Pape, ‘The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism’, *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 3, (2003): pp. 1-19.
27 Cavanaugh, p. 252.
Americans had an ounce of human kindness, they wouldn’t treat their blacks and their Latinos like subhuman. Instead of crossing oceans to come to the aid of some poor, emasculated ragheads, they’d better to put their own house in order. They could do something about the Indians they’ve got rotting away on their own reservations, kept out of sight like people with shameful disease. (p. 33)

The counter-hegemonic stance of Khadra’s novel is embodied in its exposé of the barbarity of the American empire on its own ground. The ‘subhuman’ treatment of ‘blacks’ and ‘Latinos’ as well as quarantine of ‘the Indians’ is a critique of the USA as a rehash of the social and political hierarchies that were first established by European colonisers. The reference to the racial segregation against inhabitants of America debunks the myth of ‘Christian charity’ and ‘the aid of some poor, emasculated ragheads’ in Iraq, too. The passage cited above makes clear and evident that the US claim to liberate Iraqis is a rhetorical construct, which justifies the intervention and thereby helps quench American insatiable thirst for Iraqi wealth and oil resources.

The ‘vultures of Washington’ as described by Jabir, who is known in the village as ‘Doc’, have a keen eye on the geopolitical power relations in the whole region of the Middle East. For Jabir, who used to teach philosophy in a preparatory school in Basra, the US intervention is a reinforcement of its ‘hegemonic project’:

The USA was extremely worried about two things that might interfere with its hegemonic project. One: Our country was very close to acquiring full sovereignty—that is, a nuclear weapon. In the new world order, only nations that have a nuclear arsenal are sovereign; the others may be potential hotbeds of tension or providential sources of raw materials for the great powers, but from now on, that’s all. The world is run by the forces of international finance, for which peace is equivalent to layoffs. It’s all a matter of living space. The second hing the USA knew was that Iraq was the only military force in the region capable of standing up to Israel. Bringing Iraq to its knees would make it possible for Israel to dominate the Middle East. (pp. 34-35)

The redefinition of sovereignty as the acquisition of ‘a nuclear arsenal’ entails the never-ending subjugation and dependence of all Arab-majority nations (including Iraq) on ‘the great powers’. The fate of the Arab-majority nations is either to fall into intracommunal conflict or to provide ‘raw materials’ for imperialist forces. In light of the quotation above, the novel’s portrayal of ‘the new world order’ as divided among imperial powers into spheres of influence wherein the struggle for survival is the condition of human relations provides a subtle critique of Samuel P. Huntington’s ‘Clash of Civilizations’
thesis. Huntington, in his book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, contends, with the end of the Cold War, the world experiences at the ideological faultlines of between the West and other world cultures, especially Islam. According to Huntington, the relationship between Islam and the West ‘has been the other’s Other’; their antagonism arises out of Islam’s inhospitable nature to Western liberal concepts, in particular ‘secularism, irreligiosity, and hence immorality’. Cavanaugh’s critique of ‘religion’ as a concept is mirrored in Khadra’s critique as evident particularly in the use of image of the ‘vultures of Washington’. Cavanaugh and Khadra expose the hollow rhetoric of the ‘clash of civilizations’ as advanced by ideological hoaxes like Huntington. Just as ‘vultures’ hover around their prey, the US invasion is a politically-strategic tactic for the maintenance of the geopolitical interests of the American empire, a reflection of a Eurocentred structure of imperial conquest.

As is clear, *The Sirens of Baghdad* constitutes a countervailing force against the hegemonic ideology of Western modernity. The novel’s critical unravelling of the far-reaching implications of modern ideology for the grassroots population of Iraqi society yields useful insights into a dominant set of ideas, characterised by the idea of the civilising mission and notions that Islam is inherently violent, ideas which are both resisted and yet sometimes internalised by Iraqis themselves. The novel suggests that the roots of terror in Iraq (as well as in other Arab-majority nations) are subtly embedded in the ideology of Western modernity. In what follows, I consider the alternative that the novel offers as a way out of the crisis inherent in the hegemonic paradigm of modernity.

**Alternative vision**

*The Sirens of Baghdad* investigates the extent to which the ideology embodied in the articulations and practices of the villagers of Kafr Karam can serve as an alternative model to the dominant ideology of Western modernity. Kafr Karam is represented in the novel as untouched, or uncontaminated, by the forays of Western modernity, and therefore is a site of desire and possibility for an alternative imaginary. I argue that the novel’s proposed alternative is a figure of authenticity, for Kafr Karam is presented

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30 Ibid., p. 209.
31 Ibid., p. 114.
32 Ibid., p. 213.
through a consideration of a range of concrete experiences and articulations by the villagers. In other words, the novel’s grounding of its portrayals of the village in its own material and historical terms is not just a departure from the highly-abstract language of Western modernity but also an affirmation of possibilities of living and thinking beyond the hegemonic paradigm.

*The Sirens of Baghdad* provides depictions of the narrator’s Kafr Karam as a categorically-different location where Iraqis relate to one another, and go about their daily life, uninterrupted by the material changes that modernity has brought about in the wider context of their country. The novel portrays Kafr Karam as enmeshed in a cosmology rooted in the traditional formations of Arabic Bedouin culture. Kafr Karam, according to the narrator, ‘wasn’t a paradise, but-since penury resides in the mind, not the heart-we were able to laugh aloud at every jest and to draw from one another’s eyes whatever we needed to cope with the nuisances of life’ (p. 24). The celebration of life as indicated in the narrator’s words is an allegory not just of the village’s self-sufficiency but also of its transnational positioning, emphasising the complex formations of traditional Arabic-Bedouin culture.

*The Sirens of Baghdad* shows how communitarian values of modesty prevail, and respect for the elderly and the parents is a living reality in Kafr Karam. Throughout the novel, the nameless narrator keeps reverting to the established traditions of morality that characterise the way people act and interact with one another in their village: ‘Our people think it’s better to die than to sink into vice and thievery. The call of the Ancients frowns out the siren’s son, no matter how loud. We’re honest by vocation’ (p. 18); ‘Whenever trouble loomed, our village elders would intervene and calm everyone down’ (p. 23); ‘In our village, the young, like the old, respect one another’ (p. 43); ‘We’re all brothers, cousins, neighbors, and relatives here, and we watch what we do and how we act’ (p.43); ‘In Kafr Karam, when sages and important men start quarreling, teenagers and bachelors must depart from the scene’ (p. 38). Despite their miserable material conditions, Kafr Karam villagers stick to honesty, maintain respect of their elders, and relate to one another. Nevertheless, it could be argued that the novel is romanticizing the culture. The novel is in some sense making a case for local sensibility and morality as a way for restoring dignity, for the representative nature of this village could be seen as a kind of nationalistic propaganda. However, Arthur Goldschmidt discusses the crucial
significance of morals and ethical principles in relation to Arabic cultural traditions. Referring to a number of these norms, Goldschmidt mentions: ‘hospitality, generosity, strong family ties, and true empathy for the needy and feelings of others.’ Like Goldschmidt, Peter Adamson indicates that Arabic culture seeks to develop ethically-responsible individuals, precisely because Arabic is essentially didactic in orientation. Nonetheless, I argue that the discourses being enacted by Goldschmidt, Adamson, and Khadra are in danger of essentialising, and thereby creating, a monolithic category, (‘Arabic culture’), which is complicit with the discourse of postcolonial nationalism itself. Khadra’s novel’s main point, however, is to suggest that Kafr Karam has a superior moral compass than Western ideological models, for the character-formation in the former focuses on the humane dimension of the human while the latter is a dehumanising project.

The promotion of humane principles is conducive to peace. In contrast to the aggressive ideology of Western modernity, the humane setting in Kafr Karam continues to provide peace of mind to its inhabitants. Despite its peripheral positioning by the state, the village inspires its people with the sense and sensibility of humanity, as described by the novel’s narrator:

We were poor, common people, but we were at peace. Until the day when our privacy was violated, our taboos broken, our dignity dragged through the mud and gore … until the day when brutes festooned with grenades and handcuffs burst into the garden of Babylon, come to teach poets how to be free men...' (p.12)

As the passage indicates, the peace at Kafr Karam has nothing to do with material prosperity that is often associated with modern style of life. The Kafr Karam peace, as is implied, is a facet of the internal stability of the villagers’ psyche as a result of their respect for traditionally-inherited norms. Khadra’s above-cited allusions to the ‘gardens of Babylon’ and to Iraqis as ‘poets’ and ‘free men’ are suggestive of the historical rootedness of Iraq’s cultural traditions, and therefore of the world’s indebtedness to such a history. Nonetheless, the renowned Muslim scholar Mohammed Qutb notes that the ‘peace’ that the morally-informed conduct of life that Arabic and Islam culture provides

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33 Arthur Goldschmidt Jr, A Concise History of the Middle East (Routledge, 2018).
34 Ibid., p. 408.
is ‘spiritual tranquility.’ 36 British historian of religion Karen Armstrong, in her book *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet* (2008), questions the relation between terror and Islam, arguing that terrorist ‘hijack the biography of Muhammad and twist it to suit their own ends.’ 37 Like Khadra and Qutb before him, Armstrong remarks that the ideological underpinnings of Arabic and Islamic culture promote hermeneutics of peace. As she writes:

> We can learn from Muhammad how to make peace. His whole career shows that the first priority must be to extirpate greed, hatred and contempt from our own hearts and to reform our own society. Only then is it possible to build a safe, stable world, where people can live together in harmony, and respect each other’s differences. 38

Khadra’s proposal of the ideology of Kafr Karam as an alternative to the dominant ideology of Western modernity is thus confirmed by Armstrong, as the quotation above suggests. Yet, what Khadra’s novel contributes to Armstrong and Qutb is a consideration of the viability of an alternative model as embodied in Kafr Karam. However, I argue that the novel’s alternative itself could be seen as a discourse about Arab nationalism, which itself exercises its unspoken exclusions.

The most powerful insight that Khadra’s novel provides in relation to Kafr Karam is that the violence and barbarity that modernity usually ascribes to traditional cultures is a myth. Having critiqued the impact of the ideology of Western modernity through depictions of the American savagery against Iraqis, the novel provides a categorically divergent image of the impact of the ideological forms of Kafr Karam. It is in the last scene of the novel where the narrator’s immediate memory of the humane relations of passengers bidding farewell to their relatives at Beirut airport as well as the memory of Kafr Karam that the impulse for revenge is repressed. The narrator’s desire for revenge is stifled at the sight of the bonding relations that characterise human beings beyond all sectarian considerations:

> My anxieties merge with my memories. My whole life passes through my mind: Kafr Karam, my family, my dead, my living, the people I miss, the ones who haunt me…. Nevertheless, of all my memories, the most recent are the most distinct: that woman in the airport, hopefully examining the screen of her cell phone; that


38 Ibid., p. 15
father-to-be who was so happy, he didn’t know which way to turn; that young European couple kissing each other…. They deserve to live for a thousand years. I have no right to challenge their kisses, scuttle their dreams, dash their hopes. (p. 306)

The passage reflects the profound impact of the indigenous culture of Kafr Karam on the narrator. It is the residual cultural potential of Kafr Karam that helps the narrator to change his mind and discard his whole mission. In light of the quotation above, I argue that the novel’s emphasis on the cultural formations of Kafr Karam is a refutation of the modern denigration of premodern cultures as barbaric and irrational. In other words, Khadra’s novel is an invitation for rethinking the divide between modern and premodern cultures through a consideration of their impact on the attitude of individuals in actual situations.

By way of concluding this section, I would note that The Sirens of Baghdad introduces Kafr Karam as an alternative to the dominant paradigm of Western modernity. The novel depicts Kafr Karam in its own right by focusing on the village as a complex of social, cultural and transnational formations. Besides, Kafr Karam was represented as an implicit propagation for the pan-Arab discourse of nationalism, thereby assisting in the reinforcement of the hegemonic networks of ‘Empire’. My critique is pertinent to an argument made by Hamid Dabashi, in his book Post-Orientalism: Knowledge and Power in Time of Terror (2009):

The colonial origin of the area now called ‘the Middle East’ already anticipates the question of ‘Knowledge Production in an Age of Empire.’ In other words, the two parts of the subject matter are in fact redundant, for designating a part of the globe as ‘the Middle East’ already announces, loudly and clearly, the manner of ‘knowledge production in an age of empire’—albeit a different empire than the current one.39

Dabashi suggests that the replication of the separatist identity politics of the colonial lineage does not entail a radical move away from ideologies and schemes of domination but helps in the consolidation of ‘a different empire’.40 Khadra’s alternative, therefore, has a scant promise, and needs radical rethinking in order to become a viable proposal for

40 Ibid.
transforming the intellectual and material conditions of the grassroots levels of Iraqi society.

*The Tobacco Keeper*

Bader’s *The Tobacco Keeper* is one of his major contributions to postcolonial fiction. Novelist, journalist, and war correspondent, Bader is a prize-winning writer, whose novels include *Baba Sartr* [Papa Sartre], (2001); *Shita’ al-A’ailah* [The Family’s Winter], (2002); *al-Taňq ilà till al-Mutrân* [The Road to the Bishop’s Hill], (2005). In *The Tobacco Keeper*, Bader reinterprets postcolonial Iraqi nationalism by exposing its fatal consequences on the Iraqi society at grassroots levels. As will be demonstrated below, the atrophies of the novel’s main character are presented as the touchstone-measure for the invalid and unreliable narratives of postcolonial identity-formations in Iraq.

*The Tobacco Keeper* depicts the life of the Iraqi fictional violinist Kamal Medhat, a musician kidnapped and then assassinated in Baghdad in 2006 at the age of 80. The musician’s body was found near the Jumhuriya Bridge in Baghdad, and a nameless Iraqi journalist (the novel’s narrator) is assigned the task of investigating the mystery of the musician’s death by an American newspaper. The journalist discovers that Kamal Medhat has three different official identities: the Jewish Yousef Sami Salih (1926-1955), the Shiite Haidar Salman (1924-1981), and the Sunni Kamal Medhat (1933-2006). Each of these three characters has a different life, a wife, and a son. The novel depicts the gravity of Kamal Medhat’s predicaments every time he is made to assume a different identity in order to escape the persecution of the dominant identity-structure. The triple personality of the novel’s main character, thus, allegorises the problem of identity in Iraq and other Arab-majority nations.

