War and Exile in Contemporary Iraqi Women’s Novels

DISSERTATION

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By

Hanan Hussam Kashou

Graduate Program in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures

The Ohio State University

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Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Joseph T. Zeidan, Advisor

Dr. Morgan Liu

Dr. Youssef Yacoubi
Abstract

This dissertation explores the representative works of several contemporary Iraqi women’s writing and the themes of war and exile employed in their narratives. Iraqi women focus their fictional narrative discourse and themes on the Iraqi war(s) and the political situation their nation faced over the past thirty years. The writers chosen for this study are a mere representation of the many Iraqi writers who focus their efforts and their writings on the war story. I argue that the themes of war and exile, and the historical and pragmatic vein that they write from, have come to dominate the discourse of Iraqi women. It has become the focal point of their themes which has come to serve as their national narrative. The framework Iraqi women articulate, this national narrative, is an embodiment of the violence they witness in their quotidian life in war and exile. They write this experience from a feminist impulse as well as through a maternal instinct to articulate the voice of the voiceless subaltern members of their society. They depict their national war story through the sub-narratives of the tumultuous experience of Iraqis. Women novelists, through their powerful depiction of the reality Iraqis experience, deliver a significant and necessary voice to their contemporary national narrative of war.
Dedication

To my aunt Haifa Al-Khatib (d. March 19, 2000), to my mother Ibtisam El-Khatib,
and to my brothers Nasser H. Kashou and Hussam H. Kashou
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I had the great pleasure and honor to meet and interview in Jordan in 2010 one of the most successful Iraqi women writers, Luṭfiyah Al-Dulaymī. I thank her for her invaluable input on her writings and for the resources she made available to me.

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technical aspects, the proper formatting, and proofreading, as well as in helping me get all the important paperwork completed. A special thank you to my mother for her support always and for the strength and motivation she gave me throughout my studies.
Note on Translations and Transliteration

I provide my own translations for the majority of the Arabic texts and quotes unless otherwise noted by the reference. A few Arabic texts since the inception of my study have been translated into English. In a few instances, if a text was translated into English and was available to me, I used the English version to reference it as a convenience to the reader. It should be noted clearly which texts were referenced from English; otherwise, all other novels and text were referenced and translated from the original Arabic novels.

Most Arabic words were transliterated using the JMES transliteration system. Some popular Arabic names and words may have been Anglicized and remained this way in the texts; however, other names were transliterated to my best judgment.
Vita

December 1997 ........................................... B.A. Political Science and International Studies, The Ohio State University.

June 2003 ..................................................... M.A. Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, Arabic Language and Literatures, The Ohio State University.


1998 to 2012 ................................................ Graduate Teaching Associate, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, The Ohio State University.

2012 to Present ............................................... Assistant Professor, AMESAL, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.
Fields of Study

Major Field: Near Eastern Languages and Literatures
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... ii

Dedication ....................................................................................................................................... iii

Acknowledgments ........................................................................................................................... iv

Note on Translations and Transliteration ....................................................................................... vi

Vita ................................................................................................................................................... vii

Fields of Study ............................................................................................................................... viii

Introduction .................................................................................................................................... 1

Organization of Dissertation ......................................................................................................... 25

Chapter 1: The Politics and History of Iraq .................................................................................... 30

  The History of the Intelligentsia in Iraq ....................................................................................... 38

  Women’s Journals and Women’s Freedom ............................................................................... 43

  Literary Production in Iraq ........................................................................................................ 51

  The Role of the Intellectual ....................................................................................................... 61

  Historical Background of Arab Women Writers and their War Narrative ....................... 66

  Women and Their Historical Role as Writers ....................................................................... 77

ix
Chapter 2: Iraqi Narratives and their Theoretical Implications ........................................ 82

Identity and the Faceless Other .................................................................................. 86

Iraqi Writers, Feminist Impulses, Maternal Instincts ................................................ 105

Writing, A Form of Power ......................................................................................... 117

Essentialism and its Consequences ......................................................................... 120

Chapter 3: Narrating the Victims of War .................................................................. 129

The Male as a Victim of War ....................................................................................... 129

Lutfiyah al-Dulaymî Novels: Ḥadīqat hayâh and Sayyidât zuḥal ............................. 135

Martyrdom and the Expectations of a Soldier ............................................................ 158

Roxanna Varzi’s Fictional Vignette, a Comparison .................................................... 160

Kulîzâr Anwar’s ‘Ajalât al-nâr .................................................................................... 166

Chapter 4: Narratives of Exile and Identity ............................................................... 172

Eluding Censorship Through Exile ............................................................................ 178

Stories of Exile and Nostalgia .................................................................................... 180

Imagined/Hybrid Identities in Exile .......................................................................... 183

Clash of Identity Batûl Ḵuḍayrî’s A Sky so Close ....................................................... 187

A Hybrid Identity ....................................................................................................... 190

Haifa Zangana’s Nisâ’ ‘alâ safar, Writing the Personal and Political .................... 206
Chapter 5: The National Narrative of War ................................................................. 249

War and its Narratives .................................................................................................. 249

Women in War and Absent Men ............................................................................... 258

Art and State Propaganda .......................................................................................... 262

Nuhā Al-Rādī, Yawmīyāt Baghdādiyah A Diary of Iraq Under Sanctions .......... 266

Hādiyyah Ḥusayn’s Bint Al-Khān, Madness of Loss .................................................. 270

The Sub-narratives, Tales of War ................................................................................. 275

ʿĀlīya Ṭālīb’s Qiyyāmat Baghdād Chronicling the Violence............................... 283

Chapter 6: Passive Voices, Passive Existence, Reacting To the Realities of War through the Eyes of Iraqi Novelists .............................................................. 296

Batūl Khudayrī’s Ghāyib the Quotidian Life of War .............................................. 296

Hādiyyah Ḥusayn’s ‘Amal “Hope”, in Fī al-ṭarīq ilayhim, Nissāʾ al-ʿatābāt... 306

Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 328

References ..................................................................................................................... 338
Introduction

Throughout history, war and exile has shaped and inspired the insight and work of many authors. The focus of this study is to critique, analyze, and identify trends in how contemporary Iraqi women writers situate narratives of war and exile in their novels. These fictional works reveal their personal experiences of war in Iraq as they provide the reader with details of the lives of Iraqi women living under sanctions. The trauma inflicted on the consciousness of Iraqis haunts their memories in exile and is brought forward in these narratives. I argue that these writers express both their personal experiences and the collective Iraqi experience as well. The voices of Iraqi women as they deal with life under strenuous conditions expose the devastation, the pain, and the struggles of a nation at war. These various female perspectives shed a particular light on the shared human costs of war, sanctions, and exile that has marred Iraq’s recent history.

The women writers this study focuses on all present different images of the daily Iraqi experience. The more Iraq immersed itself into battles, the more these Iraqi women wrote about this experience and its effect on the people around them. Miriam Cooke called the Lebanese women who wrote about the civil war “Beirut Decentrists”, noting that these women wrote about the war in Lebanon differently than the Lebanese men who wrote about the same theme. She writes, “Men wrote of strategy, ideology, and violence. The Beirut Decentrists wrote, regardless of confession and political persuasion, of the
dailiness of war” (Cooke, 1987, p. 3). Iraqi women write about the quotidian life in war as well, and they also write about the violence, the hardships, the pain, and the experience, while questioning the dogma behind such violence and destruction. Iraqi women, distinct from Cooke’s Decentrists, put a political and historical context to their novels. They write with a sense of responsibility to their nation, narrating the stories of regular Iraqis otherwise marginalized as voiceless subalterns.

Gayatri Spivak famously asked if the “subaltern”, the marginalized, can speak, and so the question arises if Iraqi women have an authentic voice in their society. I argue that these Iraqi novelists make an attentive effort towards making unheard voices speak.

1 Several Iraqi women novelists try to explain events and outcomes through past historical events and leaderships in an attempt to rationalize and understand the current situations their nation is in. Both Iraqi and Lebanese women write about general issues and experiences through ordinary daily life in war, which Cooke refers to as ‘universal’ (Cooke, 1996 p. 41); however, I see that each case is distinctive as each historical experience is different and particular, based on the local memory and experience. For instance, Iraqi politics and history are different from the politics, history, and problems Lebanon faces; therefore, these historical experiences and concerns differ at a local level even if at a universal and regional level they share many similarities.

2 A term first used by the Marxist intellectual Antonio Gramsci to refer to the proletariat. It has since been used in post-colonial studies to refer to groups in formerly colonized countries who were marginalized and were not part of the hegemonic power; hence, their voices were not heard. It is employed here to refer to the marginalized voice of Iraqi women who are otherwise unheard, although Gayatri Spivak argues against over utilizing the term: “In post-colonial terms, everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern — a space of difference. Now, who would say that’s just the oppressed? The working class is oppressed. It’s not subaltern. . . . Many people want to claim subalternity. They are the least interesting and the most dangerous. I mean, just by being a discriminated-against minority on the university campus; they don't need the word ‘subaltern’ . . . They should see what the mechanics of the discrimination are. They’re within the hegemonic discourse, wanting a piece of the pie, and not being allowed, so let them speak, use the hegemonic discourse. They should not call themselves subaltern.” (De, 1992, p. 46). Similarly there are Iraqi voices that may never be heard within the discourse of a hegemonic power, but this does not mean there are no efforts towards that.
and be heard while at the same time positioning themselves as couriers of their nation’s historical and contemporary narrative. They seek to replace self-interest with societal and national interest as revealed through the sub-narratives in the novels.

I refer to the stories of various Iraqis that are included within the main narratives of Iraqi women novelists as sub-narratives. They are utilized as a tool to articulate as many Iraqi experiences as they are able to within their main narrative. These sub-narratives are presented by Iraqi women to illustrate the plight of Iraqis during their war years. This in turn presents an explanation into the approach in which they employ to write their narrative on these themes. The purpose of their writing, I argue, is a reflection of their national Iraqi narrative. These themes of war have become engrossed within their recent novels so much that it has become an embodiment of their national narrative. Iraqi women convey this national narrative through their approach in employing the sub-narratives to articulate the Iraqi account.

Iraqi women writers also present their disparagement with the regime whenever they deem appropriate, on their own terms, with their own style. Iraqi women writers are very apprehensive about their nation and its people. As the wars progressed, the dual space between the public and private appears blurred, making the public concern a private concern. The plight of a nation becomes the plight of the Iraqi woman, her destiny, her fate from which she cannot escape. Iraqi women’s narratives personify a natural maternal impulse towards their nation that is also patriotic and nationalistic. Maternal characteristics are universal to women; however, I do not detect these particular Iraqi women eager to distance themselves from such impulses in their writings. Their
particular experiences such as loss and exile are a result of the particular political conjuncture they witnessed through others as well as through their own lived Iraqi experiences. The maternal impulses do not make them less motivated towards the cause of women’s issues but are rather a powerful attribute and extension of their feminist impulses³.

These Iraqi writers convey their maternal and feminist impulses through the sub-narratives they use to approach the troublesome events faced by many Iraqis. It is through the stories of lonely women who lost husbands and fiancés as well as family members in bombings that we hear the voices of Iraqis. We see examples of this in these novels as Iraqis are chastised for crimes they did not commit, or speaking about a particular subject that lands them in jail, or their tongue gets cut off for teaching something deemed threatening to the regime as in the case of a character in Luṭfiyah al-Dulaymī’s novel ْSayyidāt zuhal. In Batūl Khudayrī’s 2004 novel ْGhāyib, her uncle Ghāyib is turned in by an undercover security agent hired by the regime to maintain order; he disappears after his arrest for selling his pieces of art. Hadīyah Husayn’s novels employ a dead young female main character named ‘Amal. Through her, one observes the dissolution of a family over the years due to the perpetual wars; it is all seen through the dead protagonist as a metaphor for the lack of freedom of the living. The living lack a voice – therefore

³ I am defining ‘feminism’ as “the doctrine advocating social, political, and all other rights of women as being equal to those of men” and ‘maternal’ as “of, pertaining to, or having the qualities of a mother, such as caring and nurturing”. In the case of Iraqi women novelists and their novels, we will see the feminist and maternal impulses come to light again and again; these will be highlighted in turn as these women and their novels are analyzed.
this voice is rendered to the dead. These are but a few examples of the situations Iraqi women write about in their approach to present their narrative discourse.

The formation of nation-states and the rise of nationalism and patriotism are modern constructs that can be attributed to colonialism. However, Iraqis have particular histories that grant them a sense of nationalism and patriotism. The political and geographic partitions of the area gave rise to certain kinds of nationalism; in this particular context, it was Arab nationalism, and most recently Iraqi nationalism. These attributes are part of the recent Iraqi identity and loyalty to their nation. They can be foreseen as problematic, especially during wars which increase the ardor of people’s patriotism. This threatens to marginalize and antagonize those who do not possess such attributes. Iraqi women showcase their loyalty towards their nation while not being overzealous, creating a delicate balance. They problematize and criticize their own national issues through their narrative discourse yet still maintain a certain dedication to their nation and its people. They reflect this national concern through their narratives in such cases as Haifa Zangana’s *Nisā’ ʿalā safar* (Women on a Journey), Iqbāl al-Qazwīnī’s *Mamarrāt al-sukūn* (Zubaida’s Window), Dunā Ghālī’s *ʿIndamā tastayqiẓu al-

4 All of these loyalties are a recent phenomenon attributed to the newly formed nation-state system that came about after the European colonization and partition plans of the area. Many Arabs and Iraqis struggle to find a homogenous identity within the nation-state systems created. This is especially promoted by the state because it underscores legitimacy. Whether it is Arab nationalism, Iraq nationalism, tribal loyalties, ethnic loyalties, or sectarian loyalties, it can be attributed to the Arab tradition of loyalty to one’s own clan, and hence in the modern construct, the nation. The nationalism and patriotism Iraqis convey can be problematic due to the pluralistic makeup and the artificially constructed boundaries of their nation, which in turn have resulted in constant battles and wars with its neighbors. The tribulations this nation continuously faces are due to these complex formations of the nation that struggles to define its borders and to find a cohesive identity for its nation.
When the Scent Awakens). They all write about nostalgia for Iraq while in exile, but when they write about it they convey their memories of their past suffering in a nation they left in ruins. This problematizes their own sense of consciousness as their concern for the nation is increased by their distance and their inability to participate in salvaging it. This sense of nationalism is intertwined with the personal experiences of Iraqis and the conflict that arises within them, preventing them from maintaining the normality of their lives. Consequently, depression, suicide, and counseling are all part of the everyday lifestyle of Iraqis living in exile which are conveyed through their narratives.

When Iraqi women write on their personal and collective Iraqi experience, they write in a manner that presents the personal lives of Iraqi women within the context of their troubled nation. These narratives do not exclusively discuss the personal lives of women but the lives of Iraqis as a whole that are all affected by the wars and exile. For instance, they write about the plight of Iraqi women and the difficulties they face, such as loneliness, the absence of their men, and the lack of freedom during the early years of the Iran-Iraq war. They also write about the lack of safety and security attested to by frequent rapes and assaults that were a direct result of the lack of governance after the 2003 offensive on Iraq. Under these circumstances they are writing from a feminist impulse about the endurance of Iraqi women while at the same time expressing concern for the Iraqi men and their victimization and involuntary combatant roles. In this sense they are writing through their natural feminine maternal instincts in which they find the need to nurture and protect the sons and daughters of their nation. Through these maternal impulses, Iraqi women narrate the lives of Iraqis in a selfless manner in which they
attempt to uncover the war costs of Iraq. At the same time they write to satisfy their personal reflections in an approach that attempts to rationalize the events that affected and influenced them as Iraqis. In this regard, the texts written by Iraqi women should be considered as an added source in understanding Iraqi literature as well as the current overall Iraqi reality.

One observed trend in the writings of Iraqi women writers is their conscious sense of duty towards the plight of their nation. Regardless of the origin of the injustice, whether from their own leadership and governmental system or from foreign invasion, they speak out against the injustice their nation has endured. This suffering and pain of a people is revealed through fiction. For instance, Hadiyah Husayn in her novel Nisā’ al-‘atābāt includes stories from various women who have personally suffered from the wartime situation in Iraq. She includes tales of women losing sons from the war as well as losing them through execution as reflected in her novel Nisā’ al-‘ataba (Women of the Threshold). ‘Alīya Ṭālib and Luṭfiyyah al-Dulaymī narrate the situation Iraq was in after the last invasion. Hawrā’ al-Nadāwī’s Taḥt samā’ Kūbihāgin (Under the Sky of Copenhagen) presents a problematized hybrid identity of an Iraqi girl living in Denmark and the gendered complexities young Iraqi women are forced to negotiate within the confined space in which they find themselves. Interestingly in this novel a male voice is equally present, and it is through the male voice that the ordeal of an Iraqi woman (his mother) is revealed, as he recalls his mother’s fear of giving birth to another son so she does not lose him to war, as she did with her other sons.
I introduce two concepts observed through al-Nadāwī’s novel, the rooted/émigré complex, which encompass two identities of people living in the West away from their homeland. The émigré identity is the identity acquired in the place of exile, or in the foreign country they currently reside. The émigré identity is contiguous to the rooted identity, which is what immigrants bring with them from their native culture and tradition when they come to a foreign land. As in the case of Huda in al-Nadāwī’s Taḥt samā’ kūbínhāgin, this rooted identity is passed to the first generation of children who are brought up in the immigrant society. In this novel, one sees a shift in focus towards more of a personal narrative and less about a national narrative, dissimilar from the case of the older Iraqi women authors who resided for a longer period in their native country of Iraq and went into exile at a later age.