*Crisis of Identity*

*The Tobacco Keeper* makes problematic essentialist articulations of identity by demonstrating the ways in which the concept of identity is enmeshed in a network of asymmetrical power relations, which outweigh the concerns of individual Iraqis. The novel makes evident that identity is an ideological construction imposed and manipulated by political powers to the detrimental of human integrity. The first identity that the novel’s main character assumes is the Jewish Yousef Sami Saleh, who was born in 1926 when
the Anglo-Iraqi treaty was signed. Yousef goes to Moscow to study music, and after his return to Iraq he enjoys the simply style of life, which characterises Iraq then: ‘the loud calls of the radish seller, whose voice filled the lane; the coachman who drove his carriage through the streets, tooting his horn; [...] the music of a Kurdish beggar woman singing in a melodious voice’. However, the novel refers to the historical incident called Farhud, which occurred in June 1941, which ‘followed the rise of the Nazi organizations in Iraq and which saw the death of hundreds of Jewish victims in Baghdad’ (p. 117). From his window Yusuf ‘watched the crowds running in the pale and hazy light and heard the hoarse screams of Jews suffocating and dying, but [...] he formed no clear ideas’ (pp. 119-20). During the years spent there he felt that he was living outside time, and that the weight of his identity was too heavy for him to bear. In 1953 he escaped to Iran via Moscow, using a counterfeit passport in the name of Haidar Salman, and then returned to Baghdad, where he died two years later.

*The Tobacco Keeper* investigates the extent to which national appropriation of subject identity through the process of essentialism is not just a denial of individual agency but also a cause of continued anguish and agony for the wider section of Iraqi population. The novel’s investment in depictions of identity as vulnerable and insecure aids in fostering awareness about identity as a rhetoric for the consolidation of the geopolitical interests of dominant forces in Iraq. However, Monica Ruocco, in her essay ‘Between Symphony and Novel: ‘Ali Badr’s *Harîs al-Tâbîg* (The Tobacco Keeper)’, discusses how Bader applies the techniques of harmony (between the three-movement symphony of his novel) with the notion of counterpoint, for his novel is a book in three parts (and of course an identity in three parts too). Each story of the main character - though self-sufficient - correlates with the two other stories, suggesting that the shift from one identity (or story) to another is made possible by the tensions caused by identity itself. The overlapping territories of identities signals a break with conventions of

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41 Ali Bader, *The Tobacco Keeper* (Doha: Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Publishing, 2011), p.106. All further references to the novel are from this edition and will be marked in parentheses.

42 It is a colloquial Iraqi word refers to the process of looting public and private possessions which take place during the crisis such as wars.


closure and fixity in mimetic representations, hence a potential for new possibilities of reflection.\textsuperscript{45} Ruocco writes:

All Badr introduces dissonant counterpoint to define characters: each main character experiences a deep conflict with the context in which he lives, and the dissonant relationship between he and his environment helps in defining and recognising his peculiarity. Just as dissonant counterpoint generally refers to a dissonance that, rather than consonance, is the norm, similarly the individuality of the three main protagonists of The Tobacco Keeper is based upon the perception of a separateness between them and their social and political context.\textsuperscript{46}

Ruocco’s commentary on the ‘dissonant relationship’ that the novelist establishes between his main character and the social and political context in which he lives is suggestive not just of the ‘peculiarity’ or ‘individuality’ of the character (the ‘counterpoint’ as Ruocco calls it) but also of the malleability of identity and the flawed concept of identity itself. Nonetheless, I argue that Bader’s main concern is an emphasis not so much on the singularity of the main character’s experience as on the concomitant disruption and destruction of his whole life: it is a critique of identity as a concept itself. The Tobacco Keeper promotes the idea that mainstream articulations of identity are in essence divisive and fragile. The novel’s critique of identity occurs at two different-yet-intertwined levels. On one level, the novel’s fictionalising of Iraq’s history since independence involves an expansive scope of events, including the British-Iraqi treaty of 1926, the 1958-revolution of Abd al-Karim Qassim, the 1968-coup of nationalists and Baathists, the eight-year war between Iraq and Iran in 1980-1988, the Second Gulf War in 1991, the 2003-American invasion and toppling of Saddam Hossein, and the aftermath of his regime. On the other level, the novel’s main events take place in as well as between Baghdad, Damascus, and Tehran. According to Ruocco, Bader’s novel is characterised by a symphonic structure wherein the experiences of the triple personality of Kamal Medhat are portrayed as a mosaic of interrelations:

The very structure of the novel presents a prelude, three movements and a postlude/epilogue. The opening theme returns at the end of the novel, while the three central movements repeat the same pattern, which coincide with the three main characters’ live experiences. Moreover, in each movement the written world makes way for the world of notes through a narration that respects a musical

\textsuperscript{45} See, for example, Gregory Castle, \textit{The Blackwell Guide to Literary Theory}, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007).
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., p. 215.
sequence: the movement begins with an adagio which develops to reach a climax before a coda that brings the movement to a close. In the violinists’ lives, the opening adagio represents their musical formation, while the climax coincides with their forced exiles that end with a return to Baghdad. The formal structure of the three movements, where the same theme appears in all sections in a contrapuntal texture, is very close to the fugue form of composition.47

The passage indicates that the experiences of the three main characters signify overlapping territories and constitute a composite of interwoven layers of meaning. Nonetheless, I argue that the form of The Tobacco Keeper is an allegory not just of the novel but also of a reimagining of new possibilities. The novel’s depictions of the conflicting identities (Jewish, Shiite, Sunnite) of the main character embody an interrogation of postcolonial identifications as a means of rending social fabric. It follows then that the expansive scope of the novel (both temporal and spatial) lends Medhat’s tragedy a universal dimension in that his story is an allegory of the identity-crisis, which has dogged Iraq and other Arab-majority nations, and has immersed the whole region into sectarian conflict, economic vulnerability, and political instability. The novel’s key insight, thus, is to observe that Iraq has never been monocultural; it is multi-ethnic and diverse in terms of cultural traditions; and that postcolonial nationalisms and pan-Arab discourse obscures this.

Identity is a prime cause for conflict in the Middle East. The Tobacco Keeper considers the impact of the imposition of identity on Iraq as well as other countries in the region and suggests that identity is soaked in ideologies of exclusive political lines. The Shiite Haidar Salman is the main character’s second identity. Haidar is the son of a Shiite merchant in al-Kazimiyya, who studied music in Moscow and married Tahira, a daughter of an Iranian merchant. Haidar returns to Baghdad with his family after July 1958, when Abd al-Karim Qasim takes power in Iraq. To his utter dismay, Haidar is witness to a series of events that have dogged the region, in particular, the 1963 coup, the coup in 1968, and the Iranian revolution. It is only after the Iraq-Iran war that Haidar and his Tahira are compelled to leave for Tehran, while their son, Hussein remain incarcerated in Iraqi prisons for more than three years before getting deported to Tehran. In Teheran Haidar plans his return to Baghdad via Syria. He gets a new passport in the name of a man who died in a car accident, Kamal Medhat Hasan.

47 Ibid., p. 223.
Identity is a divisive issue in the local politics of Iraq. The Tobacco Keeper investigates the extent to which separatist identity politics rends the social fabric. The Sunni Kamal Medhat is the third identity assumed by the main character of The Tobacco Keeper. Medhat’s arrival in Syria coincides with the most violent hostilities between the regime and the Muslim Brotherhood. In Damascus, Medhat gets married to Nadya al-Amri, the widow of a Syrian merchant killed in the conflict between Islamists and the army. Medhat and Nadya decide to return to Baghdad, where he gets disappointed by the conformist stance that intellectuals and artists adopt towards the dominant discourse of Saddam’s regime: ‘Amgad believed that the Arab nation had an immortal message, which was the spiritual development of the world. […] His fundamental idea was the necessity of returning to history’ (p. 264), thereby, ‘turning Baghdad into a Spartan society’, where ‘the citizen was basically a soldier, […] and martyrdom was a necessity’ (pp. 265-67). In the years following the Kuwait war Medhat becomes forgotten, and he returns to his violin after the end of the 2003 invasion. During one of his walks he gets kidnapped and then killed. The murder remains unresolved, but the journalist discovers a file from the Iraqi intelligence services confirming that the state is aware of Medhat’s previous incarnations.

Bader’s novel establishes the view that the promotion of sectarian identities disturbs the foundations of the postcolonial state of Iraq by provoking unending circles of violence, displacement, and agony. The novel’s depictions of the awful conditions of Medhat’s life experiences emphasises what Michael Walzer, in the Henry L. Stimson Lecture Series, calls ‘the paradox of national liberation’. Walzer argues that ‘The nation has to be liberated not just from external oppressors but also from the internal effects of external oppression.’ 48 Walzer identifies popular apathy towards their oppression by nationalist centres of power as the key causes for the paradox of national liberation: ‘the power of traditional elites’ and ‘the passivity, the quietude, the deep lethargy of the dominated people.’ 49 In addition, Walzer’s lecture involves a consideration of the political utility of the religious discourse not just in mobilising the public to take the national cause against colonisers but also in subverting dissenting voices against the dominant centres of power: ‘Nationalist leaders often found religion useful for their immediate political purpose which was to sustain the unity of the anti-colonial struggle

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49 Ibid.
in the new state. Walzer’s discussion bears topical relevance to Bader’s critique of national identity in the contemporary scenario of Iraq. On the one hand, the deployment of the religious discourse in Iraq has a tremendous political utility for the establishment, in particular the Sunni/Shi’i divide. On the other hand, the shift in the balance of powers in the political domain (particular after the collapse of Saddam’s regime) leads to a reversal in the power structure, and thereby causes the persecution of one identity politics by the other. For both Walzer and Bader, religious identity is a rhetoric of hegemony, which deepens the divide and cement the wall between religious ethnicities in Iraq.

Bader’s critique of religious violence as an offshoot of the separatist identity politics in Iraq links also to Cavanaugh’s discussions of the modern history of the notion of religious violence. Cavanaugh, in his recent essay ‘Religious Violence as Modern Myth’, discusses how ‘religious violence’ is essentially enmeshed in the power-configurations in the modern history of Europe. According to Cavanaugh, the promotion of the concept of ‘religious violence’ is subtly entrenched in the modern distinction between secularity and religion, is ‘an artifice of European power.’ The modern myth of religious violence is an ‘ideological justification that can be used to sanction the violence of so-called secular orders.’ According to Cavanaugh:

The modern religious/secular distinction comes about as a way of relegating the ecclesiastical authorities’ area of concern to an essentially interior impulse called ‘religion,’ while the civil authorities took charge of ‘secular’ things like political authority, property, and the legitimate use of violence. The religious/secular distinction was then exported to the rest of the world in the process of European colonization, as it became useful to define the native cultures as religious and therefore essentially private, while the colonial authorities took care of business.

It could therefore be argued that the sectarian violence in Iraq as depicted in Bader’s novel is an impact of the constitutive ideology of Western modernity (in particular the

50 Ibid.
53 Ibid., p. 489.
54 Ibid., p. 487.
55 Ibid., p. 489.
secular/religious distinction). The shift in the configurations of power in Iraq’s dominant politics feeds into sectarian clashes (Shiite/Sunni divide) and aggravates the suffering of Iraqis at the grassroots levels. Bader’s depictions of the violence his main character is subjected to due to his religious identity is a concretization of Cavanaugh’s critique of ‘religious violence as modern myth’. Both acknowledge that ‘religious violence’ is an imposition by imperialist powers, an expression of the ideology of Western modernity. Yet, what Bader adds to Cavanaugh’s discussion is a consideration of the concrete manifestations of ‘religious violence’ on the ground in Iraq.

The tradition/modern distinction is a dimension of identity-crisis. The Tobacco Keeper depicts Iraq as a site of ideological contestation between divergent forces. The novel’s depictions of the Jewish Yousef Sami Saleh (first identity of the main character) as caught between two opposing forces (traditionalists and modernists) is an embodiment of a wider cultural crisis in the Arab-majority nations. In the midst of ‘political pressure’ and ‘social forces’ (p. 132), Yousef makes concerted effort to experiment with musical forms of expression in an effect ‘to find a new type of’ reasoning, or a new orientation that was neither Zionist, nor nationalist (p. 134). Nevertheless, Bader’s discussion of the crisis of identity in the context of the struggle between tradition and modernity is reminiscent of Issa J. Boullata’s analysis of the ideological roots of instability in Arab-majority nations. The eminent thinker Boullata, in his book Trends and Issues in Contemporary Arab Thought (1990), reflects on the ways in which the struggle between tradition and modernity has had negative impact upon the living and thinking conditions of Arab-plurality countries. The stance towards modernity, he maintains, has led to new ideological classifications, aggravating the crisis in these countries and thereby maintaining the status quo, for no radical transformation has been effected on the intellectual or material level. Referring to the new classifications, he mentions the ‘leftist’, who discarding religious outlook on life and replacing it with secular outlook; the ‘centrist’, who call for preserving essential aspects of tradition and availing of useful elements of modernity; and the ‘rightist, who stress the revival of old values and

56 This is also the critical position of Islam Aburaiya as articulated in his essay entitled ‘Islamism, Nationalism, and Western Modernity: The Case of Iran and Palestine’, International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society, Vol. 22, No. 1, Special Issue: The Culture of Conflict in Israel and Palestine, (pp. 57-68). (Springer, March 2009).
institutions and the elimination of all external cultural influences.\textsuperscript{59} Described by Boullata as a ‘state of flux’, the roots of which stems from the absence of ‘synthesis’.\textsuperscript{60} He laments the fate of Arabic-Islamic civilization as falling apart, for the exclusive visions that sail into different directions and adopt ideologies that never stress the need to add, embrace, and transcend narrow borders. ‘The Arab cultural crisis,’ he notes, ‘will therefore continue but its dimensions will become so strongly polarized.’\textsuperscript{61} Like Boullata suggests, the stratification of Arab-plurality nations into exclusive entities is an ideological imposition, which feeds into sectarian conflict and thereby deepen the suffering of population. Boullata’s predictions have come true, for Bader’s novel narrativises the self-laceration of Medhat owing to the shifting politics of identity power structures.

Thus, the critique of identity in \textit{The Tobacco Keeper} addresses contemporary concerns as they unfold, particularly in relation to sectarian clashes, such as the Sunni/Shi’i divide. The power of the novel’s critique hinges on depictions of the suffering of individual Iraqis due to the identitarian conflicts within the multiethnic context of the nation. Underneath the novel’s counter-hegemonic discourse, therefore, is a call for rethinking Iraqi identity along lines different from the essentialist articulations of modern and national orthodoxies. In what follows, I explore the possibilities of transformation that Bader proposes in an effect to rectify the malady of the nation, and thereby alleviate the suffering of Iraqis.

\textbf{Alternative vision}

Sally Bland, in her article ‘Blurred Identities’, describes \textit{The Tobacco Keeper} as ‘a story which reveals ‘the true ambiguity of identity’ while lamenting the loss of tolerance and multicultural co-existence.’\textsuperscript{62} According to Bland, Bader presents Medhat as ‘a symbol of Everyman, the Arab citizen, the intellectual and Iraq itself.’\textsuperscript{63} The cause of Medhat’s tragedy, according to her, relates to ‘misguided populism, narrow nationalism, the debasement of culture, the erosion of national memory and sectarian

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., pp. 3-4.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., p. 9.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., p. 2.
conflict.’ 64 Bland identifies the ways in which the novel poses a critical challenge to the grand narratives of modernity and nationalism:

Despite the narrator’s neutral tone and the novel’s resemblance to fast-paced spy story, Bader has written an important treatise on the challenges of the modern world which is always in danger of sliding back into barbarism under the impact of war and dictatorship. Juxtaposing the post-modern concept of fluid identity and no set essences, with an actual hardening of imagined essences, he narrates the experience of both the journalist and the violinist in such a way as to show the impossibility of remaining neutral. 65

Bland’s commentary suggests that Bader’s novel is a literature of critical intervention, wherein the critique of essentialist assumptions of identity is conducted by means of an emphasis on ‘the post-modern concept of fluid identity’. 66 In light of the quotation above, I argue that Bader’s novel is a multivocal novel, which embodies multiple experiences, expressions, and histories, affirming the complexity of human identity in general and post-war Iraq in particular. The novel’s celebration of the pluralistic possibilities of meaning and identity is suggestive of the need to cross the narrow boundaries of identitarian imperatives, and to forge an alternative critical approach to Iraqi nationhood. Like Bland suggests, the novel’s critical position on separatist identity politics is an invitation to redefine identity as a complex of multiple character.

The Tobacco Keeper is a compendium of interlocking narratives and overlapping identities, in which music is conceived and conceptualised as a unifying force. Medhat’s fascination for music is a leitmotif in the novel, not least because a symphony requires a range of different instruments in order to work. Unlike identity, music is not limited to, or restricted by, a set of belief system or a range of practices but includes diverse orientations across the board. As the journalist-narrator tells us, music is the main character’s means of ‘breaking down barriers’ (p. 259). As will be demonstrated below, the novel’s emphasis on the borderlessness of music is articulated in the character-portrayals of the three different-yet-related facets of the main character’s identity. 67

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64 Ibid., p. 2.
65 Ibid., p. 2.
66 Ibid.
The Jewish Yousef Sami Saleh finds in music a mystical experience, which transcends mundane experiences in the material world so as to attain glimpses of higher intimations of meaning. The symbolic power of music represented in Yousef is a response provided in the novel to the interest-driven articulations of identity. The conception of music as a symbolic realm of meaning contrasts sharply with the way Iraqi identity is enmeshed in material gains and asymmetrical power relations. Describing Yousef’s ideas of music, the journalist-narrator of the novel says:

He saw music as expressing nothing and everything at the same time, patterns not ideas, sounds emanating from the essence of existence and not from existence itself. [...] He had to create music that would force existence to lie prostrate on a table, where he would contemplate it with no fixed ideas; to create a body that did not fade because music does not fade; to create ethereal, eternal feelings, because it is only feelings that cannot disappear; to create music that was like a leap into the unknown, music that was elevated and spiritual. (p. 112)

Music is a symbolic realm in which Yousef attains intimations of meaning well beyond the ‘fixed ideas’ of the nothing/everything duality. Music enables Yousef experiences a moment of epiphany whereby he redeems himself of the mundane interests of ephemeral ‘existence’, and thereby experiences ‘a leap into the unknown’. The phrase ‘patterns not ideas’ in the quotation above implies a reversal of the dominant epistemology of Western modernity (of which Iraqi nationalism is an outgrowth). Bader’s suggestion is that identity-formation and identification-processes need to be modelled on the patterns of music in an effect to fathom ‘the essence of existence’, and thereby gain a better grasp of self-knowledge.

Music is a source of life. The Shi’i Haidar Salman believes in music and in its moral virtue, and ‘that it was for art to eradicate ugliness and introduce beauty to the world’ (p. 178). Music teaches us what it means and takes to be a human being beyond narrow sectarianism. He ‘wanted his music to emerge from his inner self and not from external ideas’ (p. 173). He ‘wanted Arabic music to seep into Western classical music as stealthily and quietly as sand’ (p. 192). This is an interesting image of the interrelation of East and West. Music has the potential to reunite the fragments and remedy the cracks caused by identitarian separatism. Music is particularly useful in breaking the wall and bridging the divide.

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68 The artifice of the separation of East and West is at the core of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978).
Music expresses the will to life. The Sunni Kamal Medhat finds in music the source of ‘enjoyment and pleasure’ (p. 234). For him music emphasises the will to life, ‘while wars emphasized the wills of their individual perpetrators’ (p. 254). The novel’s main character is enabled to map across different facets of identity, to negotiate diverse cultural formations by means of music. The outward differences between the three main characters is overcome by an internal urge in them to unite the fragments of their lives into a composite of an irreducible whole. Music makes possible the unity (and therefore meaning) of the fragments and cracks of the main character identity. It is the transformative potential of music that empowers the novel’s main character to cross all boundaries and make fresh crossings in fulfilling his aspirations.

The novelist’s plea to reformulate postcolonial Iraqi identity along using the metaphor of a symphony confirms Anthony D. Smith’s perspective on national identity. Smith, in his book *National Identity*, 69 discusses the difference - despite ‘some overlap’ - between the concepts of state and nation in that the former refers to ‘public institutions’ while the latter ‘signifies a cultural and political bond, uniting in a single political community all who share an historic culture and homeland.’ 70 Smith highlights the encompassing concept of the nation, arguing that ‘[a] national identity is fundamentally multi-dimensional; it can never be reduced to a single element, even by particular factions of nationalists, nor can it be easily or swiftly induced in a population by artificial means.’ 71 Smith’s theorising of the complex nature of national identity and Bader’s fictionalising of the atrophies of artificially-reductive approaches to identity are integral to a realisation of the need to rethink postcolonial identifications in Iraq and other Arab-majority nations. Yet, what Bader adds to Smith’s discussions is a consideration of music as an alternative model upon which a redefinition of identity could be based.

The discussion of *The Tobacco Keeper* has made it quite obvious that it is crucial for a genuine transformation in the living and thinking conditions of Iraqis to redefine national identity along frameworks that provide meaning and inspiration instead of conflict and despair. The model of music as considered in the novel is an illustrative example of domains of meaning that unify the politically-fragmented world of humanity. Nonetheless, it could be argued that this is a false unity which rests on western notions of

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harmony. The complexity of Bader’s alternative model, however, relies on the overlapping identities of the main character, and allows for the possibility of unity in diversity.

**Conclusion**

The chapter has examined the ways in which Khadra’s *The Sirens of Baghdad* and Bader’s *The Tobacco Keeper* critique the postcolonial conditions of Iraqi society. The discussion of the two novels has yielded useful insights into the subterranean connections between the unceasing crises in Iraq and the continuance of imperialist powers. Both the novels suggest that the anguish and agony of Iraqis is the impact of the dominant ideology of Western modernity. As has been noted earlier, contemporary Iraq is soaked in the ideological moorings of Western modernity and is targeted by colonial and neocolonial interventions. The ideological infiltration of Iraq, and its internalisation by many Iraqis is so powerful that it aggravates the suffering of Iraqis as evident particularly in terms of sectarian clashes, economic vulnerability, and political turmoil. As noted earlier, imperial continuity is facilitated through the maintenance and imposition of the prior framings of empire. The novels’ counter-hegemonic positions, I argue, are embodiments of what Wendy Brown defines as critique.\(^{72}\) Brown valorises critique as ‘thinking against the times’;\(^ {73}\) which helps in the articulation of ‘political possibility against the seeming givenness of the present’,\(^ {74}\) as well as ‘beyond those offered by the existing discursive framing of the problem’.\(^ {75}\) The critical intervention of both the novels helps grasp the architectonics of ‘Empire’ (as used by Hardt and Negri)\(^ {76}\) through depictions of the unceasing crises of Iraqi population down the decades.

The counter-hegemonic discourse articulated in *The Sirens of Baghdad* and *The Tobacco Keeper* is evident particularly in terms of the novels’ unravelling of ‘Islam as inherently violent’ as a concept that is embedded in the constitutive discourse of Western modernity. The novels’ move from the blaming discourses of Islam as a culture of irrational violence to a critique of the secular-liberal concept of Islam foster greater consciousness of the political utility of misunderstandings about Islam for the

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\(^{73}\) Ibid., p. 4.

\(^{74}\) Ibid., p. vii.

\(^{75}\) Ibid., p. viii.

continuance of ‘Empire’. The intellectual contributions of Cavanaugh, Dodge, and Knott to the critique of ‘religion’ and ‘secularism’ as concepts are reflected in the novels’ criticism of the ideological indoctrination and internalisation of these concepts by many Iraqis. What the novels add to contemporary critiques of ‘Islam as intrinsically violent’ as a concept is a consideration of its instrumental value for imperialist discourses and powers to achieve politically-motivated purposes to the detrimental of Iraqi population.

The chapter’s main focus has been to examine the alternatives that the two novels advance in order to help redress the grievances of Iraqis. On the one hand, *The Sirens of Baghdad* suggests that the cultural traditions embodied in Kafr Karam provide an alternative model to the dominant ideology of Western modernity. The novel attaches great weight to the humane setting of Kafr Karam. The force and meaning of this setting is foregrounded by contrasting it with the inhumane treatment of the villagers by the US forces. As I have argued, however, that the novel’s romanticizing of Kafr Karam could be seen as a propagation of the pan-Arab and postcolonial discourse, which has its own unspoken exclusions. It could also be objected to the way the novel depicts Kafr Karam as a humane setting. The novelist’s advocacy of the local sensibility of Kafr Karam is reliant on concepts of ‘humane’ and ‘humanity’, which are at the core of the Western ideals of the Enlightenment. On the other hand, *The Tobacco Keeper* suggests that Iraqi identity be reconstituted on the model of music. The novel uses the metaphor of symphony in order to emphasise the intermingling of different-yet-related instruments. The unifying force underling a musical symphony, the novel suggests, allegorizes the complex of transnational, social, cultural, and historical formations of Iraqi society. Nevertheless, it could be objected that the notion of music and symphony rests on Western concepts, and therefore might not provide a viable framework for a radical transformation of the intellectual and material conditions of Iraqi population.

It seems that Khadra and Bader have drawn upon Western notions, while presenting themselves as anti-western, raises serious questions concerning the nature and efficacy of postcolonial critique, particularly in relation to Arab-majority nations. The problem with the novels’ alternatives consists largely in their under-theorised appropriation of postcolonial theory. The lack of awareness of the limits of postcolonial theory (particularly in the face of the ‘Empire’) often leads to a recycling of old problems. It is relevant here to allude to Dipesh Chakrabarty’s discussion of a mediating set of
universalising terms. Chakrabarty argues that disciplines operate using a method of translation. When encountering difference, scholars who seek to explain unfamiliar phenomena do so by categorising it under European concepts. Chakrabarty calls this process ‘the mediation of a universal, homogenising middle term’. Chakrabarty remarks that these third terms of translation follow a ‘universal set of rules’ which is the product of European modernity. However, these universalising third terms of translation cannot capture the singularity of experience or peculiarity of expression that characterise non-western cultures. Chakrabarty recommends the adoption of a new kind of translation which bypasses the third term. These ideal translations:

Are translations in which codes are switched locally, without going through a universal set of rules. There are no overarching censoring/limiting/defining systems of thought that neutralize and relegate differences to the margins, nothing like an overarching category of ‘religion’ that is supposed to remain unaffected by differences between the entities that it seeks to name and thereby contain. The very obscurity of the translation process allows the incorporation of that which remains untranslatable.

Accordingly, it is high time to redefine conceptual categories, for it is crucial in fostering greater awareness of the intricate systems of relations that characterise the networks and mechanisms of ‘Empire’. This invokes Hardt and Negri’s ideas, in their book *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (2004), write:

We believe that in light of the challenges and possibilities of our world it is necessary to rethink the most basic political concepts, such as power, resistance, multitude, and democracy. […] we need to ask if we really understand what democracy means (or could mean) today. Our primary aim is to work out the conceptual bases on which a new project of democracy can stand.

Hardt and Negri emphasise the need to rethink the most basic political concepts and the range of their implications for the world we aspire to construct. I subscribe to Hardt and Negri’s perspective, and state that Khadra and Bader do not seem to have gained a full grasp of the conceptual categories they deploy in their imaginings of alternatives. Therefore, I have questioned the viability of their proposals for transformation, for they

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78 Ibid., p. 85.
79 Ibid., p. 86.
80 Ibid., p. 86.
82 Ibid.
are essentially framed and articulated along lines dominant Western concepts and models of analysis.
Chapter Four: Borders of Conquest in Rashid Boudjedra’s The Barbary Figs (2012) and Ahmed Saadawi’s Frankenstein in Baghdad (2013)

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to identify a range of challenges that modernity/coloniality has presented to the Arab-majority nations through the prism of Algeria and Iraq. The chapter explores the ways in which cultural imperialism, political interference, and military intervention are made possible largely through the imposition of modern conceptual apparatuses, such as the nation, secular/religious distinction, on postcolonial states, thereby justifying Western hegemony. In this chapter, I discuss Rashid Boudjedra’s novel The Barbary Figs (2012) and Ahmed Saadawi’s novel Frankenstein in Baghdad (2013) as contemporary literary responses to postcolonial conditions in Algeria and Iraq respectively. While Boudjedra’s The Barbary Figs critiques postcolonial nationalism as a rehash of European (in particular French) colonialism, Saadawi’s Frankenstein in Baghdad produces nuanced understandings of imperialist discourse as well as shedding light on the human cost of military alliances among powerful nations, which resulted in the Iraqi war, which began in 2003, and the War on Terror (2001-present). A key preoccupation of the novel is the role played by news media in shaping public consciousness, particularly in relation to the interests of geopolitical forces such as the United States. I intend to examine the novels’ articulations and interpretations of postcolonial critiques of Western modernity, particularly in relation to nationalism and independence, secularity and religion.