Another trend detected in Iraqi women’s narratives is that most of the characters in the novels were presented from a woman’s standpoint, with the voice of the male, if presented at all, is incorporated as a secondary voice. Male protagonists as central characters are mainly absent from the novels of Iraqi women, which is partially explained by their unfortunate political and social situation. Many men were drafted and sent to war while many of their wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters were left alone in the home, trying to continue with their lives without the presence of men. This absence of men has a profound effect in the lives of Iraqi women. Iraq faced a growing number of widows, and this is reflected in the sub-narratives Iraqi women use in their discourse. In other instances, women in the novels were either single or divorced, which further reveals the increasing number of Iraqi women required to be independent and to survive alone. The
strength of the women of Iraq and their resolve is revealed through the characters of these novels. The female characters highlight experiences and perspectives relevant to them, and while these experiences are limited in scope and space, they nonetheless present certain angles on male war experience such as battles or soldier life. Ḥawrā’ al-Nadāwī explains that her writings were confined to certain settings of the city of Copenhagen because this was the space she was familiar with, and she did not try to attempt to write about places to which she has not been. This explains her limited inclusion of Baghdad, as she is among the young Iraqi immigrants whose family left their nation to live elsewhere in self-imposed exile (Ahmad, 2012).

When male characters are present, they act as supporting, secondary protagonists providing particular information about the war and about hardships and tribulations of war. Iraqi male characters reveal that their pain and suffering equaled or even surpassed those of the women. While Iraqi women see themselves as victims of war, they see the men as being even more so. This is another important characteristic of Iraqi women’s fiction.

Iraqi women writers are essential to study because of the content and the message they are attempting to convey. The themes they utilize in writing and narrating the story of Iraq are specifically from the perspective of Iraqi women, which allows them more power as writers to articulate a voice seldom found in war fiction. It gives them the agency to represent themselves in these narratives as well as their nation and their people. Iraqi women are able to capture Iraqi experience in a distinctively faithful way. Although they write about their quotidian lives and the personal experiences of Iraqi women, they
also include lists of events that took place in Iraq. Hadīyah Husayn in *Bint al-khān* lists chronological events of the 2003 war on Iraq within her narrative. In *Qiyāmat Baghādād*, ‘Ālīya Tālib discusses the events that affected Iraq and the disorder that came with it. Iqhbāl Qazwīnī, Haifa Zangana, Batūl Khudayrī also include information about the wars in Iraq, such as the start of war and the demonstrations they attended against the war.

Women writers in Iraq are thus participating in their national discussion of nationalism, patriotism, and historicity. These themes have come to dominate Iraqi women’s current discourse and narratives more than any other subject they have written about in the past. With the amount of documented historical and actual events they include in their narratives, they take on the role of preservers and documenters of the Iraqi experience over the past thirty years.

In addition to the subjects and themes Iraqi women select, many of the Iraqi novelists this study focuses on write in Arabic; some, however, have been translated to other languages, including English. The disadvantage of writing in Arabic is that it limits the scope and the audience of the readers unless they are translated into other languages, particularly into English. If the purpose of the works of these Iraqi novelists is to convey the hardships of their people, then there is a need for translated works. For this reason, many Iraqi novelists are eager to have their works translated into other languages. This opens up their spaces and opportunities they would otherwise not find in a limited Arabic readership. With the exception of Ḥawrā al-Nadāwī, most Iraqi novelists write only in Arabic because it is their mother tongue. Many of them have journalistic or literary backgrounds in Arabic, and therefore they have a strong grasp over the language. Al-
Nadāwī has the option of writing in Danish or Kurdish, yet she astoundingly chooses to write her literary works in the Arabic language. Her novel Taḥt samā’ Kūbihāğin (Under the Sky of Copenhagen) was written in the Arabic language.

The number of Iraqi women who are currently writing novels and fiction, and in particular about the war and exile, are widely increasing and in abundance; henceforth, to include all writings of the Iraqi women who are currently on the literary scene is beyond the scope of this study. For this reason, a few female Iraqi writers and their representative works will be examined and presented in this study. I chose to present and focus on writers and works that have not been widely read and translated in the West. However, since the inception of my study, more Arabic novels by Iraqi women have been translated into English. I chose not to focus on Iraqi men’s novels partially for this reason, as more attention is paid to novels written by men in general; furthermore, men do not generally write from feminist or maternal impulses, and even men who are feminists cannot be said to write about the issues particular to women in the same way that women do. To compare and contrast female and male Iraqi writers is beyond the scope of the study, as one of the main goals of this particular study is to give female Iraqi writers the chance to have their own voice heard, outside of the realm of male-dominated narratives.

To understand the backdrop Iraqi women are writing from, one must understand the role the novel plays in the Arab world and its significance in light of the politics and

5 Al-Nadāwī explains the reason for writing in Arabic is due to her early introduction to classical Arabic literature by her father, such as Abū at-Ṭayyīb ʿĀḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Mutanabbī. As she articulates, although it is not her mother tongue, since she was young she wrote in the Arabic language: “Since my childhood the Arabic language was the most important to me, I did not feel [in any other language] except in the Arabic Language” (A. H. Ahmad, 2012).
the history of the area. Iraqis experienced political turmoil throughout much of their history, from the ancient past in Mesopotamia with which they identify, to the recent formation of their nation state. The historical and political realities of Iraq since British colonization had profound effects on the Iraqi people, but it is the current wars that specifically concern contemporary Iraqi women writers, so much so that they make them the focal points of their novels.

The political/historical novel is not a new phenomenon to the Arabic novel, as it is a main attribute of the novel in the Arab world (Selim, 2004). From its inception into the Arab literary genre, the Arabic novel was heavily politicized (Meyer, 2001). According to the prominent literary scholar Roger Allen, the Arabic novel metamorphosed in a similar developmental approach as its Western counterpart, as it originated from a political backdrop, analogous to the political events that took place in the region. It developed a nationalist identity as a reaction to colonialism or occupation by foreign countries. It also served as a reaction to society as a whole (R. Allen, 2007).

Allen presents an important attribute of the current trends in Arabic literature and fiction in that it covers a geographic area too wide to house under one umbrella. Arabic fiction, from its inception, did have a nationalistic and a pan-Arab zeal, but it has since evolved to the local level. He refers to this disintegration of Arabic fiction/literature as *khuṣṣiyyāt* (particularities) (R. Allen, 2007). This is important because it underscores the need for a more focused approach to different regional literatures in the Arab world. He relates, “It is as well to admit that we are unable to ‘cover’ – if we were ever – the entire genre of the Arabic novel in all its regional and generic variety (and criticism of
He argues, and rightly so, for Western scholarship to develop a more focused approach to Arabic literature, “to focus our attention on more variegated studies that examine particular genres and sub-genres, regions and their cultural particularities, and critical approaches” (R. Allen, 2007, p. 250). To take this proposition into consideration, Iraqi literature, and in particular the Iraqi novel, should take on a particular focal point to distinguish it from the Arabic novel under which it is categorized and from which its foundational shape has evolved. With this being said, Allen also questions the popular misconceived narrative of the common literary historical Arabic fiction from which it originated.

In sustaining the argument pertinent to the approach Iraqi women take in their narratives, Allen uncovers the different trends and categories the historical novel consists of, such as “fictions whose authors project the present into the past” (R. Allen, 2007, p. 255). The use of themes, both historically correct and fictional within a historical construct, are features that Arab novelists continually utilize in their discourse. As Allen notes, “history is invoked by many contemporary novelists to draw attention to the nature of authority within the societies in which they live and write. The themes and lessons of history become effective means of portraying the otherwise inexpressible… ‘those who do not know the past are condemned to repeat it’” (R. Allen, 2007, p. 256).

This is affirmed by the prominent Iraqi novelist and poet, Sinan Antūn. In a recent interview, he reiterates the importance of the historical novel and the popular role it currently has in Iraq. The historical novel is essential for the Iraqi people because they feel the need to retell their history after the former regime had distorted it for so many
As is mentioned in the interview, Antūn explains that “in cultures experiencing violent upheaval, the fiction writer becomes a custodian of histories” (Sears, 2013, p. para 7). Now that there is more freedom to narrate the events that took place in Iraq over the past thirty years, there is an audience to read “the stories of generations [that] are missing” (Sears, 2013, p. para 9). He writes for an Iraqi audience first, since “Iraqis read even in the midst of violence in an attempt to ‘stay normal’” (Sears, 2013, p. para 7). He continues to state that “[t]he subsequent years of chaotic sectarian rule have also tried to control the country’s narrative. This void leaves the novelist in Iraq the responsibility of recording and preserving the people’s history” (Sears, 2013, p. para 7).

Furthermore, Antūn brings up an important point, one which is particularly fitting in the case of Iraqi women novelists, as he reiterates the importance of fiction and its important role in Iraqi society. “Strong fiction, rather than news media, offers Western readers a view into the more varied life experience of other cultures…. Antūn observed how Western audiences tend to polarize and reduce the Middle Eastern life experience into one singularly divided by religion or heritage. Fiction makes the culture more familiar by allowing readers to experience a variety of every day human conflicts, similar to their own” (Sears, 2013, p. para 5). This is a significant point that Judith Butler highlights in the importance of establishing an identity to the victims of war. A faceless, unknown people become prey to a dehumanized construction; therefore, violence against them is more readily justifiable. These preconceived notions are further explained by Edward Said’s Orientalism and the image the West has developed of the East.
The political/historical Arabic novel is based on an onslaught of a number of events in the Arab world, such as colonization, independence, and authoritarian governments; whether they were republics or kingdoms, they all had their tribulations. The pluralistic ideological schisms, the multiple wars witnessed by the Arab nations, and their defeats since 1948 all contributed to the rise of the political novel in Arabic literature. Iraqis writers participated in the political war novel from the 1960’s to the 1980’s (the 1980’s war novel was part of the state apparatus and propaganda for the Iran-Iraq war) similar to their neighboring Arab counterparts. However, they saw an increase and a shift in tone of the political war novel from the 1990’s until the present in the midst of exile of many Iraqi intellectuals from Iraq due to the political turmoil in the country (Multaqā al-Qāhirah al-Rābi’ lil-Ibdā’ al-Riwa’ī al-ʿArabī, 2008).

The writings of Iraqi women do not differ dramatically from each other; rather, they share many commonalities in their novels in both theme and events, in addition to the undertones of loneliness, isolation, and nostalgia. Their differences are mediocre compared to their similarities, as the themes and the methods they utilize to convey their stories are so similar, especially in the subjects and the characters they formulate. With the exception of al-Nadāwī’s Taḥt samā’ Kūrhāgin and Batūl Khudayrī’s narratives Kam badat al-samā’ qarībah (A Sky So Close) and Ghāyib (Absent), the majority of the novels lack very strong plots and storylines. The emphasis appears to be on documenting the events and stories rather than on the way they are narrated. Narrative devices such as stream of consciousness are in found in the works of Iraqi women writers as well as
multiple first person narratives; a reliance on past memory and history are also features found in their novels.

Iraqi women’s writings reflect their concerns not only for their Iraqi society but for the women in that society. Iraqis endured many decades of war starting from the 1980’s with the Iran-Iraq War. Consequently, they did not experience a prolonged period of peace and stability since the rise in power of Ba’ath regime through the coup d’état which removed ’Abd al-Karīm Qāsim in 1963. During Qāsim’s time the Iraqi people were hopeful and optimistic, but they did not realize how much hope they had lost until they endured the terrible years of war. During that war, some literature was produced with the encouragement and support of Saddam’s Ba’thist regime, but according to Miriam Cooke, none were worth more than their original purpose of propaganda in support of the war (Cooke, 1996). This literature, which she refers to as Qādisiyyat Saddam, refers back to the infamous battle of al-Qādisiyyah against the Persian Empire.


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6 Abdul Hādi Sadūn Sāmir Naqqāsh, Maḥmūd Sa’īd, Muḥammad Khudayyir, Sargon Boulus, Nāssif Falak, Sāmuel Shimon, Mahdi Issā al-Saqr are among Iraqi male writers who have written novels or short stories. The majority of them have been translated into English.
Wakr (The Den, 1980), *Khuṭṭūt al-ṭūwīl khuṭṭūt al-ʿard* (The long lines, The Wide Lines, 1983); the translator and writer Shakir Khasbak, *Al-hiqd al-aswad* (The Dark Hatred, 1966); the translator poet and writer, Fāḍil al-ʿAzāwi *Al-qalʿa al-khāmisa* (The Fifth Peak, 2000). Younger generations are also starting to write war and political novels, among them ʿAlī Badir, who began writing in the 1990’s. Among other prominent contemporary male Iraqi writers who wrote from Iraq and exile are Salīm Maṭar, Hasan Qāsim, Moḥsin Ramī, Sinān Antūn, Nāzim Moḥammad al-Obaidī, Aḥmad Saʿdāwī, Loʿay Hamzah Abbās, Nawzat Shahdin, al-Qāsim Moḥammed Abbās, and Diyaʾ al-Khaliḍī (Multaqā al-Qāhirah al-Rābiʿ lil-Ibdāʿ al-Riwāʿī al-ʿArabī, 2008). However, as these are all male writers, their particular contributions are beyond the scope of this study.

One significant contribution of this study is to highlight the value of texts written by Iraqi women, which are often overlooked and dismissed as inferior in quality by Arab readers and critics compared with their predecessors or male colleagues. This is similar to the Lebanese women writers who were marginalized and viewed as insufficient to be considered part of the literary tradition (Cooke, 1987). I will show that there is a need to read and analyze these writings regardless of their supposed literary merit. One can dispute whether this is purely an issue of perception or an over-utilized habitual critique, particularly among the Arab critics, that is not dispelled or altered easily.

A related concern of this study is the need to focus on Iraqi women writers beyond the very few who are written about in academia. Some have gained wide respect and popularity in Arabic literature, such as Nāzik al-Malāʾikah, a pioneer of Arab poetry.
Other Iraqi women writers that have emerged since the time of Nāzīk al-Malāʾikah should not be ignored for their supposed lack of novelty or recognition.

There is a tendency within the discussion of contemporary Iraqi women’s literature to center attention on certain writers in the literary scene while overlooking others. It is difficult to locate works by emerging Iraqi women writers, much less sources of substance written about them. Although many of these writers are known within their own Arab literary circles, they are not well known or accessible to the Arab mainstream readership or even to the Iraqi audiences. There are many reasons for this. Interest in Arab fiction is not high among Arabs, especially compared with their interest in Arabic poetry. The novel and other literary genres such as the short story are relatively new additions to Arabic literature.

This study focuses on Iraqi women writers because there are few comprehensive works that deal with these particular authors, specifically in the West. However, in recent years there has been an increased interest in Arabic literature and the works of Arab women writers in particular. With this interest, issues have arisen regarding whose works should be translated and studied, and why those over others. For instance, most of the Arab writers that have found space and were received in the West were mainly from Egypt or Lebanon. One good example is Nawāl el-Saʾdāwi and her radical feminist dogma that allowed her to be received and translated more readily in the West. Ḥanān al-Shaykh is another Lebanese writer who has been widely studied and received in the Western academia for her critically acclaimed novel on the Lebanese civil war, *The Story of Zahra*. Many other Arab women have also been cited in the limited literature available
on them, yet Iraqi women have failed to be included or to be received in such a widely acclaimed manner. They have not been as widely received or studied as their other Arab women counterparts. Thus there is a necessity to understand the discourses and apprehensions of Iraqi women and to present their feminine impulse within the context of Arabic and Iraqi literature.

Iraqi women have a rich tradition of writing. Fortunately there is a slow shift in interest in the works of these women, and, with the increased amount of translated works, they will more readily find a space of reception in the West. The responsibility here lies on those who choose which works and writers to study and to open up the space for them to be received. Among the few Iraqi women who are slowly being recognized and translated are Batül Khudayrî, Hadîyah Hûsayn, and Haifa Zangana. This is due in part to the writers’ own efforts in marketing themselves and finding opportunities in the West for their works to be available to a wider audience.

It is also an important feminist and literary mission to research the plethora of contemporary Iraqi women who are producing work that should be read and heard, critiqued, and translated. It takes an audience that is serious about understanding their literary productions for Iraqi women’s writing to improve. As these women struggle to have their voices and experiences heard, we do not want to fall into the same apprehension Spivak has about the lack of space for subaltern voices (Spivak, 2010).

With the exception of Hadîyah Hûsayn, many Iraqi writers come from educated backgrounds. Most did have opportunities to receive an education or to work. Iraqi women writers come from diverse backgrounds and ethnicities but narrate many similar
experiences and concerns. These Iraqi women became the catalyzing agent to tell the stories of their homeland, of their people and their fellow Iraqi women. In her recognized essay *a Room of One’s Own*, Virginia Woolf notes that in order for a woman to write fiction she must “have money and a room of her own” (V. Woolf, 1991, p. 2). Whether living in the East or in the West, these factors are what a woman needs to be able to write as she explains in details the situation of woman as compared to men: “I pondered why Mrs. Seton had no money to leave us; and what effect poverty has on the mind; and what effect wealth has on the mind;….thinking of the safety and prosperity of the one sex and the poverty and insecurity of the other and of the effect of tradition and of the lack of tradition upon the mind of a writer” (V. Woolf, 1991, pp. 24-25). This highlights an important aspect in relation to the background of Iraqi women writers.