Theoretical Context

The chapter in hand is informed by a series of critical assumptions drawn largely from the work of Edward Said. I intend to bring the work of Said into dialogue with other thinkers and critics who have progressively nuanced understandings of the complicitous relationship between modernity and colonialism. The theoretical framework of my

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1 ‘Borders of Conquest’ in Ahmed Saadawi’s Frankenstein in Baghdad was presented at Third Bremen Conference on Language and Literature in Colonial and Postcolonial Contexts, which was entitled ‘Postcolonial Knowledges’, and held in March 15-18, 2016, then accepted for publication.

reading of Boudjedra’s *The Barbary Figs* relates to the theories of the nation in the work of thinkers and critics such as Aijaz Ahmad, Partha Chatterjee, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri C. Spivak whose works I surveyed in the introduction. These thinkers and critics offer particularly useful insights into the concept of the nation as a modern construct that helps to ensure the continuance of Western hegemony over postcolonial states. My reading of Saadawi’s *Frankenstein in Baghdad* focuses particularly on the secular/religious distinction, which has been brought into question in work by Talal Asad and Timothy Fitzgerald.¹ Both critics argue that the secular/religious distinction brings about intellectual distortions in our understanding of such events as the War on Terror.

**Categorisation and Colonisation**

Timothy Fitzgerald’s critique of the hegemonic pursuits beneath modern categories. In his *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity* (2007), Fitzgerald argues that the secular/religious dichotomy has a clear political utility for imperialism. However, there is no direct employment to the concept of secular/religious divide in our selected two novels. secular/religious has been employed in this chapter as an extension to other concepts of imperialism, such as divide and rule, either or politics and so forth. This in turn, leads to the idea that all these divides are created and controlled by European hegemony for imperialist ends. The categories of ‘secular’ on the one hand and ‘religious’ on the other, he states, are not neutral, descriptive terms but ideologically-loaded classifications.² While the ‘religious’ domain is broadly understood as being restricted to private faith, it is assumed that the ‘secular’ encompasses worldly matters, such as political, economic and social affairs. Subsequently, the ‘secular’ realm is seen to reflect a form of rationalism, of which ‘religious’ traditions fall short. By contrast, the ‘religious’ is considered to be a force of irrationality. Such conceptions work in tandem with related distinctions with a long, colonial pedigree: West/East, Orient/Occident, civilised/barbaric, white/black, us/them, and self/other. These distinctions are rhetorical configurations of subjugation, economic exploitation and political hegemony.³ The modern project, Fitzgerald observes, is anchored in the Western colonialist politics of confiscating lands and disposessing peoples.⁴

¹ Ibid.
³ Ibid., pp 13-14.
⁴ Ibid., pp 39-41.
Fitzgerald’s *Religion and the Secular* (2007) refers to the concept of modernity by alluding to the premodern world. He indicates to the Greek, Roman, and, Catholic Christian conceptions of the ‘religious’ as interconnected with all practices and domains of knowledge and meaning including politics.\(^5\) Described by Fitzgerald as ‘disciplines of civility,’ premodern pictures of the world dismantle the ‘modern reification of religion and religions.’\(^6\) Such conceptual anti-essentialism characterises Islam, too.\(^7\) He asserts in all his work that the secular/religious dichotomy is a ‘category error’ which leads to intellectual distortions, in particular the tendency to replicate cultural and political hierarchies that were first established by European colonialism.\(^8\)

The secular/religious dichotomy is also interrogated in Talal Asad’s *Formations of the Secular* (2007). Asad questions the nature and usefulness of the distinction between religion and secularity,\(^9\) the ‘secular’, he states, is part and parcel of other domains like the social, political, and cultural.\(^10\) Considering examples of the correlation between the ‘secular’ and the ‘religious’, he mentions the focus on ‘self-discipline,’ ‘participation,’ ‘law,’ and ‘economy;’\(^11\) the ‘liberal’ thinkers’ redemptive ‘myth’ and the Christian myth of redemption,\(^12\) the modern writers’ deployment of ‘myth’ for fiction,\(^13\) the ‘Arab nationalist ideology’ and ‘Islamism,’\(^14\) and the reform projects of Egyptian intellectuals like Muhammad Abduh, Qasim Amin, and Ahmad Safwat.\(^15\) Modelled on the secular/religious separation, binaristic thinking, Asad points out, is a fallacy that distorts our perceptions of the world in ways that serve causes of hegemony.\(^16\)

The political ramifications of the religious/secular dichotomy are particularly evident in the justifications of key political actors in the ‘shock and awe’ bombings of

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\(^6\) Ibid., p. 14.
\(^8\) Fitzgerald, *Religion and the Secular*, p. 15.
\(^10\) Ibid., p. 25.
\(^11\) Ibid., p.3.
\(^12\) Ibid., p. 59.
\(^13\) Ibid., p. 29.
\(^14\) Ibid., pp. 196-198.
\(^15\) Ibid., pp.209-215.
\(^16\) Ibid., p. 14.
Baghdad, whereby political Islam has figured as a monstrous conflation of religious belief and activist violence, as Tony Blair, former British Prime Minister, asserts:

The extremism seemed remarkably well financed. It was active. And it was driven not by a set of negotiable political demands, but by religious fanaticism […] September 11th […] was a declaration of war by religious fanatics who were prepared to wage that war without limit. […] The purpose was to cause such hatred between Moslems and the West that a religious jihad became reality; and the world engulfed it […] Here were states whose leadership cared for no-one but themselves; were often cruel and tyrannical towards their own people […] It didn’t matter that the Islamic extremists often hated some of these regimes. Their mutual enmity toward the West would in the end triumph over any scruples of that nature […].

Blair’s speech gains an air of credence by means of a strategic investment in ingrained stereotypes against religion as distinct from the domain of secular politics where negotiation is the mode of interaction between rational human beings. By deploying the rhetoric of terror through the images of ‘religious fanaticism’, ‘religious fanatics’, ‘war without limit’, ‘hatred between Moslems and the West’, he manages to evoke a sense of an impending disaster against which the secular state needs to stand. The secular/religious dichotomy thus helps to legitimate Britain’s collaboration with the United States of America in the ‘War on Terror’.

In his *Introduction to Arab Poetics* (2003), the Syrian-Lebanese poet-critic Adonis (a pseudonym for Ali Ahmad Saeed) argues that Muslim nations’ historically repressed desire for international contact and cultural exchange has taken the form of religious orthodoxies that are unable to counteract European cultural imperialism by drawing from Muslim-rather than European-intellectual resources. Adonis sees the Arab mind as being ‘lost between a blind acceptance which robs it of its identity, and equally blind adherence to the traditionalist past, which robs it of its inventive spirit and prevents it from being a presence in the living reality.’ His chief concern is that Arab intellectuals tend to either conform to Western modes of thought or oppose them vehemently. Both approaches, he argues, block intellectual creativity.

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19 Ibid., p. 89-90.
In *Contemporary Arab Thought* (2004), Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi’\textsuperscript{20} reevaluates the cultural fallout of Western modernity for the Arab world. Abu-Rabi’ argues that colonialism, which enabled modernity to assault the traditional roots and mentality of the colonised countries, did not waste time planting its intellectual seeds wherever it went.\textsuperscript{21} Paralyzed by an ‘inferiority complex,’\textsuperscript{22} Arab intellectuals, he remarks, rush into Western arms, assimilating European ideas of global capitalism and secular democracy and adapting them to their own local contexts and debates.\textsuperscript{23} The craving for power, however, blinds these intellectuals to perceive the fact that modern premises such as the secular/religious separation - although not discussed in detail by Abu-Rabi’ himself - are culturally incongruent with the formative premises of Islam. The intellectuals’ lack of awareness of the nuances and cultural specificity in relation to Islam and modernity leads to confusions that destabilise the Arab world.

Abu-Rabi’s ideas are reminiscent of Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), in which Fanon highlights the psychological impact of colonialism on black people, who subscribe to the representations of their French masters. Despite their ‘black skin’, colonised subjects continue to wear ‘white masks’ in order to signify the racial superiority of their European masters.\textsuperscript{24} This impersonation of their white masters’ attitudes and beliefs indicates both subservience and an enduring inferiority complex.\textsuperscript{25} It is interesting to note that Bhabha’s notion of ‘mimicry’ implies resistance, whereas Fanon’s impersonation signifies subservience. The seeming paradox between Bhabha and Fanon with regard to the notion of imitating the coloniser, I think, has to do with the level of public awareness of actual experiences on the ground, has to do with the type of mentality of the colonised themselves. Nonetheless, the postcolonial theory that I endorse focuses on how colonial powers struggle to impose its own models on colonised community. Therefore, Fanon’s critique of the psych-pathology of colonialism is more important to me. This phenomenon has been variously described by Ngugi wa Thiong’o, as a form of ‘mental colonization’: ‘[…] But writing in our languages per se […] will not

\textsuperscript{20} Professor and Edmonton Council of Muslim Communities Chair in Islamic Studies, University of Alberta, Canada.


\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p. 12.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., pp. xv-xvii.

itself bring about the renaissance in African cultures if that literature does not carry the content of our people’s anti-imperialist struggles to liberate their productive forces from foreign control.\textsuperscript{26} Such works have convincingly suggested that Western powers should not impose ‘solutions’ to political problems elsewhere. What I am proposing to do is to think through the dominant systems of thought by investigating the ways in which these systems define and control a wide range of practices, particularly in relation to the production of knowledge and news. This critique helps to expose the intellectual distortions promoted by and through dominant systems and institutions. A revaluation of Western modes of thinking, I believe, needs to go hand in hand with a consideration of alternative possibilities of Knowledge and meaning.

The various critiques considered in this chapter present significant facets of the humanistic practices that Said describes in his \textit{Humanism and Democratic Criticism} (2004). In this book, Said attaches great weight to humanistic practices that demystify Eurocentrism and nationalist identity.\textsuperscript{27} Humanism, he explains, should enable critical reflections and connections with the wider world so that intellectual activity can offer opportunities to respond to the incidents and meanings evolving around us. Described by Said as ‘humanistic heroism’, humanistic practice is ‘a matter of being able to see and understanding humanistic practice as an integral aspect and functioning part of [the contemporary] world and not as an ornament or an exercise in nostalgic retrospection.’\textsuperscript{28} It is an act of ‘humanistic heroism’ to empower the hitherto blurred interrelations between humanistic practices and the humanities on the one hand and what human beings are doomed to experience at the hands of agents and forces of hegemony on the other hand. Said’s emphasis on the relevance of humanism to world events as interlocking causes makes possible ‘the unity of humanity.’\textsuperscript{29} The critically challenging articulations under study translate ‘the unity of human history’ in terms of complex transnational critiques of the divides and walls that modern legacy has established and maintained via categorisation and colonisation.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., p. 53.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., p. 96.
Boudjedra’s novel *The Barbary Figs* (2012) evaluates postcolonial Algerian nationalism and responds to the continued subordination of Algerians in the name of the nation. The novel critiques nationalist ideology as a rhetoric of neocolonial hegemony for the exclusive interests of the ruling elite. As Andre Naffis-Sahely notes in the Afterword to the English version of the novel, ‘The events of the Algerian war (1954-1962) have inspired countless histories, novels, memoirs and films, and yet there is no single writer that has so singularly devoted himself to the task of tackling the mind-boggling ramifications of that conflict - in both France and Algeria - as Rashid Boudjedra’. Boudjedra’s novel offers depictions of the traumatic experiences of Algeria’s past from 1830 to the present, lamenting the mass destruction of the entire fauna and flora in the ruthless struggles for power.

Boudjedra was born on 1st September 1941. He has made significant literary contributions, including *The Repudiation* (1969), *Sunstroke* (1972), *The Obstinate Snail* (1977), *The Dismantling* (1982), and *Graft* (1984). He has also a collection of poems entitled *The Disorder of Things* (1991). Boudjedra is an iconoclast who calls for a radical change in the conformist culture nurtured by the establishment in Algeria. He uses his pen to orient the society towards an ideological struggle against ‘society’s deep-seated prejudices regarding women, Jews and political dissenters’ (p. 168). His views, such as ‘Islam is absolutely incompatible with a modern state’ (p. 171), could not be tolerated by groups like the Islamic Salvation Front; with the result that he has incurred fatwas (p. 168). Boudjedra’s unravelling of the politically-motivated uses of Islam go hand in hand with his criticism of the establishment, because of which he ‘not only lost him his job, but further earnt him a two-year sentence in prison’ (p. 167). As Naffis-Sahely notes, the aim of Boudjedra’s criticism is to ‘contribute to the formation of a responsible and engaged citizenry, whose knowledge of history and its consequences can ultimately be a force for good’ (p. 176). From my own perspective, the fatwas and imprisonment that Boudjedra has incurred are suggestive of the crisis of contemporary thought in the Arab-majority nations. Like Boudjedra, other intellectuals are subjected to interrogation, confinement, or exile for their critically-challenging articulations. The list includes the

30 Rashid Boudjedra, *The Barbary Figs*. trans. and afterword by Andre Naffis-Sahely (London: Arabia Books, 2012), p.166. All further references to the novel are from this edition and will be marked in parentheses.
Boudjedra’s *The Barbary Figs* depicts the story of two old friends and cousins (Rashid and Omar) who find themselves side by side on a flight from Algiers to Constantine. The narrative tells us that there is a lot of history between them, as well as bad blood. The flight lasts an hour during which stories are told, interspersed by anecdotes of Algeria’s struggle to release itself from France’s colonial grip: ‘we were getting everything off our chests. All in the space of a single hour’ (p. 86). Wracked with feelings of guilt, the travellers experience life ‘on the edge’, life as ‘a web of mirages’ (p. 26). Their past has a haunting grip over their present; obsession of memories of childhood and adolescence overlaps with the traumatic experiences of the Algerian War for Independence: ‘recurring fixations’ (p. 128), ‘flashbacks’ (p. 129), ‘everything came flooding back’ (p. 129), ‘Old memories and ideas came welling up’ (p. 129). By the end of the novel, the conflict remains unresolved for the travellers’ disputes are not settled.

The novel’s portrayal of incidents is presented through the trope of a plane. The travellers exchange stories during their air travel from Algiers to Constantine. Though common in postcolonial fiction, the use of voyage or journey as a technique for revealing secrets or disclosing often-hidden stories takes on a postmodern form in Boudjedra’s novel. From my own perspective, the flight seems to suggest not just the qualitative changes of the present era, but also the momentary relief and the incomplete redemption that the characters are allowed to experience. The critical distance assumed through the novel’s use of the voyage also suggests a dismantling of all subject positions as rhetorical ploys forged and manipulated to sustain the interests of power-driven articulations at the expense of truth and knowledge.