Among the writers presented in this work, several of the Iraqi women writers started their careers as a journalist or working for the broadcast stations in Iraq. Ḥadiyah Ḥusayn came from a poor family that lived in a simple neighborhood in Baghdad. Due to her family’s difficult financial situation, she was not able to complete her education and hence joined the Baghdad broadcast station in 1973, where she also worked as a reporter. She participated in literary events in Iraq as well as in neighboring countries before she left for Amman in 1999 (Mandi, 2010). Ḥadiyah Husayn lived for several years in ʿAmmān where she wrote most of her novels until departing for Canada. Her works can be considered part of the Iraqi diaspora literature. Another Iraqi writer who wrote in exile is Dunā Ghāli. She has been residing in Denmark since 1992, where the setting of her novel *(Indama taṭayqithu al-rāʾiḥah)* (When the scent awakens) takes place. She is a poet
and a translator, and also contributes articles for literary journals in Denmark (al-Baz'i, 2011).

Ibtisām ‘Abd Allah is a translator and an editor for the literary journal *al-Thaqāfah al-Ajnabīyyah* (Foreign Culture). She wrote from Iraq and provided a glimpse of the outside world to Iraqis who lived under the sanctions (Ghazoul, 2003). An Iraqi woman writer who has written quite a few books throughout her career, she has now shifted her focus in her fiction writing to the theme of war and the current experience many Iraqi and writers have experienced recently. Ālīya Ṭālib is among the writers that had a deep journalistic past as well; she was an editor of several newspapers as well as an author of several studies, short stories and novels (Aljadida, 2012).

Ḥawrā’ al-Nadāwī, who also writes from Denmark, is the youngest writer among the Iraqi diaspora. She was brought up in Copenhagen since she was a child when her family immigrated in 1991 after the infamous failed Iraqi uprising. Al-Nadāwī, who speaks more than four languages, wrote her first novel at the age of twenty in the Arabic language, although it is not her mother tongue (A. H. Ahmad, 2012; Tarbush, 2011). Half-Kurdish and half-Arab, she comes from a family rich in poetic and literary heritage.

Haifa Zangana, who is also half-Kurdish, and half-Arab, was the third child born out of nine children. Born in 1950, she is a well-known Iraqi activist who belonged to the Iraqi communist party. She was imprisoned and exiled as well, and wrote some of her works from exile, including *Women on a Journey*. It is significant to note this work was written before the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime. Haifa Zangana writes both fiction and biography.
Haifa is straightforward in her views of the Iraqi regime. She dwells on the past by describing life in Iraq before the Saddam regime:

At that time Arabs, Kurds, Muslims, Christians, and Jewish lived peacefully together. There existed neither hatred nor confrontations or violent clashes. When the Ba’thists came to power in 1968, it was the end of this harmony. I cannot even remember one single conflict between my father’s Kurdish family and my mother’s Arabic one. This is the reason that we kids grew up without having to learn no more than a few Kurdish words. There were no problems even by giving the children names. My parents had agreed to give Arabic names for the first four kids and Kurdish ones for the others. I therefore received an Arabic name. (Mosbahi, 1997, p. 112)

Luṭfīyah al-Dulaymī is among the older generation of Iraqi writers. She has been writing war novels since the Iran-Iraq war, and she has recently written about the current turmoil in Iraq in her novels. Al-Dulaymī is a well-known Iraqi writer who presided in Iraq but chose self-imposed exile to ‘Ammān, and for a short time in France. Due to unfortunate incident in which she was violently mugged, she decided to move back to ‘Ammān (Luṭfīyah al-Dulaymī, 2010).

‘Ālīya Mamdouh is an Iraqi writer that had the fortune of getting her book *Napthalene: A Novel of Baghdaḍ* (Mothballs) translated into English and a forward written by the French feminist Helen Cixous. The novel describes life in Baghdad in the
1940’s written from the perspective of a nine year old girl, similar to Bātul Khuḍayrī’s *A Sky so Close*, which also begins with the memory of a young girl. This novel is comparable to Khuḍayrī’s novel with its coming-of-age theme of a girl struggling with her identity and the patriarchal society. This book, which did get the attention of feminists in the West, is not about the theme of war and exile which many Iraqi women are currently writing about and thus will not be discussed in this study. Bātul Khuḍayrī comes from a half-Scottish and half Iraqi background and has written several successful novels, two of them will be included in this study.

These Iraqi women novelist are among the many Iraqi authors emerging on the literary scene who write about the themes of war and exile on Iraq. Although they hold similar career positions, these women come from different ethnic and ideological backgrounds. This is a reflection of the pluralistic Iraqi society which contributed to suppression of sectarian groups\(^7\) that did not fully support the Saddam Hussein regime. This study will not highlight the ethnic sectarian backgrounds or schisms of the writers, but one can explicitly understand their leanings from their writings. Many of the writers who went into exile during the 1970’s (such as Duna Ghāli and Haifa Zangana) more likely belonged to dissident groups, predominantly The Iraqi Communist Party (ICP).

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\(^7\) Iraqi Shi’ahs, although they are considered the majority in Iraq, saw the most tribulations under the Saddam Hussein regime. Many of them belonged to the ICP: “From the late 1940s to the mid-1950s, the Shi’ah made up the majority of the membership of the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP). The Shi’ah ulema later condemned the ICP as an atheist party, which caused the Shi’ah to withdraw support, a factor in the successful coup against President Qāsim in 1963” (GlobalSecurity, 2011). The Kurdish ethnic group faced similar problems.
The following chapter will explain the background and recent history of Iraq. It will illustrate the backdrops of the political turmoil they faced due to several coups, which resulted in the thirty year rule of the Ba’ath regime under the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. It will also emphasize and elaborate on the role of the intellectuals and the literary productions that emerged in Iraq.
The first chapter of this study will provide an overview of the historical background of Iraq. The focus will be on its history and will explain the political and historical circumstances leading up to the current situation. A particular focus will be on the intellectual history of Iraq and the role the educated class played in the area of literature as well as politics. The chapter will disclose that they were intertwined as Iraqi intellectuals contributed to both the literary scene as well as to the political. It will also reveal the time and inception of Arab women writers into the mainstream Arab literary field, which historically was predominantly male. The evolution of the role of women in the Arab world will help trace the development of women’s literature, in particular in Iraq. Other discussions will be on the issues they had to confront, the social and political realities that impeded the women, as well as the influence all of these issues had on their writing.

The second chapter discusses the various theories that explain the implications and biases that certain marginalized societies confront. In particular, Chandra Mohanty raises the importance of not positioning all women into one category – a reality that tended to place all third world women into one cohesive category. She problematizes the preconceived notion that they are all passive, oppressed, and weak. Umma Narayan continues that debate by similarly highlighting the implication of essentialising women.
Edward Said sheds light on how the East was read and misperceived through a series of biased scholarly texts which led to an inferior image, establishing a whole array of misconceptions of the East. Judith Butler discusses the dehumanization of certain lives which allows the violence against them to be perpetuated. This will be used to highlight the Iraqi context, in particular the feminist outlook and how Iraqi women’s texts are positioned within this framework. Another aspect discussed is how much the writings of Iraqi women can be situated as feminist or possessing feminist features. The postmodern view helps unpack the way modern texts are read, but does the postmodern view offer anything to the texts that are read politically and under the historical context? All of these discourses are discussed in a way that attempts to understand the backdrop of Iraqi women’s writings.

Chapter three focuses on the mode in which some characters are presented in the narratives, in particular the male characters. The narratives reveal how Iraqi women write about and depict the Iraqi male in light of the war situation. The soldier is presented from an interesting perspective and reveals the maternal extinct Iraqi women writers possess and present in their writings. Iraqi women write about their nation and its people. It is evident from their narratives, and in particular narratives from Luţfīyah al-Dulaymī, Hadiyyah Ḥusayn, and Kulizār Anwār.

An important comparison is made in the third chapter between the ways the soldiers are depicted during the Iran-Iraq war via vignettes from Roxanna Varzi, who writes about an Iranian soldier. She presents the Iran-Iraq war from an Iranian perspective. These vignettes reveal the similar hardships and pains both nations faced
during the war against each other, which in turn is heavily referenced and cited in the fiction narratives of Iraqi women represented in this study. Roxanna Varzi’s *Warring Souls* is important to include as it presents similar tragedies and experiences the two foes faced during the war against each other. Since the Iran-Iraq war is very much alive in the memory and the mind of many Iraqis and it is a big part of their war narratives, it is important to reveal the commonalities in their perspectives as citizens while witnessing this war. Like al-Rādı’s book, Varzi’s book is not a novel or presented as fiction; it is in fact an anthropological study on the images of war and propaganda the State employs. It offers an important perspective on the Iranian soldiers in the war front during the Iran-Iraq war.

The fourth chapter brings to light the essential themes of exile and identity. These two themes become part of the Iraqi national narrative as well as the war as a result of the increased number of exiled Iraqis. Many Iraqis were forced into exile, including many writers; hence, very few actually write from the center of war. The Iraqis that wrote from exile were mainly political dissidents to the Saddam regime and tended to belong mainly to the Iraqi communist party, such as Haifa Zangana and Iqbal al-Qazwînî. These writers were exiled early on in Saddam’s regime. As such, they mainly focused on themes of exile and nostalgia.

A recent Iraqi writer that emerged to the Arabic literary scene is Ḥawrā’ al-Nadāwî. She is a young Iraqi writer who has never lived in Iraq but writes about Iraq. She presents the identity formations and preservation of Iraqi traditions and its implications while living in the West. Ḥawrā’ al-Nadāwî’s novel brings an interesting and a fresh
perspective on the Iraqi hybrid identity as well as an imperative view of the future and the path Iraqi writers and their writing are heading towards. Interestingly, even male Iraqi writers find themselves affected by exile and assimilate themselves into the literary scenes of their country of exile, as exemplified by the Iraqi writer Abbas Khider who writes in German. He recently won the prominent Nelly-Sachs-Preis and was “recognized (in) the Hilde Domin Prize for Literature in Exile” (mlynxqualey, 2013).

Chapter five will focus on the Iraqi national narrative that has come to embody the themes of war and exile. State propaganda and images of art, as well as al-Rāḍī’s book help, explain the importance of these images on the perception of the people and in both the justification of war and disavowing of it. Al-Rāḍī’s book is written in a form of a diary documenting her daily life under sanctions. Although this book is not creative fiction but rather based on a factual experience, it does present a useful comparison with the fictional narratives Iraqi women write about regarding the war(s) and sanctions in Iraq. One finds many similarities and overlaps in terms of the experience and the events that took place. This presents a critical image of the blurred line between reality and creative fiction in these novels. It illustrates how these stories narrate their world as they present a framework of what they experienced and witnessed as Iraqis.

Moreover, this section focuses on particular subjects Iraqi women include in their narratives as well as the way they relate the narratives and the stories of Iraqis in the sub-narratives. Their narratives reveal the hardships their protagonists face in light of war and sanctions while also including overarching themes of loneliness and nostalgia. How they cope with loss and isolation is included, as well as the life they face alone with the
absence of men and family members. All of these narratives reveal the strength and resilience of Iraqi women and their discourse within the themes of war and exile.

The sixth chapter brings in several Iraqi women’s representative works. These texts are presented with a particular focus on two works by Hadīyah Ḥusayn, Fi al-ṭarīq ilayhim (The Road to Them) and Nissāʾ al-ʿatābā (Women on the Threshold). These two novels narrate the tale of protagonists with the same name and are related to one another. Their shared name of ʿĀmal (Hope) comes to represent a meaning of hope amidst a superfluity of hopelessness. Batūl Khudayrī’s 2004 novel Ghāyib (Absent) presents a normal quotidian Iraqi life style that gets overturned by the dreadful effects of sanctions, a callous regime, and an incomprehensible war. The themes provide a continuation to themes discussed in the previous chapter with more attention to the events narrated in these texts.

To reiterate, what this dissertation aims to contribute is a critical literary analysis and compilation of work from a group of writers that is often overlooked. These women use their writings in the backdrop of war to be a voice that is traditionally unheard for themselves and their people. It is time they were heard.
Chapter 1: The Politics and History of Iraq

This chapter will reflect on the political situation in Iraq in recent history and will trace the intellectual trends that contributed to the enrichment of Iraqi literature, focusing on Iraqi women writers in particular. The purpose is to decipher the political situation of Iraq and to present an overview of the intellectual production via the Iraqi woman’s debut into the public literary scene.

In order to understand the themes in the writings of Iraqi women, one must understand the recent historical framework that subjugated the lives of the Iraqi people. It is also important to note the history of Iraq in order to understand the current conflict which started in 1917 with the British colonization when they began their rule of Iraq during WWI (Al-Ali, 2007). In 1920, the Iraqis united against Britain in a revolt known as ‘The Great Revolution’. Forced to negotiate its power over Iraq, the British appointed Emir Fayṣal (d.1933), the son of Sherif Ḥusseīn. Sherif Ḥusseīn’s other son ‘Abdullah Ḥusseīn ruled Jordan while the British government served as the purported ‘advisers’. Since the British had control of Iraqi oil (H. Zangana, 2007) as well as control of internal matters of the country, including the right to veto defense (Al-Ali, 2007), Iraq did not have complete independence from the British.
To present a synopsis of the Iraqi situation, on July 4, 1958, The Hashemite Monarchy headed by Emir Faysal II ended through a coup led by the ‘Free Officers’\textsuperscript{8}. The officers consisted of members of the Ba’th party and Arab nationalists. The coup was led by ’Abd al-Salam ‘Arif, one of the free officers who was with Qasim in 1958 (Al-Ali, 2007; Ali, 2004; H. Zangana, 2007). The coup led to a violent end to the royal family; this event is frequently referred to in Iqbal al-Qazwini’s novel \textit{Mamarrat al-sukun} (Zubaida’s Window). After surrendering, King Faysal II, Crown Prince ‘Abdullah\textsuperscript{9} and Nur al-S’aid\textsuperscript{10} were gunned down by officers. The shooting killed the king and some of his officers, but Nur al-S’a‘id escaped by disguising himself as a woman. Al-S’a‘id was quickly caught and killed while trying to escape the city. ‘Abdullah’s body was hung from a lamppost in the Defense Ministry, but the brutality ended with their bodies being cut to pieces and burnt, therefore denying them from a proper Islamic burial (Ali, 2004). The death of these men highlights the violence that began to take shape in Iraq. \textit{Zubaida’s Window} explains this event as the foreshadowing of the beginning of the downfall in Iraq.

‘Abdul Karim Qasim ruled the newly formed Republic of Iraq for five years\textsuperscript{11} before he was taken out of power by a coup d’état headed by the Ba’th party in 1963. It is believed that around 3,000-5,000 communists and those who supported ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim were “arrested, tortured, and killed” (Al-Ali, 2007, p. 92).

\textsuperscript{8} 12 officers who graduated from the Iraqi Military Academy in the 1930’s (‘Ali, 2003)  
\textsuperscript{9} Faisal’s uncle and adviser  
\textsuperscript{10} Former officer in the Ottoman army who later became a general in the Iraqi monarchy, he and the Sherif Hussein Family collaborated with T.E Lawrence and General Allenby. Despised for his corruption (‘Ali, 2003).  
\textsuperscript{11} Until the Ba’th coup against Qasim on February 8\textsuperscript{th}, 1963 (Zangana, 2007)
The 1963 coup was unpopular with the Iraqi people, which many believe was a “turning point in the modern history of Iraq” (Al-Ali, 2007, p. 92). This was also considered a turning point due to its level of violence through the establishment of the National Guard (known as al-Ḥaris al-Qawmī). The National Guard became notorious for their violent actions against the Iraqis. Many Iraqis see this as a foreshadowing for what will come later (Al-Ali, 2007).

After the violent acts and chaos that followed, ʿAbd al-Salām ʿĀrif led Iraq for a few years and began to stabilize the country prior to his death in a plane crash in 1966. ʿAbd al-Rahmān ʿArif’s brother took over the rule of the country, but the Baʿth party took back power on July 17, 1968, headed by al-Bakir. On July 16, 1979, Ṣaddām Ḥussein became leader of Iraq replacing al-Bakir. Ṣaddām Ḥussein remained in power until the 2003 U.S invasion of Iraq (H. Zangana, 2007).

The end of the Iraqi Monarchy in 1958 saw the establishment of The Republic of Iraq. While the Baʿth coup of 196812 was unpopular for Iraqis, Nadje Al-ʿAlī writes that most Iraqis found the July, 14, 195813 coup “liberating” and felt it was the turning point for Iraq (Al-Ali, 2007). However, Al-Qazwīnī, in her novel Mamarrāt Al-Sukān (Zubaida’s Window), believed the “deterioration” of Iraq began with the fall of King Faysal II in 1958 because of the brutality of his death. Al-Qazwīnī relates this when she remembers her grandmother describing this event. “The war did not begin today but tens

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12 Many Iraqis protested this Ba’thist coup, resisting the ousting of Qāsim; this is when many were tortured and arrested (Al-ʿAlī, 2007).
13 This put Abdel Karīm Qāsim in power.
of years ago. It began in the wrong unprepared-for day when the Iraqi army encircled the palace to change the regime” (Qazwīnī, 2008, p. 32).

The past two decades have been particularly turbulent for Iraqis. Following their claimed victory of the Iran-Iraq war, Iraq dived into another war when it invaded Kuwait in 1991. This was followed by sanctions imposed on Iraq by the United Nations Security Council which were socially and economically devastating to the Iraqi people. For Iraqis, the years of embargo were a continuous state of war against them as well, and writers narrated the hardships in their literary work. Then the U.S invasion of Iraq in 2003 began, and this, too, became a common topic addressed in the novels of Iraqi women.

To summarize the state of Iraq after the Persian Gulf War in 1991, an event is often included in the novels that mentioned Iraqi women:

Basic health and sanitation standards in Iraq deteriorated particularly, power supplies were cut, medicine was in short supply, and rising prices made it difficult for women to buy food for their families. The situation of children, no longer being inoculated against dangerous disease, became particularly serious. There was rising malnutrition and an increase in crime. Thousands of homeless Kurds fled camps in northern Iraq or Iran, where thousands of Shiite refugees, who left during the revolts against Ṣaddām Ḥussein following the Gulf War, had also found refuge. (Vickers, 1993, p. 58)

While intrinsically critical and questioning the reasons and the necessities behind such wars, the female characters in the novels written by Iraqi women were not all proactive in
their rejection of the wars. But if one sees writing as an act of resistance, then the Iraqi women who disapproved of the place towards which Iraq was heading expressed their frustrations in their writings.

When Iraqi women writers write about the kind of place Iraq has become, they simultaneously reflect on their nation’s past, which at times goes as far back as Mesopotamia. They do this in search not necessarily of a tranquil time of peace but a glorious one, a victorious past that withstood the test of time. Perhaps if one delves into the history of the country, Iraq never experienced a time without turbulence. However, it did have its triumphs – in overcoming the Mongol invasion, the sacking of Baghdad, and the burning of all of its books (an incident repeated in the more recent events in Baghdad and the destruction of many of the museums and its antiquities); Iraq overcame all of these challenges and survived, even flourished, throughout history. This, I believe, is what Iraqi women look towards in their Mesopotamian past; the rich history of the area and the proud heritage of the famous epic of Gilgamesh. They are in search of a type of conciliation and nostalgia for the glorious past Iraqis are descendants from. This nostalgia and the gaze towards the history of their nation permit them to overcome the pessimism and the destruction witnessed in the most recent hardships and wars. This is especially found in Lutfiyyah Al-Dulaymi’s book, Sayyidat Zuhal (Women of Saturn). In Ibtisam ‘Abd Allah’s novel entitled ‘Mesopotamia’, the theme revolves around antiques and art dealers, foreshadowing the destruction of Iraq’s art.

Hanley argues that war has been misrepresented and that there is a need to “demilitarize our memories of war” (Hanley, 1991, p. 9). How so can this occur? And
will the women who write the fiction of war play that role of demilitarizing our memory? War will always have violence, pain, and destruction; what Hanley is perhaps referring to by “militarization” is the propaganda of war, battle scenes, and heroic soldiers or soldiers who are victims. The literature on war which troubled feminists is the tendency for it to focus on the soldier and his battles without taking into consideration the consequences of war on the home front.

In the Western literary tradition, it was often assumed that women cannot narrate war stories because of their absence from battle. Women who write war fiction have traditionally been ignored from studies for the very reason mentioned, such as the well-known book on World War I literature by Paul Fussell in Great War and Modern Memory. The collection of World War II stories includes Earnest Hemingway’s Men without Women and Normal Mailer’s Naked and the Dead (Hanley, 1991, p. 134). Lynn Hanley explains this dichotomy between female and male writers on the subject of war through William Broyles Jr’s article on “Why Men Love War.” In his article, he explains that the reason for the archetypal war story is that it is there to narrate the story of the man who was present in the war. “I suffered, I was there, you were not, only these facts matter” (Hanley, 1991, p. 134). Here, the assumption that the suffering in war is only as a result of being in battle; this excludes a major part of the population which are the civilians in society who live through and survive war. He fails to include their suffering, which is a direct causality of war.
This is where the narratives of women pick up from the female experience of war in the home front. Within the context of the Iraq wars, the home front and the war front are one and the same.

There are writers who have not had firsthand experience of an event or place yet who write about it. This phenomenon is recognized as the reality effect (l’effet de reel), a literary technique coined by Roland Barthes. He explains it as “that imaginative supplementation of the historical account with details which may be factually based or may be probable extrapolations, but have the role of confirming its historicity through the very vividness and, as it were, unmotivated immediacy of their effect” (Poole, 1991, p. 81). Roger Poole attributes this technique to Virginian Woolf’s writings on the war themes in her stories. Many women writers who did not have firsthand experience of real life events due to their limited exposure would be placed in such a category. Whether this makes a difference in the strength of the narrative is up to the reader and the extent to which the narration reflects reality and the authenticity of the situation. This is not completely irrelevant in many ways to the Iraqi novelists who wrote about their war experiences, as some relied heavily on other people’s stories and experiences and included them as sub-narratives. Meanwhile, other Iraqi writers avoided writing about wars they did not live through or witness first hand, such as Hadīyah Ḥusayn, who shifted her themes once she was writing from exile and not from the home-war front.

In the Western context, women’s literary works about war were considered lacking when compared to men’s writings of war. Men were considered to be the great storytellers due to the fact that they were at the center of the battle. Paul Fussel criticizes
the absence of the Great War poem that females should have written “next to the permanently wounded, the main victims in war, their dead men having been removed beyond suffering. Yet the elegies are written by men, the poems, registering a love of soldiers are written by men, and it is not women who seem to be the custodians of the subtlest sort of anti-war irony. This seems odd, and it awaits interpretation” (Elshtain, 1987, p. 213). Many scholars who have written about the subject of war and writing have since responded to Paul Fussel’s premises and the role of women in the literary production on war (Elshtain, 1987).

Interestingly, while Western women writers were critiqued for not writing the great war poem or elegy during nineteenth century Europe, Arab women have been contributing to Arabic literature using poetry as the literary genre since the pre-Islamic time (Jahiliyyah), which began with the poetry of al-Khansāʾ. In 612 AD, even before the inception of Islam, al-Khansāʾ won praise for her elegies of war over the deaths her brothers, Muʿāwiya and Ṣakhir, who died in battle against other tribes. She did not denounce the fighting once Muʿāwiya was killed, but encouraged her other brother, Ṣakhir, to avenge the death of Muʿāwiya. After converting to Islam, all four of her sons, Yazīd, Muʿāwiya, ‘Amr, and ‘Amrah died in the Battle of al-Qādisiyyah. Uncannily, this was the battle during which Arabs captured Iraq from the Persian Sassanid Empire. The infamous battle of al-Qādisiyyah, the location of which is located in modern day Kufah in Iraq, southwest of al-Hillah, was revived during the modern day Iran-Iraq war when Ṣaddām named the battle “al-Qādisiyyah” in an attempt to draw a connection between the battles of the past and the battles of the present. It was also the launch of
Iraqi literature on the Iran-Iraq war, serving as propaganda for the war via the war narrative, including a literary prize for best work.

According to Cooke, the books were mainly written by Iraqi men with the exception of three Iraqi women writers, including Luṭfīyah Al-Dulaymī’s book Budhur al-naṣr (Seeds of Fire), written in 1988. The famed Persian epic, The Shahnameh, also references the famous battle of al-Qādisiyyah, which still today revives the fervor and Persian resentment of the lost battle that led to the destruction of the Sassanid Empire.14

**The History of the Intelligentsia in Iraq**

The social and political changes that took place in Iraq during the 19th century had a profound impact on the Iraqi intellectuals as well as Iraqi literature. These political changes helped in producing an educated and intellectual class of Iraqis. As the Iraqi intelligentsia flourished, so did their role and participation in the political and social reforms of their nation. The influence these intellectuals had on the social and political reforms of their country cannot be ignored. The newly educated class developed their literary achievements as well as their public participation and political positions which helped direct the tides of change in Iraq during the early 20th century. The impact of modernization and calls for political reforms saw an increase in women’s rights and participation in the development of their nation-state as more and more intellectuals

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14 A more detailed description of this is in Parvaneh Pourshariati’s Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire, 2008.
began to perceive it as a necessary step in achieving independent hegemony over their nation. The role of women as intellectuals began to develop in literature as well as in political participation. Their contribution to the intellectual life in Iraq cannot be overlooked, as they had the same goal of achieving national independence from colonial rule and seeing Iraq as a modernized state.

Since the 16th century and until the First World War, Iraq was under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. Under the Ottoman rule, the intelligentsia in Iraq consisted only of powerful notables and the religious clergy (Davis, 2005, p. 39). In the 19th century, Iraq saw a series of reforms take place which opened up opportunities for Iraqi intellectuals to encounter different types of literary genres. These events helped lead the way into to a revival in literary prose (Ahmad, 1969). Several factors coincided with the development of literature in the Arab world and in Iraq. These include the rise of nationalism, the end of Ottoman rule, and the struggle against imperialist powers in their land (Ahmad, 1969).

On November 22, 1914 Britain began its conquest of Baghdad, whereas the Turks defeated the British in 1915 at Kut in southern Iraq. Iraqi intellectuals initially supported the Ottomans, but in 1916, when the Turks were losing to the British, many intellectuals joined the Arab revolts with Sharif Ḥusseīn and his son Fayṣal against the Ottomans. With their defeat in World War I, the British took control of Iraq. In 1920, the League of Nations recognized Iraq as a nation and in 1921 Fayṣal, the son of Sharif Ḥusseīn of Mecca, was crowned king. He ruled from 1921 till 1933. That period, however, saw political instability, especially with the 1924 uprising against the Iraqi constitution, followed by more protests in 1927 and 1928. In the 1930’s, there was the Anglo-Iraqi
treaty, and in 1931, a general strike was declared. The last year of Fayṣal’s rule also saw the Assyrian Crisis and tribal uprisings near the Euphrates (Davis, 2005, p. 56).

Further instability plagued Iraq after King Fayṣal died in 1933 and his young son King Ghazi I replaced him in October 1936 through a coup d’état by Bakr Sidqī. Bakr Sidqī was assassinated shortly after, in 1937. In 1939, a suspicious car accident killed King Ghazi, and Prince ‘Abdullah replaced him. During the period of WWII, from 1939 to 1945, Britain reoccupied Iraq. In 1941, another coup d’état by four military colonels ignited further instability in the country (Davis, 2005).

The British occupation made Iraqis realize their unfortunate realities and the need for modernization and independence. The increase in publishing houses and the low cost of printing and paper led to a plethora of literary works. The amount of books being produced almost led some to believe Iraq would surpass its neighbors, Egypt and Syria, in book production; however, this was short lived. Iraq did not seem to have interest in literary and intellectual works as much as in the political situation in their country (Ahmad, 1969). Yousif Izzidine, in his book Novel in Iraq, states that Iraqi intellectuals were divided into two schools of thought: those who believed in the importance of reforms in Islam, and those who believed that Arab nationalism should be the new basis of reforms. Arab nationalists had a religious basis as well, but had a different approach towards reforms. The Arab nationalist trend gained tremendous support due to the British colonialism and the threat it posed to the Arabs, their language, and their culture (Izz al-Dīn, 1973).
In the early 1920’s, Iraqi intellectuals who took part in literary activity took on the responsibility of advocating for nationalism and democracy. Similar to Arab intellectuals in neighboring Arab countries, Iraqi intellectuals were politically active in opposition movements and were involved as bureaucrats, ministers, in the military, and in various other professions (Bashkin, 2009). The main motivational forces driving Iraqi intellectuals were to enrich Iraq’s Arab heritage and language as well as to rethink the political situation of their country (Davis, 2005).

In 1899, a school for girls was established by the Ottoman governor of Baghdad through the efforts of Iraq intellectual Jamīl Sidqī Al-Zahāwī (Ingrams, 1983). Sāṭiʿ al-Ḥuṣrī, who was a director general of education in Iraq from 1923-1927, was responsible for establishing a secular education system. He was an Arab nationalist and elitist who was also an advocate for girls’ education. From the periods of 1925-1926, British statistics reveal there were 4,053 women were enrolled in elementary and primary schools in Iraq (Efrati, 2008). It is important to note that the purpose of supporting the education and emancipation of women in the Arab world was part of the nationalist agenda and the fight against colonialism. Promoting these ideals were not meant for women to seek individual, self-satisfying fulfillment and freedom, but rather to be a productive member of society (Efrati, 2008).

With the rise of Iraqi intellectuals, two secular-style educational institutes were established in 1908, including a law school in Baghdad and elementary schools that allowed women to enroll as well (Davis, 2005). The formation of new educational systems in Iraq produced some of the most famous Iraqi poets, such as Nāzik al-
Malāʾikah and Badr Shakir al-Sayyāb, both pioneers of the free verse movement in Arabic poetry. Other writers such as ‘Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayāṭī and Lamia ‘Abbas ‘Amara were also part of this new educational system (Davis, 2005).

The Iraqi intellectuals before 1918 contributed significantly to the nationalist Iraqi struggle. During Ottoman rule, Iraqi intellectuals posed as poets, religious leaders, writers, or journalists who took a stance on whether to support the Ottoman rule or to resist it. The intellectuals were products of the religious schools and mainly continued writing in the traditional classical Arabic style (Davis, 2005). They participated in the collapse of Ottoman rule, and they also took an active part in the 1920 revolution against the British (Davis, 2005).

Throughout the 19th century, Iraq stayed away from the modern Arabic trends despite their access and communication with Syrian and Egyptian intellectuals. They also did not have the same exposure to the West like Syria and Egypt did (Ahmad, 1969). Magazines from Lebanon and Egypt that contained a series of short stories and novels before Iraq began publishing its own materials were available (Kāşim, 1986). Iraq had only four newspapers published in the 19th century (Davis, 2005), but saw an increase in publications after the Young Turk Revolution from 1908-1911. In Baghdad, forty-four publications appeared (Bashkin, 2009), and by 1914, sixty-one newspapers were published in Arabic, Turkish, and French, throughout Iraq (Davis, 2005). By 1929, there were 104 newspapers in Iraq (Davis, 2005). The Iraqi dailies that were published during the 1920’s demanded independence from the British and advocated democracy as they
considered it the most appropriate form of rule for their nation state (Bashkin, 2009; Davis, 2005).

Women’s Journals and Women’s Freedom

The first women’s journal to be published in Iraq was “Layla” in 1923. It was published for two years by the Iraqi Journalist Paulina Ḥassūn (Ingrams, 1983) until she returned to Palestine where she worked as a nurse. Ḥassūn’s mother was Palestinian and her father was an Iraqi from Mosul (J. Zeidan, 1999). She was also a member of Nādī al-nahda al-nissāʾiyya (The Women’s Awakening Club) that was led by Asmāʾ Al-Zahāwī, Jamīl al-Zahāwī’s sister. It was the first Iraqi women’s organization that was established. Members of this women’s club were sisters, wives, and family members of the intellectual elite of Iraq and the bourgeoisie class (Ingrams, 1983). This women’s organization took part in improving the conditions of women by establishing schools, an orphanage, a library (J. T. Zeidan, 1995), sewing clothes for the poor, and teaching literacy to women. Some of the prominent women who belonged to this club were the Iraqi Prime Minister’s wife, Mrs. Nūrī al-Saʿīd, Naʿima Sulṭān Hamuda, and some British women, such as Gertrude Bell of the Oriental Secretary, and author Ethel Stevens (Ingrams, 1983).

Iraqi male intellectuals such as Jamīl Sidqī al-Zahāwī (1893-1936) and Maʿruf al-Rusāfī (1875-1945) were advocates of women’s rights in Iraq and blamed the “backwardness” of the East for their lack of rights. Al-Zahāwī’s approach leaned towards
the “Western” model, and he was influenced by Egyptian intellectual Qāsim Amīn who wrote about the emancipation and education of women in the Arab world. Al-Zahāwī was viewed as a pro-British poet, and some Iraqi poets such as ‘Abd al-ハウスن al-Azri, and Muḥammad Mahdī al-Basir (1896-1968) viewed him as a traitor for telling Percy Cox, who established the Provisional State council in Iraq, to return and settle permanently in Iraq. This led the British secretary Gertrude Bell to call al-Zahāwī “our poet” (Mūsawī, 2006).

In 1910, al-Zahāwī published an article denouncing the mistreatment of women, their seclusion, the veil, and women’s civil rights such as marriage, inheritance, divorce (Efrati, 2008). Al-Zahawi’s article “al-Mar’ah wa-al-difā’ ‘anha” (The Woman and Her Defense) was published in an Egyptian newspaper. Ma’ruf al-Rusāfī’s poems were very popular among Iraqis for advocating social and political change and speaking against the British and the King (Mūsawī, 2006). Al-Rusāfī advocated the same issues of women’s rights as al-Zahāwī, did but he did this through his poetry. Al-Rusāfī, unlike al-Zahāwī, looked to Islam’s historical past to reveal the rights of women from during the time of the Prophet Muḥammad. Both intellectuals were chastised by society at the time for their progressive views towards women, and a fatwa (religious edict) was issued against al-Rusāfī in 1922 after publishing a poem in the “al-Istiqlal” newspaper. Al-Zahāwī lost his faculty position from Baghdad University (Efrati, 2008; J. T. Zeidan, 1995), and he was also placed under house arrest (J. T. Zeidan, 1995). While some Iraqi intellectuals supported the education of women, not all of them, however, supported the unveiling of women. Writers, poets, and thinkers such as ‘Abd al-ハウスن al-‘Uzurī, Tawfīq al-
Fukaikī, Muḥammad al-Samawī, Mullah Abbud al-Kharkhī, Muhammed Bahjat al-Atarī and ‘Ābd al-Rahmān al-Banna’ did not support the unveiling (Bashkin, 2008).