The disenchantment with nationalist ideology in *The Barbary Figs* is particularly evident in the deployment of intricate devices of narration. Apart from the nonlinear progression of events and the complex structure of memory, flashback, and repetition, the novel is a semi-autobiography. In my estimation, the novel’s semi-autobiographical style of writing is an effective device, because it presents a methodological challenge to

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31 For example, the voyages depicted in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and Ngugi wa Thiongo’s *The River Between*.

32 Boudjedra himself describes it as ‘the novel of my life’ (p. 172).

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the established conventions in the craft of fiction by enabling critical reflections on the Algerian situation from perspectives outside the political control. In other words, the use of semi-autobiography helps the novel to raise questions about the nature and effectiveness of postcolonial nationalist experiences in Algeria. As Linda Anderson remarks, autobiographical writing ‘by female and postcolonial subjects […] has interrogated the ideological underpinning of autobiographical tradition and explored the possibility of difference as excessive and uncontrollable.’33 The phrase ‘excessive and uncontrollable’ is key to explaining the purpose of the novel’s semi-autobiographical style as to suggest the possibility of radical thinking and, by implication, the prospects of transformation despite the political will to containment and control.

The novel displayed awareness of its own constructedness entails the constructedness of history. Throughout the novel, there is a consistent use of the technique of ‘historical metafiction’, which helps ‘foreground the possible mnemonic failures of recorded history.’34 Rashid (the narrator) states clearly that the narratives he shares with his cousin Omar are made and remade: ‘I never stopped rearranging the events I had lived through, bringing a tight, bolstered and unusual order to my experiences, welding one detail to another so as to leave no room for doubt’ (p. 24). The importance of Rashid’s cited words is that, if we rearrange events that means we are rewriting them and that our memories are unreliable. So, the novel is reflecting on the tricks of memory and the artificial ‘order’ it actively imposes on past events. Rashid, for example, says: ‘I always catch myself in that act of narrating my life using awkward, inadequate words. That’s why I cheat, I feel obliged to embellish it all with stylistic effects, peppering it with the usual flourishes typical of this sort of situation. Tricks, what else!’ (p. 142). Thus, the novel’s acknowledgement of its textualised essence and thereof its own ‘possible mnemonic failures’ is a subtle articulation of the same limitations in the ‘recorded history’ of postcolonial Algerian nationalism.

The novel’s emphasis on the artifice and unreliability of historical reconstructions is a confirmation of the postcolonial insights into the fragility of nationalist representations. As indicated in the theoretical terrain of this chapter, nationalist narratives tend to rely on a rhetoric of national unity in the process of reconstituting the

newly-independent nation. The process of reconstruction of the ‘national allegory’, however, is ‘superficial’ (Ashcroft et al), because it is essentially a ‘derivative discourse’ (Chatterjee and Gandhi), and is artificially reductionist of the heterogeneous and hybrid nature of the nation (Bhabha and Ahmad). Yet, what Boudjedra’s novel contributes to postcolonial discussions about the modern concept of the nation is a consideration of the pitfalls of the nationalist ideology in Algeria. The novel articulates critically-challenging perspectives on the validity and reliability of the ‘grand narratives’ of the establishment since Algeria’s independence in 1962.

In keeping with the theoretical perspectives discussed above, I intend to demonstrate the ways in which nationalism is problematised in the novel. I also attempt to foreground the possibilities of reflection that the novel offers in response to the experiences of postcolonial Algerian nationalism.

‘Maelstrom’ of History

*The Barbary Figs* criticises postcolonial Algerian nationalism as a ‘grand narrative’ for the consolidation and reinforcement of the rule regime. As will be discussed in greater detail below, nationalism is undermined as a reworking of colonial ideology through the novel’s considerations of how nationalist claims to national unity, freedom, and democracy during the Algerian war for independence (1954-1962) masquerade a rhetoric for the maintenance of power in the hands of nationalist leaders and elites. In his self-recollections, Rashid looks back into historical moments and tries to reason out the causes of the all-pervading sense of insecurity that he, like other individual Algerians, experiences. Rashid says: ‘Now an adult, I was sickened by the horrors perpetrated by the colonial power in the past, as well as by the present-day atrocities committed by my own country’s potentates. As if this country were irremediably doomed to a tragic fate’ (p. 145). The phrase ‘the tragic fate’ to which Algeria is ‘irremediably doomed’ sounds the deep despair over the course of events that has occurred in the country, amounting to unceasing circles of conflict as well as the shattering of dreams of prosperity and instability of the public. Interestingly enough, Boudjedra’s reinterpretation of the nation echoes the gist of Fanon and Said’s critiques of nationalism. The three thinkers share the belief that the grip of power by a few is a reworking of the exclusionary practices of colonialism, for power obscures awareness of its selective retellings of history.
The travellers’ reflections on past incidents are a self-critical exercise. Their conversation revolves largely around diverse-yet-related little narratives concerning everyday life in the midst of political and social turmoil in Algerian history. Of particular significance too is their realisation that French colonisers were replaced by a new class of ‘predators that were taking the country hostage’ (p. 97), who had also pushed the youth into the streets in October 1988 in an uprising against the one-party rule. The travellers express their deep anguish over the continued oppression of Algerian society at the hands of the ‘new predators’ whose actions are motivated by ‘the struggle for power and the lust for money’ (p. 98). As Naffis-Sahely points out that the major concern of the novel relates to the question: ‘was Algerian independence simply the precursor to even greater crimes against the Algerian people?’ (p. 173). As the crux of the whole novel, this question unsettles Rashid and Omar so deeply that they keep reverting to it in dismay and shock:

We often spoke of how Independence had turned sour, of widespread corruption and tribal bickering. We therefore posed ourselves this inevitable question: How had the Organisation, which had comported itself so impeccably throughout the seven-year war, turned into such a dishonest, money-grubbing, arrogant and finally idiotic government. (pp. 96-97)

The question of how nationalist leaders (the ‘Organisation’ refers to the FLN, the National Liberation Front) become oppressors of their own people is a leitmotif in The Barbary Figs. The travellers’ rethinking of the outcomes of Algeria’s independence is a disillusionment with postcolonial Algerian nationalism as a rhetoric for exploitation of resources and subordination of people.

The novel’s critique of nationalist ideology occurs through a postcolonial reinterpretation of history. The background to the novel is a consideration of how history is divided into a dominant version and a silenced one. The novel establishes characters and incidents in a context of conflict between ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ histories. The conversation between Rashid and Omar derives power and meaning from the sense of history as a construct of dual character. The perception of history as comprised of mutually-exclusive versions (official versus unofficial) is interesting for gaining a nuanced understanding of the power relations in Algerian society. The ‘real’ history is presented as opposed to the ‘human’ history. Boudjedra’s use of the terms ‘real’ and ‘human’ in relation to the schism between official and official versions of history runs parallel to the schism between what Bhabha calls the ‘pedagogical’ and the ‘performative’
in nationalist representations. Nonetheless, Boudjedra’s novel questions the artificial configuration of the duality of history as a rhetoric which lends power and authority to a specific class of society to the exclusion of the rest.

The novel’s interrogation of the dominant narratives of history is essentially a call for rethinking the validity and reliability of the existing methods of historiography. A key concern of the novel is the question of history as a European construct of the colonial period. Dominant narratives, we are told, are framed by the colonial calendar as the universal referent for the postcolonial state of Algeria. In their conversation about the innocence of Omar’s father and brother from collaboration with the French colonisers, Rashid and Omar confirm that postcolonial Algerian nationalism is inescapably linked with colonialism:

Colonialism was in effect a chronic disease. Both unrelenting and incurable. Almost fifty years after Algeria won its independence, this chicanery continued to make the world suffer. Like leprosy. Indelible. It would take generation upon generation to soothe Algeria’s collective consciousness. For the moment, the country was still in the grip of misery; choleric, and on its toes. After such systemic slaughter: massacres, killing sprees, beheadings, summary execution, trips into the countryside where prisoners were shot, buried and never seen or heard from ever again, napalm being dropped over the whole country, nuclear tests in the Sahara. Devastation! (p. 158)

The travellers express their anguish over Algeria as ‘irremediably doomed to [the] tragic fate’ of ‘Devastation’ but this time at the hands of the freedom-fighters of the FLN. The passage depicts the atrocities of the Civil War (1992-2002) that broke out after the democratic elections of 1990. Despite the fact that the Organisation refused to recognise the results of the election, it led to the perpetuation of the one-state part. Like ex-colonies, Algeria continues to suffer the ramifications of French colonialism, for the oppression of the Algerian population is still widely felt and experienced now at the hands of nationalist leaders. As the above-cited passage indicates, foreign oppression is replaced by a local one, for Algeria is stricken with ‘leprosy’, an ‘incurable’ ‘chronic disease’ the symptoms of which are vivid in the continued pain of the Algerian population. The pattern of imagery is one of contagion, and multiple illnesses and diseases are mentioned. Nonetheless, Ahmad’s critique of the classificatory rhetoric that defines the Third World in terms of its ‘experience of colonialism and imperialism’ is rearticulated by Boudjedra. Yet, the novel’s critique of the continued influence of colonialist history suggests the need for a reconsideration of Algeria’s precolonial history as a viable alternative.
The critique of historiography as a power-driven construct is frequent in the novel’s portrayals of the existing cultural and political hierarchies in post-independence Algeria. The autobiographical elements in the narrative voice of the novel are particularly useful in capturing the ongoing tragedies in the country through expressions of personal crisis: ‘I became obsessed with history’s twists, its U-turns and its horrors. History, or rather an accumulation of trivial details. This process of stratification. The meticulous arrangement of human suffering. Nothing more’ (p. 135). The phrase ‘the meticulous arrangement’ implies a sinister degree of control over the public memory, and a great deal of care and trouble in providing a particular version of events by those with a personal investment in how history is presented. In the ‘terrible maelstrom’ (p. 100) of history, Algerian society is made to go through ordeals, particularly in relation to the ‘process of stratification’ that rends the social fabric and fuels intracommunal strife. Remarkable among the novel’s depictions of the grievances through the travesties of history is the greatest tribute paid to the victors (Liberation party who has ruled since 1962), thereby relegating to the margins of history other revolutionaries, like Fernand Efon and Henry Mayo. The suggestion is that the historical distortions and intellectual disorientations projected onto the history of Algeria are a prime cause for individual and communal alienation, of which a split in consciousness is a striking symptom. Interestingly enough, this divide in subjectivity has been identified by Fanon (Black Sinks, White Masks) and Said (Culture and Imperialism), who have ascribed it to colonial conditions of which nationalism is a replica.

Boudjedra’s novel problematises the concept of the nation as a façade for ‘settling of scores’ (p. 93) with fellow-countrymen. Throughout the novel, there are incidents that support the claim that nationalism is used as a subterfuge for the nationalist leaders’ suppression of dissenting voices. Under the banner of ‘saving the revolution’ (p. 93), the ruling class commit no less appalling crimes than the French colonisers against fellow-Algerians, such as the liquidation of other resistance fighters like Abbane Ramadane (1920-1957) and Larbi Ben Mhidi (1923-1957) (p. 100), the castration of Ali ‘Nightmare Fare’, the besieged city (p. 130). Like Chatterjee suggests, the nation as a foreign construct need not be taken for granted as a prepackaged solution to the problem of colonisation. Boudjedra’s novel provides concrete illustrations of how the wholesale
adoption of nationalist ideology leads to unceasing cycles of violence and crisis in Algeria.

Said’s insights into the politics of nationalism as one of partition and division find depictions in Boudjedra’s *The Barbary Figs*. The novel provides little stories wherein individual Algerians are depicted in miserable conditions of life even in the post-independence era. One of the victims of the exclusive politics of nationalist ideology that the novel depicts is a photographer whose participation in resisting French colonisers does not help him even to secure his livelihood in the way the layman does. As Rashid relates the incident of his grandmother’s death, he mentions that she asks for a photographer to take a picture of her. On the arrival of the photographer, Rashid gives a brief profile about the man as follows:

He was almost certainly a nationalist militant who had been banished to our own town [...] who had been denied the right to any legitimate work or to receive any help from anyone and was instead obliged to sign a specific register at the police station twice a day; once in the morning and once in the evening. (p. 132)

The photographer, as the passage indicates, is made to suffer a great deal for making a living. Despite the fact that he was a ‘nationalist militant’, he is subjected to daily interrogation and humiliation. The implication is that the photographer is one example of the victims of the nationalist regime that he, like thousands like him, had participated in its cause, but ultimately were ruined by it. Like Fanon suggests, nationalism is a rhetoric of exclusive power that grinds the wider section of society. Boudjedra’s consideration of the photographer, thus, is not only to expose the scale of injustice committed in the name of the nation but also to invite just reappraisals of individual contributions in the making of history.

Boudjedra’s disillusionment with postcolonial Algerian nationalism also involves portrayals of the massive destruction committed by nationalist revolutionaries for the cause of independence. The novel depicts glimpses of how the war of independence had cost inestimable loss in public and private property alike; the images of destruction provided by the novel indicate the enormity of the crisis at all levels. In a very ironic comment on the calm that has been restored to the country after Algiers riots of December 1960, Rashid says:
The war had been terrible. Some luxury hotels had been blown up, leaving hundreds dead and injured under the rubble, innocent people for the most part who had been caught in the maelstrom of the revolutionary uprising. Numerous hip cafes, fine restaurants and nightclubs had been laid to waste by the Organisation’s bombs. [...] Trains were blown apart by mines while crawling through tunnels and rock faces, suddenly catapulted into the air, and then turned into a solid mass of soft, turgid putty. Buses were sprayed with bullets crumbling into a tangle of broken parts and human remains. (p. 136)

The ‘maelstrom of the revolutionary uprising’, the passage indicates, had not left anything alive in Algeria, sparing neither ‘innocent people’ nor material property or transport means. The images of destruction reflect the atrocity that went into the revolutionary acts of independence that the entire fauna and flora is diminished into ‘waste,’ ‘broken parts and human remains’. The novel’s frequent depictions of the appalling consequences of the war of freedom is a subtle suggestion of the futility of that war. As Naffis-Sahely notes, ‘The Barbary Figs is a eulogy to the lives lost not only in Algeria, but in all colonial wars’ (p. 173). The victory over colonialism, as the novel implies, is not cost-effective; precisely because the victory is so ‘meagre and small’ (p. 96) that it pales in comparison with the tragedies it had inflicted on the country.

Powerful too among the novel’s critiques of the limitations of postcolonial Algerian nationalism are depictions of women as ever fated to patriarchal oppression. The portrayals of nationalism as a genderised ideology in the novel are subversive of the liberationist rhetoric of the nationhood as equal citizenship. The suggestion is that Algeria remains misogynist as it used to be prior to independence despite the central role of women to resistance movements. In the conversation between the travellers, Omar refers to Rashid’s father (Si Zoubir) as a self-centred polygamous: ‘Your father had four wives, two thousand mistresses and something like fifty children!’ (p. 143). Omar’s remark - though confirmed by Rashid’s own descriptions of his father as ‘a feudalistic, polygamous and paedophilic bastard’ (p. 14) - suggests that Si Zoubir’s revolutionary spirit and nationalist impulse do not help him reconsider and thereby change himself. The nationalist Si Zoubir, we are told, continues to humiliate his wives as objects of his own pleasure. He casts away Rashid’s mother on a false charge of adultery after having made up his mind to take on a younger wife (Kamar). As a result, Rashid’s mother is kept a

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35 Namely, infrastructure, cultural heritage, society in general, the state and also humanistic values.
virtual prisoner in her own home and is in no better position than that of Spivak’s ‘widow’, for both are doubly silenced as victims of colonial patriarchy.

As the discussion makes it clear, the critique of the modern concept of the nation in *The Barbary Figs* is informed by grassroots realities of Algeria as ‘irremediably doomed to a tragic fate’ (p. 145). The novel shows how the concept of the nation is constructed in such a way that it promotes divided consciousness among Algerians. The novel also emphasises that the modern concept of the nation is not culture-sensitive, for it is a foreign imposition that does not respond to the unique needs of Algerian society. Imperial categories and provincial nationalism, thus, are the prime causes for the continued instability in the country.

**Other Histories**

The demystification of postcolonial nationalism in *The Barbary Figs* is supplemented by a consideration of possibilities of living and thinking outside the ‘terrible maelstrom’ of dominant history. The novel’s critique of the artificially-reductionist accounts Algerian struggle for independence is subtly interwoven with a different perspective on transformation. Boudjedra’s vision of transformation calls for a major structural reform in relationships, he emphasises the need to reconstitute the existing order of things in Algeria through a fundamental change in the past-present relationship. The catalysing agent for stimulating thought-change in the population is expressed in tree imagery: ‘Algiers was often bathed in a plant-like ambiguity that sped up childhood restlessness and condemned it to sleeplessness’ (p. 126), *‘the impression that a plant was sprouting its shoots through my spinal cord’* (p. 120, italicised source). The inextricable connection between the trees and the Algerians is emphasised throughout the novel. As will be discussed below, the novel is a call for a reappraisal of Algerian complex history of correlations between its fauna and flora as necessary for gaining self-awareness and thereby redressing grievances and restoring justice.

The act of rethinking the past-present relationship as portrayed throughout the novel is key to raising awareness not just of suppressed memories and untold tales but also of possibilities of transformation in contemporary Algeria. This is mainly because exposing the often-undisclosed errors is not only cathartic to individual sanity but also of fundamental utility to the whole community. Throughout the novel, there is a definitive
emphasis on the need to re-establish channels of communication between the past and the present; precisely because, the present is an effect and a consequence of the past. As the novel indicates, the past is not a completed project of fixed meanings. Rather, the novel promotes the idea that the past can be used as a source of meaning for present purposes, for old ideas can be put to new purposes. What the novel, therefore, emphasises is a dynamic relationship between past experiences and expression and present challenges and changes. The implication is that Boudjedra criticises the reliance of history on modernity’s break with the past as the inaugural moment in the history of Algeria. The travellers’ recounting of the past reveals the complexity and contingency of history that challenges the homogenous accounts presented in nationalist and colonialist recorded history. The implication is that traditional culture is mobilised as part of the people’s fight against oppression and, consequently, is transformed in the process. If the elite wish to stay in step with the people, the elite must participate in the reinterpretation of traditional culture in the present with the aim of opening up the possibility of a new future. The novel stresses the possibility of rebirth, growth, and redemption.

The most powerful metaphor for the novel’s emphasis on the redefinition of past-presents relationship comes through the recurrent images of the Barbary figs. Right from its title, the novel presents images of trees, such as ‘To us, the Barbary figs were symbolic guardians that had always kept watch over our country. Despite all the disasters and the tragedies, despite the genocide!’ (p. 83), the novel’s title is highly symbolic of the painful experiences the French colonisers were made to go through in their attempts to control Algeria. ‘the red-thorned Barbary figs’ (p. 122). The Barbary figs are an allegory for the nation’s power of tolerance and determination in the face of adversarial conditions of life. The Barbary figs have long been an important symbol in the imagination of the Algerians: ‘(At the time, ‘fig tree’ was the racist slur for Algerians, though for us, Barbary figs were a symbol of resistance)’ (p. 87). They belong to the land, and the land belongs to them. They are culturally-specific terms that do not need Eurocentric conceptual systems for validation. The all-pervasive image of the Barbary figs also suggests the interrelatedness between nature and culture.

The novel’s emphasis on the interrelatedness between nature and culture comes in the novel’s depictions of the mulberry tree. The image of the mulberry tree is used in the novel to express the deep association between individuals and the tree:
THE MULBERRY TREE fascinated me in the same way that Barbary figs fascinated Si Moustafa, Omar's grandfather, and Omar himself, who always wore a discreet little chain with a golden effigy of a Barbary fig around his neck. It was in that mythical tree that on one occasion - why I cannot recall - Omar and I made love to the twins at one of Si Moustafa’s summer homes. (p.121)

While the Barbary figs connect with ancestral meanings and established traditions, the mulberry tree tends to lean towards the young generation like Rashid and Omar. The ‘mythical’ power of the Barbary figs is clearly reflected in Si Moustafa’s wearing of ‘a discreet little chain with a golden effigy of a Barbary fig’ while the romantic adventures of Rashid and Omar are carried out under the mulberry tree. This observation is further substantiated by Rashid’s words: ‘Hateful awakenings. Such dark thoughts, childhood fears, macabre dreams […] and recurring fixations ran in parallel. […] Even the branches of the mulberry tree, which were usually so phosphorescent before sunrise, looked tired and shriveled’ (p. 128). The pathetic fallacy captured in the image of the mulberry tree’s correspondence with the youth’s activities is evoked in other places in the novel: ‘The mulberry tree was whispering; the birds were warbling’ p. 121). What is remarkable here is that despite the difference between their ages (Si Moustafa on the one hand and Rashid and Omar on the other), there is an intergenerational unity that is embodied in the image of the trees. The implication is that Boudjedra’s novel’s reference to the Barbary and mulberry trees as embodiments of the intermingling of the natural and the human suggests that there is no separation between the humane and the political, the private and the public, the romantic and the rational, the dynamic and the established except in the constructed history of power-centres which glorifies collective heroism and the infallibility of its leaders. Therefore, the alternative that the novel promotes is based on a drastic reconfiguration of the past-present relations.

**Frankenstein in Baghdad**

Saadawi’s novel *Frankenstein in Baghdad* addresses the human predicament in Iraq after the dominance of the US forces and the establishment of the new interim coalition government in April 2003. Saadawi was born in Baghdad in 1973. He is a contemporary Iraqi novelist, poet, screenwriter, reporter for several local and international news networks and documentary filmmaker. He received several awards, such as the International Prize for Arabic Fiction for *Frankenstein in Baghdad* in (2014) and also won Le Grand de Imaginaire in (2017). He has written novels, including *Albalad*.
Saadawi’s *Frankenstein in Baghdad* depicts a series of murders committed by a character referred to as ‘shesma’, an Iraqi word meaning ‘the whatsitsname’ and signifying ‘an unidentified source of terror’. At the beginning, Hadi Al-Attaq’s goal is for the government to recognise the parts as people and give them a proper burial. But the corpse goes missing, a wave of strange murders spreads the city, and reports stream in of a horrendous-looking criminal who, though shot, cannot be killed. Therefore, Hadi Al-Attaq soon realises he has created a monster, one that needs human flesh to survive - first from the guilty, and then from anyone who crosses its path. The monster ‘the whatsitsname’ comes to life to avenge the victims whose remains are parts of his body. The monster’s crimes such as [killing four beggars, Abu Zaidoun and an officer in the whores’ room in Umm Raghad’s house] (p. 81), spread terror and security forces deploy agents and launch investigations to arrest him. The ‘terrorist’ ['the whatsitsname'/the monster], however, continues his acts of murder, replacing the parts of his body which he loses in his fights with the parts of his victims. At the end of the novel, the security forces declare that they manage to capture the ‘terrorist’, who is shown on TV, and is identified as Hadi Al-Attaq, the creator of ‘the whatsitsname’. Before his arrest, Al-Attaq was a victim of car bombing in Al-Bataween/Baghdad and ‘The fire had completely disfigured him’ (p. 258). Al-Attaq’s disfiguration became a pretext for his arrest and accusation as the monster since he was no longer recognised even by his close friends in Al-Bataween, such as the Egyptian, Almasri. A spokesman from the security forces stated that Al-Attaq was the monster. Ironically, the real monster remains free.

In line with the theoretical observations discussed above, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* offers a detailed portrayal of the ways in which Iraqis are caught between two opposing worldviews. On the one hand, the novel offers glimpses of the oppressive practices of the US troops and the existing government. On the other, it depicts ordinary Iraqis’ resilience in the face of hardships. In so doing, the novel echoes what Said calls

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‘humanistic heroism’ (as previously discussed in the Introduction), whereby Saadawi’s
critique of the status quo as well as articulation of human agency is an affirmation of
human unity in the face of oppression, far and wide, then and now.

_Frankenstein in Baghdad_ defies established conventions of fiction-writing. The
novel portrays characters and events without an obvious linear plot progression of
incidents or omniscient narration. The novel’s open-ended style subverts traditional
norms of closure, and its central mystery remains unsolved. It is a multivocal novel,
wherein different voices intermingle with one another, so do characters’ past and present
experiences. ‘the whatsitsname’ is constructed from multiple bodies; he embodies
multiple experiences, as an allegory not just of nation but also of the ways in which the
novel decentres Eurocentric notions of subjectivity. This is most explicit when
considering how the story of ‘the whatsitsname’ is implicated in a host of incidents,
memories, and experiences that interlock with one another to the extent that one cannot
attend to one episode without recourse to other histories. The novel’s structure and style
reflect the desire to revise the hegemonic epistemological power structures of Eurocentric
knowledge production and to recognise other possibilities of living and thinking as
integral to the human pilgrimage on earth.

_Spectre of Terror_

‘The whatsitsname’ has associates (the Magician, The Sophist, and The Enemy)
who set up his schemes and advise him on the best course of action. These three
characters are:

The Magician […] was part of the team of magicians that worked for the president
of old regime [ Saddam Hussein] and that he cast spells to keep the Americans
away from Baghdad and to prevent the city from falling into their hands […] The
Sophist […]’s good at explaining ideas, promoting the good ones, polishing them,
and making them more powerful. He is good at doing the same for bad ideas too,
so he is a man who is as dangerous as dynamite […] The Enemy […]’s an officer
in the counterterrorism unit. (p. 138-40).

‘The whatsitsname’ represents the nation and its experiences and advisors. The imagery
used with reference to the monster’s advisors signifies dramatically divergent
experiences, ranging from the superstitious practices of magic and deceptive deployments
of language to anti-social positions. Not only do these experiences clash with one another,
they are also unreliable sources of guidance. The Magician, The Sophist and The Enemy
are devoid of the professional expertise and strategic vision that are prerequisite in the
advisory board of the modern state. Herein lies the subtlety of the novel’s imagery, which implies that the crisis of Iraq is, partly, caused by its stark lack of scientific apparatuses and modern systems of governance. The critique of the age-old practices of the Iraqi government is a suggestion for the need to reconstitute the entire body of the government, so that it can run along the technocratic path of modern states.

The critique of the internal system of the government is supplemented by an interrogation of simplistic understandings and naïve practices in Iraqi society. Saadawi’s novel promotes the idea that leaders become dictators because of the sacredness bestowed on them by their own peoples. ‘the whatsisname’ has also partisans (the young madman, the old madman and the eldest madman) who alternately see in him the archetypal Iraqi citizen, anti-Christ, or the saviour. (p. 140). These allies seek salvation through the agency of an individual ‘the whatsisname’; they project their fond hopes onto him. Just as Said questions nationalism as a replica of colonialism, Saadawi casts doubt on ideological projects-religious or nationalist-that stir public sentiments towards causes of narrow imperatives. Saadawi’s critique of ideological projects is congruent with Western scepticism towards grand narratives [cultural imperialism- see Introduction]. This is mainly because these macro-structures are motivated by hidden agendas that serve the interests of the few dominant powers while ignoring the rest of society. For instance, Brigadier Majid, stated that ‘the monster itself represents the American project. It was the Americans who were behind this monster’ (p. 259). Hence, this creates terror in Iraqi society because ‘fear of the Whatsitsname’ continued to spread. In Sadr City [Shiite majority] they spoke of him as a Wahhabi, in Adamiya [Suni majority] as a Shiite extremist. The Iraqi government described him as an ‘agent of foreign powers’ (p. 259). Saadawi’s chief insight, however, is that the lack of awareness among the Iraqi masses is a prime cause for their blind adherence to the dictates of their leaders.

The ‘War on Terror’ provides the context for Saadawi’s fiction. The centrality of this war to the contemporary history of Iraq is addressed in terms of the disastrous consequences incurred through foreign invasion. The war is depicted as catastrophic to the entire fauna and flora [namely, infrastructure, cultural heritage, society in general, the state and also humanistic values] leading to the collapse of the whole country into the void of chaos:
More than ever before, public conditions were intensely deteriorating. TV broadcasts political infightings as well as street guerrilla wars, with bombs, assassinations, explosives, a car and its passengers were hijacked, and the change of night into a jungle for criminals. All this was happening while the elites and the media officials were preoccupied with such issues as whether we were heading towards a civil war, we were already in a civil war, or we were in an unconventional civil war. (p. 199)

The unprecedented scale of crisis in Iraq is expressed here in terms of a vortex of confusion and mayhem, vandalism and looting, murder and violence. The intensity of the crisis is further deepened by the distortions circulated in and by intellectual circles and news media; institutions of knowledge and information are obsessed with polemical wrangling over issues of little relevance to Iraqi society. Saadawi’s depictions of the topsy-turvy situation of Iraq are analogous with Fanon and Abu-Rabi’s discussions of the imbroglio that afflicts colonised countries on the social, cultural, intellectual, economic, and political levels. Saadawi’s chief insight, however, is to observe how the ‘War on Terror’ itself is the spawning ground of the ‘more-than-ever-before’ disruptions, deteriorations and violence in Iraq.