Ḥūsayn al-Rahh Āl, an Iraqi Marxist, along with Bakr Ṣidqī ‘Awnī, a teacher and journalist, and Maḥmūd Aḥmad Al-Sayyid, who is considered the first Iraqi novelist, established the journal Al-Sahīfa (The Paper) in 1924 (Bashkin, 2009; Efrati, 2008). The journal promoted radical views towards women’s liberation, which is perhaps the beginning of feminist thinking in Iraq. They advocated social and economic changes in addition to the promotion of the education of women and the end of seclusion and veiling (Efrati, 2008).

Several Iraqi women also championed the cause of women, following in the footsteps of their Syrian and Egyptian counterparts. One of the pioneering women in Iraq is Sabīḥah al-Shaykh Aḥmad al-Dāwūd (1912-1975), a daughter of the Minister of Religious Affairs during the British mandate, Aḥmad al-Shaykh al-Dāwūd, who was in office in 1920. In 1936, Sabīḥah was the first Iraqi woman to enter the College of Law, and upon entering her class she removed her veil while still wearing an ‘Abāya (Ingrams, 1983). A special seat was referred to as the “Box” was reserved for her in the classroom (Ingrams, 1983). She also took part in lifting the veil with Mājdah al-Ḥaydarī in public demonstrations in the 1930’s (Mūsawi, 2003).

Sabīḥah al-Shaykh Aḥmad al-Dāwūd wrote a narrative account of her life and role as an Iraqi woman who headed the juvenile court in Baghdad (J. Zeidan, 1999). She also provided a comprehensive account of Iraq’s women’s movements during the Hashemite period (Efrati, 2008; Mūsawi, 2003). The two books she wrote, Tajribatī fi qada’ al-
aheadth (My Experience at the Juvenile Court), and Awwal al-ṭarīq (The Beginning of the Road), reflect this growing interest in women’s roles and political participation (J. Zeidan, 1999). It is also worthy of note that her mother, Naʿīma Sulṭan Ḥamūda, also took part in organizing a women’s committee in Baghdad that participated in the revolt against British occupation in 1920. Iraqi women marked their presence during the revolt by participating in nationalist demonstrations, supporting, and providing material support to men (Efrati, 2008). During the revolt, more than twenty women recited their poetry expressing themselves against the British occupation (Ashur, 2004). This was the period of awakening for women in Iraq which opened up more opportunities for them to contribute to the social and political life of their country (Efrati, 2008). However, their work was not often rewarded: some of these women were rarely mentioned, or briefly mentioned by their first or by their first son’s name – such as “Umm Nizār” (the mother of Nizār) for example. For this reason, many Iraqi women at the time used pseudonyms when they wrote (Ashur, 2004).

Many of these women also had access to both the modern education system as well as traditional Islamic and classical literature. These women include ‘Attika al-Khazarjī, who studied in France, Egypt, and Iraq, Salīmah ‘Abdulrazzak al-Malāʾikah (Umm Nizār), a poet and the mother of Nāzik al-Malāʾikah, Ameera Nūr al-Dīne Dāwūd (b.1925) who studied in Egypt and the United States, and Fatinah Ḥusseīn al-Naʿīb (1917-1993) (Suduf al-ʿAmīrīya or al-ʿUbaydīya) and her sister, writer Māhirah al-Naqshbandī, whose pseudonym was “Sarāb al-ʿAbidīya” (Ashur, 2004). Fātinah Ḥusseīn was from a conservative family and her father, also a Sufi poet, was part of the Obeid
tribe in Iraq. Rabāb al-Qazimī was a dentist who studied in Egypt, France, and the United States. Other Iraqi women who participated in the literary movement of the time are Maqbūla al-Ḥillī (‘Afra’), Wadi’a Ja’far al-Shibblī, and Ḥuriya Hāshim Nurī (Fatāt Baghdād), a short story writer (Ashur, 2004; J. Zeidan, 1999).

In 1959, Nazīha al-Dulaymī (1923-2007) became the first Arab woman to become a government minister. She was a physician and was appointed as a minister of municipalities during the leadership of ‘Abdul-Karīm Qāsim. She was also the leader of the League for the Defense of Women’s Rights. She was a communist, but members of the group consisted of non-communists as well. Unlike the women who were members of the Awakening Women’s Club, women who belonged to this group were from lower and middle-class strata. The League was especially influenced by the leader of the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) Yūsuf Salamān Yūsuf (Fahd). The League focused on economic and political issues; some of their objectives included tackling the need for women to achieve economic independence in order to gain emancipation (Davis, 2005; Efrati, 2008).

The 1940’s saw the Iraqi Communist Party gain more popularity, especially by Iraqi Intellectuals such as Dhū Nūn Ayūb, a novelist who wrote Doctor Ibrahim in 1939, and Yūsuf Salamān Yūsuf (Fahd) who was the leader of the ICP. Many illegal newspapers began to be published by the ICP such as Al-Sharara in 1940 and Al-Qa’ida in 1943. In 1944, the communist journal Al-ʿAmal was published as well as the publishing press, Dar al-Ḥikma, which published many translated literatures written by Marxists (Bashkin, 2009).
The ICP gained more strength after “The Wathba” (The Great Leap) in January 1948, although other Iraqis of various political ideologies participated in these demonstrations. The Wathba was a series of protests by students who were influenced by leftist, nationalist, and communist writings, against the reenactment of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930 under Salih Jabr, the Prime Minister of Iraq at the time. The nationalists, who were against British control of Iraq, opposed the treaty. The protests that followed its reenactment were not organized by party officials, as Iraqi intellectuals and party leaders later joined the remonstrations and wrote about it (Bashkin, 2009). Several protestors were killed, but the strikes continued, and the government then enforced martial law (Davis, 2005).

Another factor that triggered the Wathba is the 1948 Arab defeat by Zionist forces. Although they saw some successes in battle, the Iraqi army lacked the weapons and supplies that the Zionists had. Despite being among the best-trained Arab armies, they were defeated because of their supply and weapon shortages. In his book Memories of State, Eric Davis writes that the Iraqi army was assigned under British commander John Glubb. Iraqis later discovered that the British commander worked to stop them from making further progress, which increasingly disappointed the army. Davis documents that “Glubb Pasha actually sought to prevent Arab forces from making any significant military progress against Zionist units. In light of the recently documented collusion between King ‘Abd Allah and Zionist leaders to divide Palestine, these perceptions were legitimate” (Davis, 2005). These events further exacerbated frustrations and distrust of European colonialism among Arabs and Iraqis and contributed to a growing pan-Arab
Nationalism (Davis, 2005). The Iraqi opposition parties such as the communist party and the left also gained significant popularity after the Wathba (Bashkin, 2008). About 400 protestors died by the time the Wathba and the protests were over (Bashkin, 2008).

In 1947, the first national congress of the Ba’th party was held in Damascus. The Ba’th party was established by Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Bitar from Damascus in 1940. The party platform was based on socialism, Arab unity, and political, cultural, and religious freedom. They called for the distancing of Islam and the equality of women (Ingrams, 1983). The Ba’thist ideology and party found its way to Iraq in the 1950’s and played an important role in overthrowing the monarchy in the July 14, 1958 revolution and against ‘Abd al-Karīm Qāsim in 1963, but it was on July 17, 1968 that the Ba’th truly came to power in Iraq (Ingrams, 1983). What became of Iraq after the power of the Ba’ath regime in terms of war and conflict has had a profound effect on Iraqi society, starting from the Iran-Iraq war that was launched in the early 1980’s. From then on, Iraq did not experience any reprieve from war. It is in light of these events that Iraqi women write their fiction.

For this reason the works of the Iraqi writers that focus on the themes of war and exile write about this particular period they lived through and still endure. ‘Abd al- Karīm Qāsim, Ṣaddām Ḥusseīn, and Iraqi history have become a part of the Iraqi literature, whether they are discussing them directly or indirectly. Various writers such as Haifa Zangana discuss the politics of Iraq in their narratives. Her novel Niṣāʾ ʿalā safā, 2001 (Women on a Journey, 2007) dedicates a character that was a former Ba’thist, and through her the frustration and the betrayal of former members of the party are exposed.
In addition, Hadīyah Ḥusayn in *Fī al-tarīq ilayhim*, 2004 and *Bint al-khān*, 2001 blatantly discusses ’Abd al-Karīm Qāsim in her novels. From this it is apparent that she is nostalgic of a time when he led Iraq and the various reforms he intended to put in place in the country. She also refers to ’Abd al-Karīm Qāsim directly by name in her novels. As is revealed in *Bint al-khān*, Ḥusayn mentions the time of ’Abd al-Karīm Qāsim and his plan to build sanitary housing for the Khan neighborhood on the fourth year of the July 14th revolution. He was known to support the plight of the poor as he was named “the champion of the underprivileged” (Ḥusayn, 2001, p. 98). As in her previous novel, where ‘Amar narrates the country’s state at the killing of the leader, in *Bint al-khan*, Maḥāsin also discusses the coup that ended the Qāsim’s life from the perspective and the opinion of the people in her Khan neighborhood. As she recalls in the novel, it was during Ramadan and he was fasting; after three days of fighting, they were finally able to capture him. The people of the Khan spend their days at home crying over their leader; some went out into the streets to protest, but were deceived by the revolutionaries reassuring everyone that he is still in power and he will appear on television. When he did appear, he was dead. A small uprising took place in the neighborhood, but it was put down by the militias from the National Guard who arrested some protestors (Husayn, 2001, p. 98). Here she foreshadows a bleak future for her nation with the passing of Qāsim and the way her neighborhood inhabitants felt about his death and the coup that took him out of power.
Literary Production in Iraq

Poetry was the main literary genre in Iraq at the time, and most Iraqi intellectuals were poets (Davis, 2005). Although the traditional form of poetry was used in Iraq, poetry in the 1920’s was still used as a rallying point to gather the masses and to incite national consciousness against the injustice in society and foreign occupation (Mūsawī, 2006). A few of these poets are ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn al-Azri’, Aḥmad Sāfī al-Najafī, ‘Abbūd al-Karhkī, Marūf al-Rusāfī, Sa’d Salih, and ‘Abd al-Muhsin al-Kazimī. Some of these poets had to flee Iraq and live in exile because of their anti-British activities (Mūsawī, 2006). Iraqi intellectuals used the mosque as a space to express their nationalist feeling by reciting their poetry there and to mobilize the masses. The Ḥaydarkhānahah Mosque in Baghdad was one of the famous mosques Iraqi intellectuals used, including Ḥusayn Rahāl’s Marxist group, which later became known as the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) (Davis, 2005).

Another space that Iraqi intellectuals used for their literary activities from the 1930’s to the 1950’s were cafes and salons (Mūsawī, 2006). These were places of gatherings for poets, writers, and other literati and intellectuals such as al-Rusāfī and al-Zahāwī, to exchange ideas and promote discussions among each other. This mainly took place in cities such as Baghdad and Najaf (Mūsawī, 2006). Early Iraqi writers did not distinguish between short stories, plays, and novels. Due to the limited exposure to Western literature, they mixed those genres together in the beginning (Izz al-Dīn, 1973). All of these literary genres, including poetry, were popularized in light of nationalist
fervor and the fight against imperialism and the liberation of Arab lands of their control (Mūsawī, 2006).

*Al-riwāyah al-‘iqāziyyah* (The Awakening Novel), penned by Sulaymān Faydī (1885-1951) in 1919, is considered one of the first Iraqi narratives to have the features of a novel. The writer’s purpose for writing it was mainly to express his views on social reforms and to participate in the “Iraqi new consciousness” (Mūsawī, 2006) rather than merely to write a story for entertainment. The novel promoted education and modern educational techniques that would awaken the people in society (Nijim Abdullah, 1986). Iraqi writers during this period focused more on social reform, and Iraqi intellectuals were more invested in building their country into a modern nation state; as a result, their writing showed less investment with art, entertainment, romance, and fantasy than Western literature did and more concern with the social consciousness and reform of Iraqi society (Aḥmad, 1969).

The novel was a Western phenomenon that was embraced by the intellectual class who were more open to the new trends and reforms in society. Yūsuf ‘Izz al-Dīn describes Iraqi society in the early 1920’s and 30’s as very traditional, Bedouin, and tribe-like society with limited educational levels. Iraqi men were supposed to be masculine in character and serious in certain matters; therefore, narratives and storytelling were perceived as women’s art that was told to children rather than for men. These perceptions derailed men from writing fiction because preoccupation with narratives and storytelling meant entertainment and leisurely activities that were not features of the serious Iraqi male character (Izz al-Dīn, 1973).
The initial and most traditional trend in Iraqi literature and intelligentsia in the modern era began with the work of *Nash'at al-qissah wa-tatawwuruha fi al-'Iraq*, 1908-1939 (*The Emergence and Development of the Story in Iraq*). This work was a continuation of the classical Arab thought and the Arab tradition which was not exposed or influenced by Western education systems. ‘Abdullah Aḥmad lists three intellectual trends that existed in 19th century Iraq. There was no influence of a foreign language or pedagogy, but rather the study of religion and the Arabic language was the main source of knowledge. This education took place mainly in the mosque. The literary intellectuals that belonged to this trend received their education from the traditional heritage, civilization, and thought patterns that they inherited. Most of the literary intellectuals of this period belonged to the traditional trend; it was not until the end of the century that some intellectuals began to forsake it. Because this school of thought is conservative, it is considered the furthest from embracing and utilizing the modern features of the story or novel (Aḥmad, 1969).

The second intellectual trend in Iraq in the 19th century is the formal/institutional trend that was established by the government through formal schooling. This educational system followed a Western pedagogy. The main language was the governmental language at the time, which was Turkish, and Persian was the other language taught. Some modern sciences were included in these Ottoman schools, with a minor focus on religion and Arabic and a few foreign languages. Arabic language and literature were not a major concern to those who attended these Ottoman schools (Aḥmad, 1969).
The third intellectual trend came through the missionary schools in Iraq. Those who went to these schools had the highest exposure to Western thought. These schools promoted the learning of French, English, and German. The missionary schools followed the modern Western system of education and heavily exposed their students to European literature. Aḥmad argues that it is natural that this trend would introduce the Western narrative to Iraq; however, due to the conservative nature of Iraqi society, this familiarity with literature was suppressed (Aḥmad, 1969). He gives an example in the late 19th century of a play translated from French by Naomi Fateh-allah Sahaar with the title Rawāyat latīf wa khushābah (the Tale of Latif and Khushaba) published in Mosul in 1891. This is significant because not only does it introduce a different society’s art and culture to Iraq, but it also focuses on social issues and the relations between the peasants and the landowners, which was relevant to Iraqi society at the time as well (Aḥmad, 1969).

Yūsuf ‘Izz al-Dīn says there should be a distinction between the traditionalist and the primitive thinker. The preservation of the positive aspects of culture and tradition does not necessarily mean backwardness in such a manner that some intellectuals and thinkers describe it as. A primitive thinker rejects any kind of intellectual reform and modernization in society, and puts himself into a certain kind of mold that refuses any change or advancement of any kind. In literature, these types of thinkers continue to regurgitate the same styles and forms their predecessors used without contributing to the literature or allowing it to evolve (Izz al-Dīn, 1973).
A traditionalist, on the other hand, is a deeply dogmatic thinker who preserves the authenticity of the language yet revives the styles and meanings of it. He draws upon the glories of richly fixed triumphant fundamentals of history. Western civilization and thinking does not defeat him but allows the traditionalist intellectual to work alongside it and gain from it (Izz al-Dīn, 1973).

The Iraqi narrative began in a period that was predominantly traditionalist. The narratives produced during this period were realist because of the social and political situation of Iraq at the time (Jasîm, 1982). Because of this socio-political reality of the country, the novel found its beginnings in other locations in the Arab world before it reached Iraq. The political changes that were occurring in the world such as The First World War and anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist feelings in the Arab world helped the novel flourish. It is assumed that the first Arabic novel appeared in Egypt in 1914 by Mohammed Hussein Haykal; (U. Talib, 1999), however Roger Allen, in his book The Arabic Novel, argues that other novels preceded it, such as Maḥmūd Tahir Haqqī’s Adhra’ Dinshāway in 1907 (The Maiden of Dinshaway, 1986), but they were not considered under riwayah fannīyyah (artistic novel) (Allen, 1995). In any case, the Iraqi novel followed the same characteristics as the early Arab novel did. The stories fell into the adventure and romance genres where oppressive traditions separate the two lovers but they are reunited at the end. This was the predominant theme of the translated novels as well (Aḥmad, 1969).

Maḥmūd Aḥmad al-Sayyid was considered one of the pioneering novelists in Iraq whose novels dealt with the problems of Iraqi society and the need for reform. His first
novel, *Fī sabīl al-zawāj* (For the Purpose of Marriage) was published in 1921. It also falls within the romance genre, and it is set in Mumbai, India. The purpose of the story was to highlight a reality that it was not acceptable for Iraqi women to fall in love and to marry the person they choose, but had to conform to their fathers’ wishes (Aḥmad, 1969; Izz al-Dīn, 1973). Al-Sayyid’s second novel was *Masīr al-du‘afa’* (The Destiny of the Weak), followed by another novel in 1922 entitled *Fatāt Baghdād* (The Lady of Baghdad). He describes this latter production as a novel for social development, showing how the modern lady can present herself in her true character and what she needs to be disciplined and well mannered (Aḥmad, 1969). Like al-Sayyid’s work, the narratives published in 1920’s Iraq were didactic and lacked creativity.