Frankenstein in Baghdad promotes the idea that the ‘War on Terror’ is a rehash of colonialist pursuits and shows how the supposed liberation of Iraq from Saddam’s regime are employed to legitimise the US invasion and control of Iraq. Instead of being liberated, the Iraqis began to feel terrified by the presence of the American forces. This is portrayed in Chapter Six of the novel when Saadawi depicts how the arrival of one element of the American military police at the al-Bataween sector of Baghdad is a cause of panic to all the residents. Faraj, a well-known broker in the neighborhood, happens to be present when the forces arrive. When asked by the American officer via an interpreter about the ownership of a certain house, Faraj is shown as trembling with fear so that his response is hardly heard. In his mind, a thought reminds him that American troops can ‘operate with considerable independence and no one can hold them to account for what they did. As suddenly as the wind could shift, they could throw you down a dark hole’ (p. 66). Faraj’s inner thought is used as a literary device in order to question the legitimacy of the unqualified freedom of the US forces in Iraq. Brigadier Majid, who is one of the remnants of Saddam’s regime and an intelligence agent with the current system, sums up the aim of the ‘War on Terror’ as to ‘get more control’ Brigadier Majid said (p. 73). The significance of the Brigadier’s statement is that it brings out the agenda behind the ‘War on Terror’: ‘more control’ over power resources and the world over. The ‘War on Terror’
is but a rhetoric for fulfilling America’s hegemonic ambitions. Said’s critique of Orientalism as a consolidation of European colonization and Saadawi’s consideration of the ‘War on Terror’ as a reinforcement of American superpower illustrate the political utility of rhetorical configurations for imperialist discourses.

Saadawi’s novel calls into question the labelling scheme of the either/or politics launched in the US campaign against terror. The novel exposes how the imposition of this politics results in rending social fabric and provoking conflicts. This critique passes through the mind of journalist Mahmoud al-Sawadi in a meeting between his boss Ali Baher al-Saidi and Brigadier Majid: ‘There are two fronts now […] the Americans and the government on one side, the terrorists and the various anti-government militias on the other. In fact, ‘terrorist’ was the term used for everyone who was against the government and the Americans’ (p. 77). The phrases ‘two fronts’, ‘one side’ and ‘who was against’, give clue not only to the disintegration of Iraq into mutually exclusive entities but also to the exclusionary practices of the dominant powers (‘the government and the Americans’) to suppress counter-forces by means of the ‘terrorist’ rhetoric of terror. That this criticism occurs in the mind of al-Sawadi, a young Iraqi journalist who is often constrained by his boss (al-Saidi as Editor-in-Chief), and therefore is unable to pursue his ambitions, is indicative not only of the overwhelming presence of the spectre of terror but also of the modern fallacies of freedom of speech and human rights. Nonetheless, Saadawi’s consideration of how the War on Terror and its either/or politics aids in the reinforcement of the dominant powers coincides with Fitzgerald and Asad’s discussions of how the secular/religious distinction helps in the consolidation of the modern state apparatuses. What is at stake is how the colonial ‘divide and rule’ politics has maintained the self-interests of hegemonic forces in the world. Saadawi’s main point, however, is to observe the continued efficiency of modern systems of classification as strategic for the neocolonisation of Iraq.

The novel also investigates the role of the mass media in deepening the crises of Iraq. In the novel, news agencies produce images of Baghdad as fraught with mayhem and terror: ‘No day passed without at least one car bomb’ (p. 100). To produce terror-stricken images and to exaggerate the intensity of conflicts help the media to modulate the public opinion in order to applaud the practices of the system as legitimate and necessary. Moreover, news agencies ascribe the destruction of lives, assets,
infrastructures and heritage to ‘al-Qaeda and remnants of the old regime had planned one hundred car bombings’ (p. 28), as well as to the newly-emerged terror of ‘the whatsisname’ (pp. 126–137). While turning a blind eye to the sub-human practices of the occupying forces, the media foregrounds terrorist activities as an embodiment of Iraqi conditions. However, Said’s critique of the media’s coverage of Islam, as discussed in my introduction, is echoed in Saadawi’s pronouncements on the diabolical role of the media that not only distorts but also destroys relations among individual Iraqis:

As the brigadier read the report, the big television screen in his grand office flashing breaking news that dozens of people had been killed on the Imams Bridge. A rumour that there was a suicide bomber among the pilgrim caused panic, and some of the pilgrims were trampled to death while others threw themselves into the river and drowned’ (p. 105).

Targeting ‘Imams’ Bridge’ (a link between two sectors of Baghdad: Sunni-majority Adamiya and Shiite-majority Kadhimiya) as a site for spreading fabricated yet deadly stories reveals the complicity of the media in igniting sectarian clashes. Like Said suggests, the media aggravates the Iraqi situation.

The novel’s counter-hegemonic position is particularly evident in its depictions of individuals as denied of self-expression, psychologically defeated and mentally controlled. The unrelenting search of the government intelligence forces for the ‘whatshisname’ as the prime agent of all terror acts in the city culminates in the announcement of his arrest. However, the perpetrator is identified by the government as Hadi Al-Attaq. The public is reported to experience a momentary shock: ‘Aziz the Egyptian saw the picture of his close friend on television and didn’t recognise him […]. But when they broadcast recordings of the criminal’s confessions, the voice was very similar to Hadi’s. How could he be a murderer?’ (p. 270). In spite of being completely convinced that the criminal shown on TV could not be Al-Attaq, the Egyptian, the local coffee shop and a close friend of the convict, suspends disbelief and joins the public in celebrating the event (p. 271). The phrase ‘the voice was very similar like Hadi’s’ and the reference to the Egyptian [Almasri] are critical of the official narrative presented through its mass media as a politically driven construct that falsifies human consciousness with intellectual distortions. The Hadi incident connects with Said’s disillusionment with cultural imperialism, in particular the tendency to blur critical awareness of the oppressive and exclusionary practices of centres of power. This is particularly explicit in the last
comment made about the public attitudes concerning the capture of Hadi: ‘Nobody could believe that this frightening criminal had been living among them, but what the government said must be true’ (p. 271). The hint at the travesty of truth and manipulation of information entails the demise of independent thinking. Saadawi’s chief insight, thus, is to observe how individual intellectual sanity suffers when geopolitical powers weigh in.

**Beyond Duality**

Saadawi’s articulation and interpretation of postcolonial critiques of Western modernity involves a consideration of both al-Bataween as a model of life and the inexhaustible potential of the human phenomenon. The novelist’s responses emphasise the need to expose the limitations of imposed ‘solutions’ to the Iraqi situation and to raise awareness of the country’s dormant resources-material and cultural-as possibilities for resolving the crisis.

The al-Bataween sector of Baghdad is in the central part of the city. It was where most of the bombing was concentrated during the War on Terror. Historically, this part of the city has been ethnically diverse. Muslims (Sunnis / Shias) and Christians have lived alongside one another and have continued to do so since the bombing. The novel thus dwells on the area as a location where non-sectarian values have been sustained over time, suggesting a model for a better kind of Iraqi nationhood, one which came under attack during the bombing. As described in the novel, ‘the area had plenty of outsiders who had moved in on top of each other over many decades; no one could claim to be an original inhabitant’ (p. 22). The phrase ‘over many decades’ suggests how longstanding is this intermingling of peoples from multiple ethnicities and religious persuasions: ‘Umm Salim was one of Elishva’s neighbours who was convinced that Elishva had special powers and that God’s hand was on her shoulder wherever she was’ (p. 9). This is how Umm Salim (Muslim) describes her neighbour, Elishva (Christian). The deeply-rooted interconnections among al-Bataween residents bridge divides and break walls. Fitzgerald and Asad’s considerations of the secular-religious correlations are embodied in Saadawi’s portrayal of al-Bataween as a microcosm of Iraq’s history of interlinked cultural traditions.37 All three writers expose the fragility of conceptual categories, namely

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37 In this chapter, I focus on Fitzgerald and Asad’s critiques of modern classifications, in particular the distinction between the secular and the religious. These thinkers expose the intellectual distortions caused
secular-religious and conflict between Christianity and Islam by describing to lived historical moments and locations. What Saadawi adds to Fitzgerald and Asad’s discussions, however, moves on from a critique of the way things are to a consideration of transformation from the range of possibilities at one’s disposal.

Saadawi’s emphasis on al-Bataween as alternative to the dominant paradigm is evident in his portrayal of Elishva. Elishva is an old Christian lady, who had lost her son in the 1980s Iraq-Iran war and who persists in the hope of his return: ‘The mother clung to the memory of her late son in order to go on live’ (p. 8). For her, ‘memory’ is life-giving, a cause greater than herself, and a uniting element against the dazzling ‘the extravagant details’ (p. 15) and the vogue of ‘abstract speculation’ (p. 15). Modern language does not render intelligible what Elishva goes through, for this language is at odds with the language she has inherited. The old lady has a different language that keeps her communion with God alive and her conversations with portraits of saints and memoirs possible: ‘She wanted a sign from the Lord about Daniel ‘her son’ (p. 15), ‘Elishva knew what he meant [God’s] speech [……] He [God] is so old friend [of Elishav’s] and it would be hard to abandon that friendship’ (p. 58). Elishav’s faith in the divine accounts for her refusal to move from Baghdad to Australia where her daughters live. Only by the end do her daughters succeed in persuading their mother by bringing her younger grandson in whom she can find a relief for her lost son: ‘It seems that her daughters have ultimately understood how to deal with the old lady. They used a logic and a rationality without trying to understand her specific logic’ (p. 287). Saadawi’s perspectives on the limitations of modern rationality, however, are reminiscent of Fitzgerald and Asad’s discussions of the ‘category error’ in modern scholarship. Saadawi’s main contribution, yet, is to highlight the need for a more accommodating approach whereby self-centeredness can be transcended and the Other embraced.

Saadawi’s refutation of the modern logic of sameness and fixity comes through an affirmation of the inexhaustible potential of human meaning and identity. The novel sketches each character as a composite of innumerable voices, associations, desires, memories, and contradictions; each person is characterised as a site of contesting forces:

by the uncritical reproduction of these categories. These distortions, for example, help justify the War on Terror as being for the cause of saving humanity from the evils of religious extremism. Such theorising finds an artistic embodiment in Saadawi’s novel as a critique of the reductionist approaches to the Iraqi mosaic of diverse formations, e.g., Christianity and Islam (Sunni/ Shiite), Kurdish, Iraqis and others.
‘There are no innocents who are completely innocent or criminals who are completely criminal’ (p. 207). The implication is that no account can claim to provide a comprehensive picture of human nature, human nature is so elusive as to be accurately anticipated or captured in fixed formulas. The novel’s accent on the complexity of human nature is subversive of the reductionist approaches to human identity, such as in case of ‘citizen No. 341’, which can be seen as a reduction of human identity and the dominant practices of dehumanization (p. 194). The impoverishment of human potential is as much debunked in Fanon and Adonis’s considerations of human creativity as in Saadawi’s emphasis on the ever-changing dynamic of meaning and identity: ‘No one is ever in one state of mind or in one permanent condition’ (p. 297). In brief, constancy of change is part and parcel of the multifaceted character of human existence.

Conclusion

The postcolonial reinterpretations articulated in this chapter focus on critiques of all ‘Borders of Conquest’ established by means of rhetorical constructs and through institutional apparatuses with a view to serving the geopolitical interests of centres of power to the exclusion of the rest. The chapter has identified a range of challenges presented by Western modernity in order to disturb the foundations of the postcolonial states of Algeria and Iraq, subjecting their inhabitants to cultural and military conflict, such as political infighting, sectarian clash, and social turmoil. The thinkers considered in the chapter have collectively identified the range of challenges presented by cultural imperialism. Categories, such as East/West and religion/the secular, bring about intellectual distortions, reinforcing colonial inequality. Such categories are compounded by what Fanon and Abu-Rabi after he have identified as a persistent legacy of cultural inferiority. The discussion has also elaborated on the divisive criteria that underpin modern ideologies, such as the nation-state and the secular/religious distinction. As discussed earlier, the imposition of foreign solutions to problems elsewhere results in sectarian clashes, social unrest, and political upheaval. The crisis in question, as the chapter has discussed, owes largely to the fact that modern ideologies are culturally incompatible with the established cultural traditions in Algeria and Iraq. Modern parameters are not culture-sensitive; they tend to question long-established traditions and meaning by replacing them with a set of assumptions that promote divisions and spark conflicts.
The chapter has discussed Boudjedra’s *The Barbary Figs* as a critique of postcolonial nationalism. The discussion has demonstrated the ways by which the novel calls into question nationalist ideology as a reworking of French colonialist enterprise. As noted earlier, the novel’s critique of the Algerian nationalist project focuses on its long-term consequences, such as the continued suffering of the population and the exclusive grip of power by a specific class of Algerian society. The novel’s rereading of Algeria’s history since independence (1954-1962) till the present as the unfolding of asymmetrical power relations suggests a different reading of history - as tragedy, comedy, melodrama, and romance, each in a sense validating the other. Boudjedra’s reading of history suggests the complexity of history as a construct of interlacing components.

The theoretical context for my reading of *The Barbary Figs* has proved particularly useful in unlocking subtle shades of meaning and opening new vistas for discussion. Of particular significance are the perspectives of Said, Fanon, Bhabha, Ahmad, and Chatterjee. Their critiques of the concept of nationalism are confirmed in Boudjedra’s novel: Fanon’s critique of nationalism as neocolonialism, Said’s of the elite’s internalizing and replicating colonial practices, Bhabha’s of the heterogeneous and hybrid nature of the nation, Ahmad’s of the all-encompassing ‘metanarrative’ of ‘national allegory’, Chatterjee’s of nationalism as a ‘derivative discourse’. As the chapter has indicated, Boudjedra’s novel comes in the dimension of these critiques by foregrounding the artifice and unreliability of historical reconstruction. The novel also exposes the exclusionary practices of the ruling elite by means of reliance on imperial categories and provincial nationalism as a rhetoric of hegemony.

The reading I have developed in the context of *The Barbary Figs* has also highlighted how the intersection of the postcolonial and the postmodern accounts partly for the novel’s power and relevance to the long-repressed desire in the Arab-majority nations for resisting all forms of hegemony. The intellectual challenge that the novel poses to the status quo in Algeria, and by implication to other Arab-majority nations, is structured in a language that can be understood by both the ordinary people and the establishment. The novel’s use of postcolonial and postmodern devices and insights makes it accessible to all audience and readership, yet with noetic complexity and intellectual rigour. It is also of critical significance to note that the intersection of the
postcolonial and the postmodern in the novel is an allegory not just of the novel’s structure and thought but also of the nation itself.