The 1930’s saw a maturity in the structure of the novels. ‘Abdullah Aḥmad lists three reasons for the improvement of the Iraqi narrative, the first being its link with the modern Turkish story that preaches development and reform and mocks several outdated rituals and social traditions. Maḥmūd Aḥmad al-Sayyid is mainly credited for this because he was fluent in Turkish and was well-read in their literature; by 1927 he was also translating literature into Arabic. Al-Sayyid was also well-versed in Russian literature and was influenced by writers such as Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, particularly their trends towards realism (Ahmad, 1969).

The second factor for the development of the Iraqi novel is its exposure to modern Egyptian writing, and especially to Maḥmūd Taymūr, who had a profound influence on Iraqi writers. Other Egyptian authors such as Taha Ḥusseīn, Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, al-Mazīnī,
al-Aqqād, and Maḥmūd Ṭāhir Lāshīn all contributed to exposing Iraqi writers to the new styles and forms of writing that were used by Egyptian intellectuals (Aḥmad, 1969).

The third factor was an increase of translated novels from other European languages such as French, English, Russian, German, Danish, and Hungarian by literati such as Anwār Shaul, Maḥmūd Aḥmad al-Sayyid, Naʿim Ṭāwiq, and Khālaf Shawqī Dāwūdy. This helped expose writers to the artistic fiction/narrative.

1927 was a turning point for the Iraqi narrative because it introduced them to important literature from writers as diverse as Henri Guy de Maupassant, André Malraux, Balzac, Victor Hugo, Thomas Hardy, Oscar Wilde, Eugene O’Neil, Hans Christian Anderson, Erich Maria Remarqu, and more (Aḥmad, 1969). In 1939, Dhū Nūn Ayyūb (b.1908) published his novel Doctor Ibrahim which contained evident communist influence as well as criticism of Iraqi society and Iraqi intellectuals (Bashkin, 2009; Mūsawī, 2006).

By the 1940’s, Iraqi writers embraced the writings of Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus (Mūsawī, 2006), both of whom participated in communist activities. This period saw new movements and trends in poetry while simultaneously experiencing heightened persecution and execution of Iraqi intellectuals throughout the 1940’s and 1950’s (Mūsawī, 2006). Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Shabībī and Yūnis al-Sabʾāwi were both executed for their involvement in political activities (Mūsawī, 2006).

Iraqi women who began writing fiction in Iraq followed a similar process to Iraqi men, although their stories were didactic and preached social moral values. These stories thus lacked the creative character that a fictional story should possess. Iraqi women also
developed a sense of national and social consciousness, and their work mirrored their politics. Like their male counterparts, they had different views and approaches to solving social problems, whether it was through Arab nationalism, Communism, or Islam. In 1937, Dalāl Khalīl Ṣafadī published *Hawādīth wa‘ībar* (Incidents and Lessons), which can be classified as a collection of short stories (Ashur, 2004). In 1956, Saffira Jamīl Ḥāfīz (b.1926) also wrote a collection of short stories called *Dumma wa atfāl* (Dolls and Children). Doreen Ingram describes her as a “left-wing activist who was more concerned with her political cause than with the art of fiction,” which describes more generally how the politics of writers heavily influenced their literature (Ashur, 2004; Ingrams, 1983).

In the 1950’s and 1960’s, many more Iraqi Women began to write about contemporary women’s issues and their struggle against the oppression and injustices they faced in their society. Two themes they focused on are marital relationships and extramarital affairs. These writers include Daisy al-Amīr, Samīra al-Manī, Suhayla al-Ḥusaynī, May Muzzaffār, Luṭfīyāh Al-Dulaymī, Buthayna al-Nāsīrī, ‘Āliya Māmdūḥ, Bilqīs, Ni‘mat al-‘Azīz, Salīmah Ṣālih, and Amīnah Ḥaydar al-Ṣadr15 (Bint al-Huda) (Ashur, 2004). Some of these women mentioned continue to write to this day, although their themes and concerns have changed to reflect the more urgent current situation they have at hand in their country.

15 The daughter of a famous Shī‘ah cleric, she was executed along with her brother by the Ṣaddām Ḥussein Regime in 1980. She wrote several novels which were mainly religious in themes. One of her novels, *al-Bāḥithah ‘an al-haqīqah* (1979), is religious in tone and focuses on a girl in search for information about Islam because of the man she loves. She begins to learn about it from a scholar and in the end she converts convinced of its teachings.
Furthermore, while the Arab novel gained its maturity in Egypt, the Free Verse Movement in Arab poetry in the 1940’s began in Iraq by two well-known poets, Badr Shakir al-Sayyāb, and Nāzik al-Malā’īkah. Al-Sayyāb’s poetry had a profound influence on Iraqi society and is still popular during times of crisis as his poetry expresses heightened emotions towards Iraq (Mūsawī, 2006). Al-Malā’īkah (1923-2007) began writing poetry during her early twenties and was exposed to poetry through her mother, Umm Nizār. Al-Malā’īkah studied in Iraq and graduated from the Teachers’ College in 1944, specializing in the Arabic language. She also studied in the United States where she completed her Masters in Comparative Literature from the University of Wisconsin in 1956 (Ashur, 2004).

Al-Malā’īkah’s accomplishments go beyond being a pioneer in the free verse movement, and she is perhaps one of the very few Arab women recognized in this school of poetry, which was a breakthrough in the Arab literary world. One of her most famous works is “Cholera,” which is considered the poem that launched the free verse movement in Arabic poetry (Ashur, 2004) due to its deviation from the strict structure of the qasīidah, or classical poem. This poem was written in the wake of the cholera epidemic that hit Egypt during the time, and it expressed the pains of the poor and vulnerable in society who always suffer most. Al-Malā’īkah’s poetry dealt with the politics of Iraq and the Arab world as well as women’s position in society. In her poem “Ghaslan li-al-‘ār” (Washing Away Shame), she focuses on the brutality of “honor killing” in traditional Arab society, where a father or brother kills a woman to protect the family’s honor (Ashur, 2004).
Al-Malāʾikah also published some studies on poetry such as Qadāya al-Shʿīr al-
muʾāsir, (Issues in Modern Arabic Poetry - 1964), and Saykulujiyāt al-Shʿīr wa Maqāllāt ʿUkhrā, (The Psychology of Poetry and Other Essays - 1993). She also wrote about
literature and society in the Arab world in Al-adab wa-l-Ghazaw al-Fikrī (Literature and
the Intellectual Invasion) in 1965 and al-Tajāzīyya fi-l-Mujtamaʿ al-ʿArabī (Fragmentation in Arab Society) in 1974 (Ashur, 2004). Her poems dealt with the politics
of Iraq and the Arab world as well as societal issues concerning women. From al-
Malāʾikah’s writings, one can read the feminist characteristics boldly emerging in the
writings of Iraqi women during that era. This set the stage for contemporary Iraqi women
to write about issues of concern to them in their particular Iraqi and Arab society.

Another Iraqi poet and intellectual was ʿĀtika Wahbī al-Khazrajī (1924-1997),
who began writing poetry at the age of fourteen. Like al-Malāʾikah, she received her
Bachelors of Arts in 1945 from the Higher Teachers College in Iraq. She taught Arabic,
then continued her studies at the Sorbonne and received her PhD in 1954. Al-Khazrajī
differed from al-Malāʾikah in her approach, as her politics took a more traditional stance
towards Arab tradition and Islamic values. She preserved the traditional structure of the
poem, explaining that classical aesthetics preserve the beauty of the rhythm in the poem
(Ingrams, 1983) Lamiya Abbās ʿAmāra’s (b.1929) poetry was more emotional and dealt
with romantic love, a theme that was exclusive to men at the time. Other pioneering Iraqi
poets that emerged in the Iraqi literary scene include Zuhur Dixon (b. 1933) and ʿAmal
al-Zahāwī (Ashur, 2004). Many more Iraqi writers have appeared since the time of their
pioneering predecessors. Today Iraq enjoys a greater number of female writers who no

60
longer exclusively write poetry but have taken up writing different, more creative narrative forms such as fiction, short stories, diaries, novels, and more currently, blogs.

**The Role of the Intellectual**

It is important to realize the role Iraqi intellectuals played in mobilizing the masses politically and socially through their numerous publications and writings. They also founded public spaces to convey their messages to those who were illiterate, such as in cafés, which became an important social and intellectual space. Most of the intellectuals were nationalist and leftist or communist, but they all had one goal in common: to help lead Iraq to a free modern, democratic and independent state.

Eric Davis attempts to explain why Iraqi intellectuals during the 1940’s and 1950’s who challenged the norms and traditions in society through the realm of literature were not able to fulfill their goal and continue into the path of democracy. The monarchy was replaced by an authoritarian regime run by ‘Abd al Karīm Qāsim, and although his rule was not as brutal as his successors’, he was considered one of the only Iraqi leaders that attempted to resolve the sectarian divide in Iraqi Society. Iraqi intellectuals were uncritical of the 1958 Revolution and the new military regime, although they took part in the fall of the monarchy. Davis explains the reason for this is they as they “failed to articulate counterhegemonic models to challenge existing forms of political praxis” (Davis, 2005, pp. 92, 118), going on to state:
Although the military ultimately deposed the monarchy, it was the Iraqi intelligentsia’s constant critique and laying bare the inequalities of the political and social system that progressively chipped away at the monarchical state’s legitimacy and authority. The expansion of the intelligentsia during the 1950’s would lay the foundations for efforts undertaken by the Ba’th party in the 1970’s to restructure political and social memory as part of its project to rewrite history. (Davis, 2005, p. 96)

The Iraqi intelligentsia during this period attempted to deconstruct the past and renegotiate the problematic traditions. Yet as they began to deal with problems of modernity and the question of identity, Iraqi intellectuals later saw themselves looking back to the past to formulate and understand their fragmented identity.

Iraqi intellectuals began to revisit their pre-Islamic Mesopotamian heritage as well as their Arab heritage (Davis, 2005) to find a common Iraqi identity with which all members of society can identify. These challenges arose after many years of rule by a Ba’thist regime that succeeded in deepening sectarian divides between Iraqis, divides that are particularly evident in a post-Ṣaddām Iraq. Writers, particularly female writers, are trying to recollect a collective Iraqi identity that is deeply fragmented. Luṭfīyah al-Dulaymī includes the history of Iraq dating back to the pre-Islamic times in her novel Sayyidāt zuhal. Ibtisām ‘Abdallah’s novel is entitled Misuputamiya (Bayn al-Nahrayn) in reference to Iraq’s past through its antiquities.
Furthermore Iraqi intellectuals played an essential role in the political matters of their country; some paid the ultimate price for it. Many Iraqi intellectuals during the 1940’s and 1950’s who opposed their regimes or were too involved politically were either jailed or executed. As mentioned before, Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Shabībī and Yunis al-Sab’awi (1910-1942) both were executed (Mūsawī, 2006). Al-Sab’āwi organized youth during the protest against the Baghdad treaty of 1930. He spoke out against the regime and the colonialist British power that controlled it. He passed out pamphlets against the government of Nurī al-Sa’īd and also participated in the 1941 revolts. He and other intellectuals, such as Badr Shakir al-Sayyāb, were imprisoned and persecuted, but al-Sad’awi was executed in 1942. Muḥammad Ḥusseīn al-Shabībī was executed in February 1949; Yūsuf Salmān (Fahd), leader of the ICP, was executed along with Zakī Bāsem who also belonged to the same party. Other intellectuals such as Ḥusayn Mardan (1927-1972) died in prison (Mūsawī, 2006). This persecution of Iraqi intellectuals continued under the Ba’th and Ṣaddām regime and even into the post-Ṣaddām era. Throughout Iraqi history, intellectuals who spoke out against oppression were executed, imprisoned, tortured, or chose to live in exile. This brutality did not discriminate between male and female intellectuals. Haifa Zangana, for example, was imprisoned and tortured for a brief period of time for her political activities; this is reflected in her fictional novels as well as in her autobiography Dreaming of Baghda. Zangana’s Dreaming of Baghda illustrates the dissident Iraqi communist movement’s underground activities. She also narrates her story of imprisonment in Iraq and her relationships with her fellow inmates.
The brutality of the military coups in Iraq is also worth mentioning. On July 14, 1958 Nurī al-Saʿīd’s and ‘Abdullah’s rule came to an end when the Rihab palace was attacked by army officers in a coup d’état. ‘Abdallah chose to surrender and not fire back in order to safeguard the safety of the royal family (Davis, 2005). Despite this, as they were leaving, an officer fired at the royal family, killing all except the princes’ sister. The bodies of the crown prince and King Fasyal II were dragged through the streets of Baghdad by a mob. Nurī al-Saʿīd’s body was also dragged through the streets (Davis, 2005).

‘Abd al-Karīm Qāsim took power after the collapse of the Iraqi monarchy, and his rule is said to have not been as brutal as his predecessors or successors. Very few opposition figures were executed after the attempted coup against him in 1958, and ‘Abd al-Salām ‘Ārif, the person who planned to overthrow him, was neither executed nor exiled (Davis, 2005). Qāsim was a simple man from a modest background. It was revealed that he did not have any money because he had donated his money to the poor. Nonetheless, Qāsim’s rule came to an end by a Ba’thist coup in 1963, when he was executed (Davis, 2005).

The Iraqi intelligentsia after World War I until the 1960’s had a profound influence on Iraqi politics and society. Many Iraqis during Ottoman rule had a limited education, and most were educated either through mosques or through a few institutions run by the Ottoman Empire. But education wasn’t available to all Iraqis until later, when schools were established by the new monarchy that was put in place by the British. As the 1920’s began, the Iraqi intelligentsia gained more exposure to literary movements in
neighboring Arab countries such as Egypt and Syria. With the emergence of more modern institutions and more translations of literature from the West, Iraqis began to embrace new forms of literature. For Iraqi writers, fiction was more of a didactic tool to help improve, reform, and modernize Iraqi society in order to build a successful nation-state. With the preoccupation in politics and the struggle to free Iraq from colonial British rule, many Iraqi intellectuals and writers put their efforts into politics rather than on the art of fiction. This is why the art of fiction in Iraq did not develop into its full maturity until later. Poetry, on the other hand, found more success in Iraq with two main poets that lead the free verse movement, Badr Shakkir al-Sayyāb and Nāzīk al-Malā’īkah. But even in poetry, the main concern for the Iraqi intellectual, whether male or female, was their nation. Writings, journalism, journals, and the education of women all were for the sake of improving their society and preparing it for the modern world. Iraqi history has also proven very cruel and brutal towards the very same people that aspire to build it; many Iraqi intellectuals were persecuted, imprisoned and even executed for their political views and activism. The brutality of the various regimes and the numerous coups d’état did not and does not present a comforting picture of the pluralistic Iraqi society.

In the post-Ṣaddām era, many Iraqi intellectuals lived in exile, and to this day, many have been assassinated. The state of Iraq’s intellectuals has not improved, forcing a significant number of writers, such as Lutifyah al-Dulaymī, to live in exile in neighboring Arab countries like Jordan, or even farther abroad in the United States or Europe. The works of these contemporary intellectuals reflect the pain and sorrows they experienced due to the unstable state of their nation. The function of Iraqi intellectuals in the political
sphere is not as it was during previous periods; however, the few remaining intellectuals are voicing their perspectives through writing or other arts.

**Historical Background of Arab Women Writers and their War Narrative**

The contribution of Arab women writers to the Arabic novel has been tremendous, beginning with the pioneering era. In the beginning, only a few Arab women writers wrote; these women tended to belong to an elite class that had more access to education than the rest of women in society. This changed as education became more readily available to Arab women. As they began writing as men to place their marks in Arabic literature, more and more Arab women began to find their voices through their writing about themselves and their concerns. The political situation of the Middle East in recent history, especially the Nakbah in 1948, contributed to the shift in women’s writing from the personal quest to the national quest. As the Arab world witnessed defeats in wars, Arab women began to share the concerns of their society and nation and to write about them in their novels. Other women were so devastated they stopped writing fiction, as in the case of Latīfah al-Zayyāt as well as the Palestinian writer SAmīra Azzām, whom Fadwa Tuqān (a famous Palestinian poet) mentions in her autobiography *Al-riḥla al-asʿab* (The Most Difficult Journey). SAmīra Azzām died of a heart attack after hearing about the defeat of the Arabs during the 1967 war. Azzām, who was better known for her short stories, died as she was broadcasting the Arab defeat (Sha’ban, 1999).
Among the best and most popular novels written by Arab women were about war and the war narrative. The Arab women in this period who focused on national issues and wrote about war were Laṭifah al-Zayyāt, Layla Usayrān, Sahar Khalīfah, Liyānah Badr, Ghādah al-Sammān, and Ḥanān al-Shaykh. Some of the writers during this period, due to the political changes that occurred in the Arab world, shifted to focus their themes on the nation.

Laṭifah al-Zayyāt was born in Dumat, Egypt in 1925 and was educated at ʿAyn Shams University, receiving her PhD in English literature. Her political activism began while she was a student in the university. She identified and was involved with the communist party because of its stance of equality for everyone. Her involvement in politics landed her in jail several times. She held many prominent positions, such as a professor in English and later on a chairperson for the English department in a University; she also represented Egypt in conferences around the world.