*The Barbary Figs* espouses a return-to-the-basics approach in defiance of the onslaught of foreign tools for redeeming Algerian crisis. Boudjedra’s proposal for a reinterpretation of the country’s rich resources through a complete reconstruction of the existing order, however, is idealistic, as the assessment of the Algerian situation is based on his own experience. From my own perspective, I think his statement of the Algerian problem is sound, but the solution he offers is restricted. This is mainly because, his vision does not seem to take into account the complexity of the modern society in which he lives. A return to the past, though desirable, is a challenge that necessitates a wider public awareness of the ‘right’ equation to be struck between the past and the present. The novel does not qualify the nature or mode on which the reinterpretation of the past needs to proceed, either.

The chapter has demonstrated how Saadawi’s *Frankenstein in Baghdad* does not internalise Western modes of thought and writing. The novel criticises grand narratives (cultural imperialism). The discussion has indicated how Said, Fitzgerald, and Asad’s intellectual contributions find interpretation in the novel’s counter-hegemonic stance to the reductionist approaches to artificially grouped sectors of humanity by means of rhetorical constructions, such as the War on Terror. The critique of the secular/religious distinction, as addressed in the chapter, provides particularly useful insights into modernity as the formative paradigm of Western dominant patterns. The critique exposes how rhetorical constructions, in particular the ‘secular’ and the ‘religious’, are deployed so as to justify Euro-American intervention in Iraq. In addition, the novel’s depictions of Iraqi crisis as largely a consequence of both the either/or politics of the War on Terror and the intellectual distortions promoted in the media contribute significantly to criticism of Eurocentric knowledge production. Hence, the title of my chapter, ‘Borders of Conquest’, refers to the hegemonic epistemological power structures of Eurocentrism, which categorise human experiences, cultures, and histories in accordance with the interests of imperialist discourses. The title, therefore, suggests the need to cross borders of the empire through critique.

Of critical note too is the delineation of Saadawi’s response to powers of hegemony. The chapter has discussed his response as integral to postcolonial efforts to
resist dominant patterns of thought. The novel’s portrayal of al-Bataween as Iraq in a miniature serves to highlight its heterogeneous culture, which is far too complex to be reduced to the essentialist accounts of Eurocentric models. The discussion has also demonstrated how similar articulations have been made by thinkers in different contexts such as Fanon, Ngugi, Abu-Rabi’, Adonis, among others. The quest for alternatives to hegemonic models is a translation of the urgency to redefine human relations and to reconstitute the existing state of affairs along fresh frontiers of non-dual orientations.

In its ultimate analysis, the chapter has made it explicit that Boudjedra and Saadawi have offered representations of local experiences on a global scale. The discussion has indicated how the novels in question have addressed problems, such as nationalist ideology and the War on Terror, as embodiments of a wider destabilization in the world. The crises in Algeria and Iraq are a miniature of the human predicament vis-à-vis the hegemonic forces of cultural imperialism. As the discussion has indicated, the novels’ expressions of the agonies in Algeria and Iraq are integral to articulations of resistance to the manipulative rhetoric and oppressive apparatuses of dominant powers. For their heroic participations in ‘speaking truth to power,’38 The Barbary Figs and Frankenstein in Baghdad are visions of ‘the unity of humanity’ beyond all borders of conquest.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to underline how the postcolonial nationalism is essentially an extension of colonial hegemony as both are equally divisive, oppressive and exploitative. The study investigated postcolonial nationalism and identity in late-twentieth and post-millennial Algerian and Iraqi novels. In order to put the issues of identity and postcolonial nationalism in proper perspective, I traced the development of nationalism in Algeria and Iraq emphasising their discursive construction and socio-political consequences. I reviewed briefly how, in Iraq’s short history of a century, people’s identity and sense of nationalism have been forged, influenced and manipulated in number of ways by the state and other elite powers through discursive means, such as rewriting history and appropriation of other knowledge systems through education and propaganda. To that end, the study investigated eight novels that represented the Iraqi and Algerian postcolonial nationalism. The novels I examined all confirm critics’ idea that nationalist postcolonial identities are discursively constructed, artificially homogenised and politically imposed.

In chapter one I argued how and to what extent historical fiction can create and legitimatise nationalist discourse. In application, how the two selected novels Children of the New World and Scattered Crumbs tried to create and legitimatise nationalist discourse to incline and mobilise the public towards the nationalist cause. Consequently, I found that the novelists use the discursive strategies of appealing to people’s collective memory of brutalization of public and victimization of women by the former states and colonial powers for the purpose of psychological conditioning of the Algerians and the Iraqis in the favour of nationalism.

I have argued that both novels have used similar discursive strategies for supporting the nationalist order of discourse. In both novels appeal to collective memory of the society by revisiting the painful past for people’s psychological conditioning in the favour of a nationalist agenda. The sexual depravity of Touma and Saadi has been used as a strategy for debasing and discrediting the counter-nationalist discourse by equating complacency with state oppression with the basest sexual and moral depravation. Both novels, through historical fiction of selective events in the history of Algeria and Iraq, legitimatise the revisionist agenda and nationalist discourse by suggesting the dismantling
of the state and refashioning of the nation. By identifying the discursive strategies, my investigation also highlighted how discourse can contribute to blocking people’s critical awareness of exclusive and oppressive effects of popular paradigm’s discursive practices.

Chapter two demonstrated how and to what extent the critical awareness/blindness of postcolonial nationalism contributes to social and cultural formations in a pan-Arabic context, and how nationalist leaders exploit and oppress the subjects like the colonial regime thereby making nation-states home colonies. To that end a critical reading of Za’eeem alAqaliyah al-Sahiqah and Valyoom Asharah found that both novels take an anti-hegemonic stance and expose how postcolonial nation states of Iraq and Algeria have become ‘home colonies’ with same oppressive practices as during the time of Western colonial imperialism.

The chapter also found that the change in the colour and ethnicity of the rulers did not change the system of governance and the Iraqis and the Algerians are experiencing the colonial oppression at the hands of the elites of their own country. I demonstrated in my critique that the postcolonial nationalist governments use the colonial tools of oppression, such as fear and factionalism for perpetuation of their power and systematic exploitation of public. The nationalist discourse causes mystification and bewilderment of critical faculty of people leading to their critical blindness and ideological vagueness. In this way my analysis problematises and exposes the nationalist discourse and its oppressive fall-outs and calls for a transformation by displacement of the hegemonic paradigm of nationhood by more inclusive and participative ideology.

Chapter three investigated how, and to what end, Algerian and Iraqi novelists explore alternatives to Western modes of modernity in relation to postcolonial identity and nationalism, and also if there is any cultural fall-out of entertaining Western voices in a pan-Arabic context. It also seeks to answer how the contemporary Algerian and Iraqi novelists represent local experiences of global phenomenon such as the War on Terror. The selected novels The Sirens of Baghdad and The Tobacco Keeper presented the similar anti-hegemonic discourse with critical view of Western modernity and postcolonial nationalism. They found that the western world-view dominates the nationalists so much so that they inescapably involve in sectarian and identarian politics of ‘divide and rule’ just like the colonial powers did. The branding of Shia-Sunni or nationalist/antinationalist expands the sectarian chasms and causes a lot of pain and upheaval in society.
The fourth chapter was designed to tackle the question of how *The Barbary Figs* and *Frankenstein in Baghdad* expose cultural imperialism through the imposition of modern cultural apparatus such as nationalism and religious/secular distinction on Algeria and Iraq through postcolonial reading. In other words, how is knowledge deployed as a strategic medium for furthering a colonialist grip over the Middle East? and how does the secular/religious distinction cause intellectual distortions about what a Muslim state should look like? My analysis of these novels investigates these issues in the light of Said’s views on the relationship between modernism and coloniality, Fanon’s ideas of colonialism and nationalism, and Talal Asad and Timothy Fitzgerald’s views on secular/religious distinction in relation to cultural imperialism.

My critique questions the validity of nationalist discourse by exposing how nationalist states privilege the interests of nationalist bourgeoisie over common welfare of society by using the means of western modernity and secular/secular distinction for mystification and bewilderment of masses so that people’s awareness of their real problems could be obscured. Western ideological apparatus of religious/secular dichotomy causes perceptions distortions by attributing positive things such as self-discipline, tolerance, law, democracy and development to secular and all negatives such as fundamentalism, intellectual backwardness, intolerance and violence to religion (Islam) with a view to legitimatising the use of oppressive force against it. The effect of accepting the discourse of religious/secular is such that the subscribers of either of the binaries essentially put themselves in opposition to the other causing division and factionalism, the bedrock of sustenance of both colonialism and nationalism. In most cases the subscribers of western secularism start feeling ashamed of their religion and finally become intellectual slaves of global cultural capitalism of the West.

Moreover, I found that nationalist rhetoric is hollow. This is apparent in two ways. Boudjedra’s *The Barbary Figs* uses conversation between two friends to explore the issue through revisiting selective events in the history of Algeria to connect the dots from French colonial period to current postcolonial state in the story of exploitation and oppression, while Saadawi’s *Frankenstein in Baghdad* uses allegory to demonstrate the hollowness of the nationalists’ claims of Post-Saddam emancipation and local experiences of global phenomena of War on Terror. My critique underlined the authors’ anti-hegemonic revisionist agenda by illuminating critical underpinnings of cultural
imperialism perpetuated through nationalists’ promotion of western notions. The people of the Middle East, as demonstrated in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, have been blinded by the neocolonial propaganda of western notions such as secular/communal and War on Terror. My reading shows the people of the Middle East the possibilities of reconsidering their situation for restoring peace and fraternity in the Islamic world. The study also found that the ‘free’ Algeria as well as in ‘free’ Iraq, conditions have not improved, and citizens are trapped between colonial and nationalist discourses. Besides, the Algerian and Iraqi women suffered the most as they found themselves doubly oppressed by both the Islamist patriarchal system and postcolonial nationalism: the former constantly trying to snatch their rights and push them behind closed doors while the later constantly creating and supporting divisive discourse leading to factionalism, oppression and exploitation.

To sum up, my critique of the selected novels underlined the ways these novels subscribed to pro-nationalistic or anti-hegemonic stand in relation to the issues of postcolonial nationalism and its various actors. While Djebar’s *Children of the New World* and Muhsin al-Ramli’s *Scattered Crumbs* proposed their revisionist agenda by depicting the oppressive practices of the prevailing colonial or autocratic rule to suggest a better governance by the nationalist powers, other six novels in the study took anti-hegemonic stands and exposed the limitations and fallacies of postcolonial nation-state, which is as oppressive as colonial imperialism. The similar strategies of creating and perpetuating nationalist discourse have been illustrated in Iraqi as well as Algerian novels. I illustrated that nationalist governments oppress the people the same way as the colonial rulers because both use the same discursive strategies and western notions. Due to subscribing to the western notions, such as racial and ethnic superiority and religious/secular divide, nationalist governments cause intellectual and historical distortions leading to critical blindness, factionalism and public unrest in the same ways as the colonial rulers did by practicing ‘divide and rule’ for perpetuating their cultural imperialism. Behind the façade of nationalism, the nationalist forces legitimatise their oppressive and exploitative practices by redefining moral and ethical code whereby branding people and practices as moral/immoral, nationalist/anti-nationalist, good Muslim/bad Muslim, morally upright/morally depraved. Thus, the psychologically conditioned, completely bewildered and mystified, common public finds itself in the perpetual clutches of exploitative discourse of either colonial powers or nationalists. The findings of this work create awareness among people regarding divisive discourse of
postcolonial nationalism and suggests a life of love and peace celebrating multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious society.

The discussion and evaluation of my analysis in relation to recent studies allows for the critical assessment of the findings. Lindsey Moore’s *Narrating Postcolonial Arab Nations* (2018) is an important development in the field of Arabic literature. Moore examines the issues of postcolonialism and nationalism in Arab creative narratives and memoirs form the last half-century in four rich sites of literary production: Egypt, Algeria, Lebanon, and Palestine.¹ In these sites, she found that “postcolonial Arab narratives are vehicles for the nation, made up of many ‘little tales’ that include […] stories of ‘the strong arms of the poor’ […] overcome ‘the decisions of leaders’”² Consequently, Moore understands stories as a tool used by narratives to enhance social awareness against “the decisions of leaders”, nationalist leaders, which were usually “denied the human will, rights, diversity and potentiality of citizens in historically constructed polities”.³ Indeed, this is consistent with my work, where I have demonstrated that nationalist leaders become oppressors to their people as the same way as the colonial rulers because both use the same discursive strategies and western notions. This finding invokes Achcar’s (2016) conclusion that “in the context of the Arab world, colonialism, incomplete decolonizing processes and continued Western intervention all contribute in a significant manner to the present ‘interregnum’ of suspended revolution”.⁴

In addition to this, I found that colonialism also was practiced by nationalist leaders and elites under the motto of nationalism due to Western hegemony. This confirms Moore’s belief that “Arab state elites have collaborated with ‘Western’ powers to ensure mutual security and financial benefits”.⁵ In postcolonial theory, this type of colonialism can be classified under the umbrella of neo-colonialism. Other forms of neo-colonialism that Moore identifies in the Arab world can be seen through “introducing competing modes of modernity and new vocabularies and languages in which to convey them, and introduced or exacerbated intercommunity tensions”.⁶ Moore also refers to

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² Ibid., pp. 1-2.
³ Ibid., p.2.
⁵ Ibid., p.9.
⁶ Ibid., -.
some Islamic movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood (al-İkhwān al-Muslimīn) in 1928 to Da’ish in 2014 as an extension to the Western hegemony and its agenda in the Arab world. In my thesis the effects of these movements were discussed as thoughts and ideas promoted by Western imperialism and their agents of the nationalist leaders and elites in particular, and I discussed the concepts of divide and rule, either or politics, secular/religion dichotomy and the War on Terror as imperialism’s policies.

Historical fiction is not the only site where nationalistic and anti-hegemonic discourses can be created or resisted: other mediums such as films, folk songs and stories, patriotic poems and narratives, history, television programmes and news are also powerful tools of discursive manipulation and ideological conditioning. However, my research focussed entirely on novels and did not investigate other artistic and literary forms which have an equally strong discursive means of conditioning people’s thinking and behaviour because of the need to keep a sufficiently tight focus on novelistic expression. My research is therefore just a step towards disambiguating oppressive discourses through critical reading of the Algerian and the Iraqi novels, which can be explored further in other cultural and political constructs also. There are ample possibilities for researching the other sites of discourse to study how they condition perceptions and affect people’s response to postcolonial nationalism, identity, Islam and the War on Terror.
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