In 1960, al-Zayyāt wrote her first novel, Al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ (The Open Door). The setting of the novel is in 1946 in Egypt during a time where there was resistance to British colonialists. Other events that were taking place in her novel were the 1952 revolution and the 1956 war between Egypt and France, Israel, and Britain. The story incorporates the character Layla’s personal and political struggle and links the two together. Layla grows up in a conservative Egyptian household, and as she was coming of age she realizes the restrictions that are place upon her by her father. She is expected to follow the typical arranged marital rules. Layla’s struggles are parallel to those of her nation’s struggles. Ironically it is her brother, Maḥmūd, who resists this norm. As he
writes to Layla during his military service in the Suez Canal, he expresses concern over marriage because he, too, was struggling with his father on the very same issue. Mahmūd writes:

They never experience a grand love, nor do they ever make great sacrifices. They do not linger in the world of the intellect, the imagination, the senses. They marry, they have their children, who are all in the same molds. They think alike, the same thing impresses them, and they have identical preferences and make identical choices. Repeatable patterns and identical molds—that is what it all is, Layla. Masses of people, without any extraordinary spark, people without any powers of invention, and without any special skills or abilities, without any powers of invention, and without any readiness to really love. (Zayyat, 2000, p. 138)

The novel opens with Layla taking part in anti-British demonstrations, and she is punished harshly by her father when he discovers she was out in the streets demonstrating. As Layla witnesses her country’s struggle for freedom, she also faces her own personal struggles for freedom. In her friend Sana’s conversation with her, Layla describes their struggles as such:

Our mothers knew their situation, whereas we are lost. We do not know if we are in a harem or not, or whether love is forbidden or allowed. Our parents say it is forbidden, yet the government-run radio sings day and night about love. Books
tell women they are free, and yet if a woman really believes that, a catastrophe will happen and her reputation will be blackened. (Zayyat, 2000; J. T. Zeidan, 1995, p. 71)

This reveals the many contradictions in Arab society with which youth struggled; whereas their mothers knew their traditional roles clearly, the new generation of women did not know how to maneuver this new-found freedom which it is presumed they had. Yet, in Arab society, a woman who does dare to even believe in this freedom is a woman who becomes an outcast within her own culture and society.

Al-Zayyāt’s character Layla reveals many realistic aspects with which women dealt and struggled. While Layla was being educated in college, she was still expected to uphold her family’s traditional values, not only her family’s rules. When Ḥusayn was writing to Layla and she receives Maḥmūd’s letter on campus, she is profoundly embarrassed that others may have discovered that she was receiving letter from a man, for her reputation will be threatened should that becomes public. Layla reveals the fears and the reluctance she has in claiming her freedom through her acceptance to the engagement of her overly controlling professor, who even interfered in whether or not she is allowed to wear lipstick. Ironically, it was Ḥusayn, a male character, who was an engineer studying abroad and her brother’s friend who gives Layla the strength to pursue her own choices and to make her own decisions (although she was suspicious of him as well). It wasn’t until the end of the novel, amidst the chaos which broke loose in the
battle of Port Said in 1956, that Layla finds the strength to make her decisions and to leave her fiancé to be with Ḥusayn.

Laṭifah al-Zayyāt’s Novel *Al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* (The Open Door) brings a hint of optimism shared by Arabs during the time of independence from colonialism, and with this optimism came the hope for women to achieve the same sense of freedom. Al-Zayyāt only published one other work in 1986, entitled *al-Shaykhukhah wa-Qiṣaṣ Ukhra* (Old Age and Other Stories). She did not write much after 1967 because she was distraught the 1967 defeat by Israel (Zeidan, 1995).

Ṣaḥar Khalīfah is Palestinian and was born in 1941. She began her literary career, like many of the Arab women writers, writing about women’s freedom. Her first book, written in 1974, is *Lam Na’ud Jawarī Lakum* (We Are No Longer Your Slaves), and she wrote her second novel in 1976, *al-Subbār* (Wild Thorns). This novel is about a Palestinian family living under Israeli occupation and the issues they face. She includes in this novel realities of the everyday life of Palestinians in the West Bank, such as working in Israel for better wages rather than facing poverty. She also mentions the societal divisions between men and women and how men are preferred in the society over women.

‘Abbād al-Shams (The Sunflower) is a continuation of the first novel. It includes the same family that was in the *Wild Thorns*, with additional characters being introduced. It still focuses on Palestinians in the West Bank. Her book provides a preview of life for Palestinians under occupation; politics is a main theme because it is incorporated in their
daily lives. In *The Sunflower*, Khalīfah also writes about contemporary political events occurring at the time the book was written, which was in 1980 (J. T. Zeidan, 1995).

Liyānah Badr is another woman writer from the “period of national identity”. She is a Palestinian, but unlike Khalīfah, Badr is a Palestinian in diaspora. Her novel is based on her real-life experience as a Palestinian trying to find her place and her identity while having to move from place to place in the Arab world. She wrote her novel *Buslah min ajl ‘Abbād al-Shams* (A Compass for the Sunflower) in 1979 which focuses on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The story does not have a plot, but instead it is fragmented and jumps from one place to another. It is based on the main character Jinan’s earlier memories. This novel’s format reflects the lifestyle of the author as a refugee having to move from one place to another. She does mention women’s issues, but the issue of the Palestinian struggle remains a priority for the author (J. T. Zeidan, 1995).

Ghādah al-Sammān was born in Damascus Syria in 1942. She graduated with a degree in English Literature from Syria and she later completed her Masters of Arts in English Literature from Lebanon. She traveled to Europe for a few years and in 1964 she settled in Beirut, Lebanon. She believes in individual freedom for both men and women, and thinks men need to fight for their rights just like women. She wrote her first work in 1962, which was a collection of short stories called *‘Aynaka qadarī* (Your Eyes Are My Destiny). Her next book was in 1973, entitled *Rahīl al-marāfī ‘al-qadīma* (The Departure of Old Harbors), which also consists of short stories. This book shifts its focus to include events from the 1967 war and the Palestinian resistance movement as well as social inequality (J. T. Zeidan, 1995).
Ghâdah al-Sammân’s first novel is *Bayrût 75*, written in 1975. It is about two Syrians who escape their dull lives to go search for a better, more liberated one in Beirut. They are totally unprepared for what they face there. The novel focuses on Lebanese society and the social, political, and economic problems facing it at the time. The significance of Al- Sammân’s book is that it foreshadows the civil war before it begins, just as it predicted the civil war in Lebanon would begin later on that year. Al-Sammân follows it with another novel she wrote in 1976 she called *Kawābîs Bayrût* (Beirut Nightmares). This novel is about the war in Lebanon. The main character is not identified by a name; the character is trapped most of the time at home, so there is not too much action happening. The novel consists of 207 nightmares, one dream, and predictions of more nightmares to come. The nightmares are divided like chapters. The character is independent and compares herself to a man similar to the characters in Usayrân’s and Khalīfah’s stories. This novel ends with a positive dream full of symbolism, with different symbols referring to the Arab countries, Lebanon, the Palestinian people and those involved in the civil war (J. T. Zeidan, 1995).

Hanân Al-Shaykh was born in 1945 in Lebanon to a religious Shi’i family in al-Nabatiyya. Her first novel was in 1970 entitled *Intiḥâr Rajul Mayyit* (Suicide of a Dead Man). She presented other works as well; however, her most prominent work, *Hikāyat Zahra* (The Story of Zahra), is about the civil war in Lebanon. *The Story of Zahra* is perceived to be among the great pieces of literary work written by an Arab woman at the time. It was an important contribution to Arab women novelists because it is the first novel in its category to include sexual content that was perceived as taboo in Arab society.
(Zeidan, 1995). This is one of the few books written by an Arab woman that has been compared to the writings of the Arab men by several critics.

In this novel, al-Shaykh succeeds in combining both feminist and nationalist issues into her novel. Like al-Zayyāt’s Al-Bāb al-Maftūh (Open Door), *The Story of Zahra* can be categorized as both as a search for quest for personal identity and national identity. The novel begins when Zahra, the main character, is a little girl and accompanies her mother to her adulterous affairs. She grows up having personal problems of her own while at the same time the war in Lebanon is at its peak. During the war, despite its horrors, the characters seem to gain freedom from societal pressures. This is due to the chaos going on around them during wartime. In Zahra’s case, her life seems to improve during the war; however, how this life appears to improve is questionable.

Zahra appears to be on the verge of madness, and this madness could be symbolic to the madness of the civil war as well. While she has issues connecting with her mother due to her marital affairs, she resented her father as well who treated her and her mother harshly to the point where she compares his mustache to Hitler’s. Zahra is sexually exploited, molested, and raped by several men. She is molested by her cousin and in Africa by her uncle with whom she goes to live with to escape her family in Lebanon. She is also raped by a family friend when she was in Lebanon. Zahra gets married but eventually leaves her husband; meanwhile, she had already been through two nervous breakdowns.

Zahra is the symbol of Lebanon to two characters, her uncle, and her husband whom they feel nostalgic to. Zahra has no control over the exploitation of her body,
which could be comparable to the state her country was in. Zahra’s life comes to a turning point during the outbreak of the war when she meets the sniper, Sami, with whom she begins an affair. Zahra discovers her pregnancy at a time when she is not able to abort it. She confronts Sami with the news, and after his initial angry outburst, he then accepts it and promises her they will get married. As she is blissfully walking home, two bullets hit her back; she is aware that it was Sami who shot her, and as she collapses to her death she wonders why he has killed her:

In all this relationship I never stayed out so late as I have tonight. The evening has descended. The street is empty, except at the barricades. The rain falls. I stumble. I hold on to a telegraph pole to stop some force from dragging me down. My thigh hurts. It’s hurting even more…the pain is unbearable. I can’t go on. I fall to the ground. Fear comingles with pain…in spite of the darkness, I can see it is blood…. Footsteps and voices move closer and then recede. Somebody shouts “Look out. There’s a sniper.” And I begin to scream as the pain leaps up to my neck. “Help me!” My fear makes me quiver like a decapitated chicken and the whole of my past and present runs together in my screaming, “Help me!” (Shaykh, 1994, p. 213)

It is not surprising that a great deal has been written about this novel and why it is considered among the best novels written by an Arab woman. This novel about the

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16 Roger Allen’s book *The Arabic Novel*. 74
Lebanese civil war has been positioned at the same level of merit as the more popular and well-known Arab male writers. Al-Shaykh’s depiction of the characters, especially Zahra, as well as her style of writing, makes it a significant novel and a great contribution not only to the Arabic novel but to the war novel. One important stylistic feature Ḥanān al-Shaykh brings to this novel is the voice of the male characters as well as Zahra’s; the story is also understood from their perspectives as each chapter is written through the voice of a different character. As will be discussed in the following chapters, Iraqi women present a different characteristic and voice to the male characters in their novels.

North Africa saw the same developmental process as other Arab countries after their independence from the various colonialist countries, particularly in the increase of girls’ education. Among the more popular and widely read North African Arab writers is Ahlam Mosteghanam from Algeria. Her novel Dhāyrat al-jassd (Memory in the Flesh) was first published in 1985, and it is the first published novel written by an Algerian woman in Arabic (Valassopoulos, 2007). The story is narrated from the perspective of a male character who was a revolutionary soldier wounded from the French-Algerian war, which is essential because it gives the writer freedom to express issues using a male voice. The novel reflects upon the Algerian war as well a love story between the main character and his old friend’s daughter (Valassopoulos, 2007).

In her book War’s Other Voices, Miriam Cooke refers to the Lebanese women writers who wrote about the war in Lebanon as “Beirut Decentrists”. She describes them as writing about “the dailiness of war.” This “dailiness” is also reflected in the writings of Iraqi women; however, the Iraqi women writers do not share all the qualities Cooke
ascripts to the “Beirut Decentrists” (Cooke, 1987, p. 3). Iraqi women write about their national identity and their love for the homeland in a manner that is not exclusively personal or self-centered. Iraqi women writers interweave a focus on nation with the effect on their daily lives of being Iraqi. As Joseph Zeidan writes in his book Arab Women Novelists, some Arab women shifted their writings from writing for the quest for “personal identity” to the quest for “national identity” (J. T. Zeidan, 1995, p. 228). For Iraqi women, their personal identity and national identity are intertwined and are not separate from each other. The second reason they are different from the “Beirut Decentrists” is that many of the contemporary Iraqi women write from exile and not only from various parts of their war-torn cities; for this reason, the mood is somber and full of nostalgia and yearning for the homeland. Iraqi women could be considered as writing from the periphery and the margins and not from the epicenter of the war. However, in their novels, war is central.

Although Arab women writers have experimented and covered the political, historical, and war story, such as those mentioned, every story is different depending on the space and region they are writing from. Despite the similarities in language and culture and the difficult experience of war, each Arab woman has her own experience from which she writes. These experiences are as distinctive and different as the wars they witness. For instance, the war in Lebanon took on different characteristics from the war(s) in Iraq, even though the Iran-Iraq war overlapped in time with the Lebanese civil war, as both were taking place in the 1980’s. As the Lebanese civil was internal and was fought on the streets of Lebanon, while the Iran-Iraq war was fought against another
nation. It was not until after the war in 2003 that Iraq’s war took on some attributes similar to those of the Lebanese civil war. Here we see a closeness in resemblance when chaos ensued and the increasing lack of safety to civilians in Iraq became an everyday reality.

In addition to the U.S invasion, militias began to form and violence became internal, with many different facets in play. The difficulties and tribulations that arise from war and exile are well-known; however, everyone deals with it and reacts to these difficulties in their own way. Iraqi women’s war experience in that aspect is distinctive, and the way they write and narrate the wars and events in Iraq are exclusive to their war experience. It is their story, different from the stories and experiences of other Arab women who endured political crisis and wars in their nations.

**Women and Their Historical Role as Writers**

Historically, there was insufficient space for women to write. The conditions for women to write were not outstandingly encouraging. In particular women, were absent from writing about the past, and men took it upon themselves to write about women. In search for woman writers in the eighteenth century and the Elizabethan age, Virginia Woolf explains historical women’s writing and she questions why there was no writing by women such as poetry. Information about them and about their lives was absent. Her explanation is that they did not have the financial means or the physical or emotional space in which to write (Woolf, 1991, 49). For women, the material poverty impeded on
their potential to write, and any woman who was gifted in writing faced a society which discouraged her from using her gift (V. Woolf, 1991, p. 53). Yet Woolf explains when middle-class women decided to write, they tended to write novels, among them the famous Jane Austin and Charlotte Bronte. According to Woolf, fiction is the simplest form to write for a woman. She rationalizes this by explaining that it is easier to write taking into consideration the time and resources a woman has, and because of the social norms of society where women tended to sit in the living room and observe people. Women, in Woolf’s view, are better trained to write novels than poetry (V. Woolf, Barrett Michèle, 1980). Whether this statement is accurate or erroneous, writing does not necessarily have a restricted space; hence it is easier to write from the diaspora or within the confinement of the home. Space for women writers is available; however, finding the time may be another issue for writers, specifically women with certain obligations.

Within the context of Iraqi women, despite the limited material accessible to them due to the war, sanctions, and the instability of their living situations, they continued to write and about these particular themes of war. During war, finding a peaceful place to write may be an issue, especially if they are living under difficult situations where mere survival and safety is of the essence. This may well explain why many writers begin their writing ambitions in exile or in a space where they have the time to reflect upon the circumstances they have witnessed and been through.

Additionally, the limited resources available to Iraqi women may have contributed to the rise of their fiction and their novels on war and exile. Just as Woolf explains, not a great deal of material is required for a person to write; hence this may
provide an explanation as to why Iraqi women are finding a space in fiction to present their discourse. This can also shed some light on its convenience as a way to express oneself during war or while in exile, when space is constantly changed and relatively unstable.

Furthermore, women writers had to admit the limitations they had as compared to the opposite sex. These women, at the time, had limited knowledge of the world around them. Their limited experiences were not exclusive to them individually, but to all women worldwide who, largely due to forces beyond their control, had a narrow perspective of the world. What differentiates the women writers from the male writers is their different exposure. There were variant experiences due to the inaccessible world and limitations of the spaces around them. As Woolf notes, “[t]he best part of Conrad’s novel, for instance, would be destroyed if it had been impossible for him to be a sailor. Take away all that Tolstoy knew of war as a soldier, of life and society as a rich young man whose education admitted him to all sorts of experience, and War and Peace would be incredibly impoverished” (V. Woolf, Barrett Michèle, 1980, p. 46). She reiterates the importance of the lived experience and its contribution to fiction in her example of Tolstoy as well in her essay A Room of One’s Own. “Has Tolstoy lived at the Priory in seclusion with a married lady cut off from what is called the world. However edifying the moral lesson, he could scarcely, I thought, have written War and Peace” (V. Woolf, 1991, p. 77). Because, Woolf explains, critics believe a scene in the battlefield has more value than a scene in a shop, then masculine values hold more importance than feminine values. “This is an important book, the critic assumes, because it deals with war. This is
an insignificant book because it deals with the feelings of women in the drawing-room” (V. Woolf, 1991, p. 80).

Similarly, Iraqi women in the past may have had limited knowledge of the world, just as Woolf describes the limitations women had during the Elizabethan age; however, modern Iraqi women had better exposure to the lived experience she discusses. Their writing on war reflect this lived experience, as most of them wrote about a war they witnessed first hand, or wrote about a story someone lived experience.

Another point Woolf makes that is similar to Iraqi women are the spaces and the resources available for them to write. Many of the writers discussed earlier are educated and came from middle class backgrounds and were more likely to hold professions in journalism. The Iraqi writers reveal that they do not have limitations to write even if under difficult situations, because just as Woolf explains, it is not necessary to have too many resources to write. Writing allows women space to express their emotions, feelings and world views while in the confinement of a home or in a limited space and mobility in times of war.

Finally, looking at the works of Iraqi women, one might consider them an additional source or that sheds light to how the events in Iraq unfolded and were narrated through different civilians’ eyes, especially women who, I believe, are the most affected by war and exile in their lives. How do these women negotiate their freedoms or lack of freedoms in times of war, and how do they interact and deal with a known patriarchal society when these women are left alone without the stable support of the family? How do their relationships with other women, people, and men change? Their stories, though
they may not reflect the typical idea of a fictional creative writing to some critics, do, however, shine light on women’s survival and sacrifices in times of chaos and war.

Additionally, just as Arab women in general shifted their writing from writing about the self, their freedom, and social issues, in what Joseph Zeidan refers to as “the quest of personal identity” as they moved to the “quest for the national identity”, so do the contemporary Iraqi women. In their writings, Iraqi women predominately wrote themes about war and exile, and if they wrote stories of romantic relationships or love interests or personal issues in the past, Iraqi women focused their attention on these issues within the context of war, sanctions, or exile. Their writings highlight the strength of Iraqi women, their independence and their will – especially those of Arab and Iraqi Muslim women – which is often misunderstood. Their strength and perseverance often is underestimated through the images or stereotypes society has of women in the Middle East, such as their weakness, vulnerability, and over-dependency on the man and on the family. These texts counteract the gendered stereotypes and characterization of Middle Eastern women as passive, weak, and dependent, an issue Mohanty takes up effectively in her paper “Under Western Eyes”. Mohanty highlights the misconstrued assumption that all women in that non-western world tend to be housed into such categories.
Chapter 2: Iraqi Narratives and their Theoretical Implications

This chapter will present the works of several important scholars that discuss and argue for theories of equality and justice for certain groups otherwise marginalized in society. This is relevant to my study because it focuses the attention on the critical precedence and the prolonged misuse of information in regards to certain members of society or in the world. Iraqi women writers attempt to contribute to distilling some myths and biases otherwise accepted and assumed to be correct. Understanding these important theorists, such as Chandra Mohanty, Judith Butler, and Edward Said (who are just a few among the many who speak out on justice and the postcolonial context binary between East and West), allows us to read particular Iraqi texts with the conscious background of their studies. All of the dynamics come together to formulate and to problematize the context from which these women write.

Furthermore, reading the Iraqi narratives presented in this study on the backdrop of these theories allows a better understanding, perspective, and interpretation of the texts. They provide a certain methodology as well as evidence that help unpack these narratives. These theories and scholarly ideas also help in the confirmation that their voices are marginalized, and this necessitates their messages in their works. They also reveal the problematized framework from which they evolve and write.
Chandra Mohanty argues against the way the West has homogenized women in Third World countries by placing women in certain categories as oppressed, submissive, and passive. This has put them in another inferior physical form which again justifies their domination by Western feminist thinking. Even though Western feminists’ main objective or intentions are to liberalize the “Third World Woman,” they in fact have reestablished a form of political and moral dominance and colonization. Mohanty refers to this as discursive colonialism through a form of “appropriation and codification of ‘scholarship’ and ‘knowledge’ about women in the Third World” (Mohanty, 1988, p. 334).

Similar to Said’s explanation of how colonization took the form of intellectual power over the colonized, Mohanty argues the same discursive colonization has placed all Third World women in one category. By using textual strategies, some feminists have codified non-Westerners as “The Other.” Mohanty describes the feminist scholarship as “inscribed in relations of power...there can be no apolitical scholarship” (Mohanty, 1988, p. 334). Western feminist discourse under the guise of “Western humanist discourse” has assumed privilege over Third World women in what Mohanty calls the “Third World Difference”.

Furthermore, Chandra Mohanty discusses the implication of Western Feminist discourse and the way it categorizes and places “women” into a coherent category where they are labeled as ‘powerless’ and as implicit ‘victims of socio-economic systems’ of male violence. This in turn defines “Third World” women as objects frozen into a mold of victims and whom they are ‘object-who-defend-themselves’ while men are crafted into
the ‘subjects-who-perpetrate-violence’. Henceforth Mohanty argues that men are read as the ‘powerful’ while women are the ‘powerless’. This leads her to the significant claim that “[s]isterhood cannot be assumed on the basis of gender, it must be forged in concrete, historical and political practice and analysis”; therefore, male violence should be read within specific societies (Mohanty, 1988, pp. 338-339).

Within the context of the Iraq war(s), this belief that men perpetrate violence is not an unsubstantiated claim; however, this does not mean this is true of all men. This also does not mean this is a main issue for Iraqi women, as their challenges are mostly the circumstances they found themselves in amidst war. The selection of Iraqi women writers discussed here predominately avoids this violent portrayal of the Iraqi male: quite the contrary. The violence towards the male Iraqi is what is portrayed and conveyed in the narratives of these Iraqi women I discuss; hence they are the victims of war just as much as women are, if not more so. This is where the maternal impulse comes into effect in women’s writings, where we see their support of the sufferings of the Iraqi man within the milieu of violence either through war or perpetrated by the state itself.

Utilizing their maternal impulse, Iraqi women practice a form of agency by writing about the problems of women and men in their society, and in war, they are using that agency which is a form of power. It reiterates the argument Mohanty makes about the misperceived implementer of violence in Western discourse are men which places “Third World” women into the category of being powerless. For Iraqi women this is not the case, because even though they write about hardships, they do not perceive
themselves as victims, seeing instead some men in their society as victims\textsuperscript{17}. This is where the two concepts (Mohanty’s argument and the maternal impulse) are interrelated, as it confirms Mohanty’s argument that this over generalization of non-Western women to be passive and powerless and lack agency is incorrect in certain cases. In the case of Iraqi women writers, they reveal that Iraqi women do possess the power and will to survive war and to live in exile alone and independent.

Additionally, as mentioned in prior examples, the situation exhibits complexities not only through politics and war but also through identity, culture, and how one reads the subaltern or the “Third World” person as the “Other”. A major problem with this is that when this “Other” is nameless and faceless and perceived as inferior, it is easier for the consciousness to accept the atrocities and injustices implemented onto to the “Other”, an issue Judith Butler is concerned with. The writings of Iraqi women help dispel the concerns Butler raises by presenting an image of a humanized illustration of Iraqis. These Iraqi characters are real people with real problems with real sufferings, and only when one reads their stories and understands their suffering will one feel the empathy needed to break the dehumanized perceptions Butler discusses.

\textsuperscript{17} This is evident in the writing of Iraqi women and their depiction of the men (See Chapter 3) when they write about the mandatory participation in war as soldiers. The men were tortured and killed in prisons, and men were disappearing while families were unaware of their whereabouts. This does not mean they do not see other women in their society as victims as well, but they both share these hardships. However, the main protagonists reveal a kind of independence and steadfastness which in itself reveals some form of power and agency for Iraqi women.
Identity and the Faceless Other

In analyzing the binary identities between East and West, one can perceive the complexities and challenges that Iraqis and particularly Iraqi women face. These complexities go beyond politics and war but also through culture and traditions, and the superiority/inferiority relationship between the two worlds. In other words, the conflict is also about dominance, which takes many shapes and forms. An example of this is seen in al-Rāḍī’s writing as well as in other Iraqi writers’ works that will be further discussed. In her frustration of reading one’s culture as more important or superior, she expresses this after she listens to the Voice of America about American children dealing with the war. She states that “Mrs. Bush, the so called humane member of that marriage, had the gall to say comfortingly to a group of school kids, ‘Don’t worry, its far away and won’t affect you.’ What about the children here? What double standards, what hypocrisy! Where’s justice?” (al-Rāḍī, 2003, p. 41). This is another illustration of how the Iraqis and in this instance the Iraqi children are not taken into consideration when trying to comfort American children. One can see the Iraqi children here as the “Other”, the “subaltern”.

An attempt to explain the theories about the Other and its implication on how one sees the Arab world in general, which in turn justifies some aspects or conditions that were the direct result of war, are seen in Iraqi writing. The theories about the Other perhaps helps answer some of the Iraqi Women writers voices as they expresses their confusion and anger in living through the war and sanctions.
Many different epistemological norms and methodologies have been implied by various thinkers to explore difference and the Other. Some have looked through history to the origin of humanity and human nature, while others sought to understand the psychological and the unconscious. All of the various strategies employed allow us to justify why or how a person sees him/herself as subject while the rest as Other. Edward Said asks in *Orientalism*, “[c]an one divide human reality, as indeed human reality seems to be genuinely divided, into clearly different cultures, histories, traditions, societies, even races, and survive the consequences humanly?... there is any way of avoiding the hostility expressed by the division, say of men into “us” (Westerners) and “they” (Orientals)” (Said, 1978, p. 45).

Said realizes that there are natural divisions between people, but questions how these divisions can be possible without falling into oppression and inhumanity. He mentions the division between East and West, where the latter is the subject, while the East is called Oriental, object. The term “Oriental” in Said’s text represents a discursive knowledge produced by colonialism in its production of the Other as inferior. This is not only about the domination of an area or land, but also a form of intellectual power, and one of the main reasons why colonization occurred (in this case, this term refers to the British and French colonization of the Middle East and Asia). This intellectual power he calls Orientalism (Said, 1978). Chandra Mohanty utilizes the same term “Colonization” discursively referring to the colonization of “Third World women” by Western feminists. Trying to analyze Iraqi women’s narratives and texts allows us to avoid falling into the assumption of Orientalism, particularly in terms of reading texts about Iraq and the war
experience from a Western perspective only while ignoring the experience of the victims of war and violence. The stories told are not from the periphery but rather from those who were at the center of the conflict and who experienced it firsthand.

Another form of discursive colonization is argued in the writing of Chandra Mohanty, who focuses on how Western feminist discourse has read Third World women. She questions this form of homogenization of the Other: “[w]hat is it about the cultural Others that makes it so easy to analytically formulate them into homogenous groupings with little regard for historical specifics?” (Mohanty, 1988, p. 340). As Judith Butler explains, “[i]t is not simply, then, that there is a “discourse” of dehumanization that produces these effects, but rather that there is a limit to discourse that establishes the limits of human intelligibility” (Butler, 2003, p. 35). Butler, like Said and Mohanty, questions the derealization and dehumanization of certain people who do not fit the cultural norms of the “West”, therefore erasing them to the point they are no longer existent or worthy enough to be mourned or grieved.

The implications of perceiving a people in a certain mode can be profound and justifiably detrimental. In a recent paper on the effects of distance and vagueness of others and its ability to lessen the guilt and empathy for the victim, Kenneth Worthy states, “distance of almost any kind – physical, emotional, social – makes violent, destructive acts easier” (Worthy, 2013, p. para 3). Therefore, it is important for one to put a face to the victim which is absent in the case of Iraqis, as Butler elaborately discusses. Worthy confirms: “[p]roximity and face-to-face encounters encourage empathy and provide the context for all sorts of genuine emotional connections to arise, including
those that lead to caring and nurturing choices” (Worthy, 2013, p. para 5). He cites the study conducted by Stanley Milgram on distance and obedience. In it he found that people are willing to inflict more harm on individuals they cannot see or know, but the situation is different if they are close, when they can see their faces. “The subjects in his experiments notoriously (and shockingly) were willing to inflict great pain and possibly permanent harm or even death on victims. But they became less willing to do so as the victim was moved progressively closer to them” (Worthy, 2013, p. para 4). In this sense, distance and lack of knowledge about a people makes it easier to accept the pain and destruction imposed on them; this decreases when the victims is no longer nameless and faceless.

Similarly in her paper “Precarious Life”, Butler explains the process of derealization and dehumanization. This process refuses to acknowledge certain deaths from being counted as a loss. The derealization becomes violent when humans are no longer considered humans, since when people are no longer seen as human beings they become unreal. She explains: “[i]f violence is done against those who are unreal, then, from the perspective of violence, it fails to injure or negate those lives since those lives are already negated. But they have a strange way of remaining animated and so must be negated again (and again)” (Butler, 2003, p. 33). This derealization of the Other, as she argues, strips it away from the right to be mourned and grieved, because it is neither dead or alive. These live are not considered lives, therefore removing them from the human framework. As Butler explains, this is the beginning of the process of dehumanization which occurs at the level of discourse:
Certain lives are not considered lives at all, they cannot be humanized, that they fit no dominant frame for the human, and that their dehumanization occurs first, at this level, and this level then gives rise to a physical violence that in some sense delivers the message of dehumanization that is already at work in the culture. It is another thing to say that discourse itself affects violence through omission. If 200,000 Iraqi children were killed during the Gulf War and its aftermath, do we have an image, a frame for any of those lives, singly or collectively? Is there a story we might find about those deaths in the media? Are there names attached to these children? (Butler, 2003, p. 34)

The lives of Iraqis in general have been vague and faceless. Whether this is done on purpose or accidentally, the Iraqi narratives that Iraqi women write help dispel these vague images of the Iraqi people by painting a picture of ordinary human beings affected by war. It reveals that they have pains and suffering. They feel and hurt; therefore, they are beings victimized by greater aggressions. The ability for people to remain faceless and distant allows violence to be perpetuated on a people. This is why one must be critical at what is presented and how it is presented. This is what makes the narratives of war and exile, and what I believe has become the Iraqi national narrative, to take precedence over any other literary theme in their writings. This national narrative applies to the Iraqi male writers as well as to female Iraqi writers – this is why it is important to
understand the solidarity formed by Iraqi writers to write, narrate, and discuss the events in Iraq which so violently shaped a nation and its people.

These dehumanized, derealized beings become faceless, without a life, without a story. Therefore, they never lived. They do not qualify for an obituary or else one is forced to recognize them as humans. Butler questions which lives become worthy of recognition and the right to be grievable and mourned? The obituary here plays the role of the intermediary between the private and public mourning of a life as she states that “[i]t is the means by which a life becomes, or fails to become, a publicly grievable life, an icon for national self-recognition, the means by which a life becomes noteworthy” (Butler, 2003, p. 34). Iraqi lives become faceless and nameless; therefore it is difficult to humanize them or mourn them. When reading them in narratives, in texts as protagonists with names, a life and a family, these lives become more real and less dehumanized. These Iraqi narratives provide a significant contribution to dispel these images, to make these characters real. To read one of the many stories of Iraqi women and to hear their suffering puts a human touch to it.

Butler gives contemporary examples of how Americans have been able to justify violence onto the Other. She questions this justification by asking “[t]o what extent have Arab peoples, predominantly practitioners of Islam, fallen outside the ‘human’ as it has been naturalized in its ‘Western’ mold by the contemporary workings of humanism?” (Butler, 2003, p. 32). All the questions highlighted by these scholars attempt to resolve the binary divide between East and West. This divide had been problematized in “Western” discourse through the assumption of power and knowledge. Iraqi texts play a
critical role in blurring this divide. When their texts are read in the West and a space is allowed where Iraqi women’s narratives are analyzed and interpreted, then this binary and myth of the Other becomes more authentic and real.

“The first man who, having fenced in a piece of land, said ‘This is mine,’ and found people naïve enough to believe him, that man was the true founder of civil society. From how many crimes, wars, and murders, from how many horrors and misfortunes might not any one have saved mankind, by pulling up the stakes, or filling up the ditch, and crying to his fellows: Beware of listening to this impostor; you are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all, and the earth itself to nobody” (Rousseau, 1754). Rousseau believed that evil began when man established property for himself. This therefore has yielded two types of inequalities. According to Rousseau’s natural and political inequalities, what modern inequality and power has achieved is to establish a connection between two kinds of inequalities, making them one and not two as Rousseau recognizes. What the latter kind of power has attempted to do is to establish a norm of physical superiority, making power and authority possible through the possession of certain traits as they see fit to be more superior. Of course, these traits that are superior are what the self-possesses while the inferior physical traits are what the others possess. This idea can be generalized to include sexuality, gender, race, and so on. This is interconnected to the same argument Mohanty, Butler and Said, are concerned with, in which there are certain powers that exist in our society through which man creates hierarchies of power. Power is related to material and physical possession which is also the cause of evil. This is all related to the universal injustices and inequalities we
live in and the binaries between East and West, for what is more unequal than the possession of wealth as opposed to the state of poverty? It is interrelated to the Iraqi political context and it is a universal issue as well. Power is related directly to violence atrocities and war. With the struggle for power, and especially material and physical power, the need for aggression and war will not exist. Rousseau further notes that man’s natural state possesses two traits: one is the love of self and the other is the pity and compassion for the suffering of others. This is related to Butler’s argument of the difference between humanizing a people and dehumanizing a people, which results in a lack of compassion for the suffering of others when there is a sense of dehumanization of the Other. Furthermore, Said discusses another kind of power: the power of knowledge. This kind of power also established inequalities as it establishes certain false assumptions of the Other as it is established through years of inaccurate scholarly texts and writings. This power is therefore interrelated to the one Mohanty discusses, which is the power Western women have had over transnational women in developing countries and the lack of agency these women possessed as they were assumed to all be weak and passive. All of these powers that I discuss and include form hierarchies and assumptions are all interrelated to the Iraqi political context, as it questions the agency one possesses to tell their stories to understand their problems, and to give precedence to their sufferings.

In his book Orientalism, Edward Said tries to explain how this term “Orientalism” came into existence and how it became the basis to justify colonizing the Other. Orientalism, according to Said, does not only represent the domination of an area or land, but also a form of intellectual power. This is one of the main reasons why colonization
occurred, in particular the British and French colonization of the Middle East and Asia. This intellectual power he calls Orientalism. Chandra Mohanty utilizes the same term “Colonization” discursively referring to the colonization of “Third World women” by Western feminists, which will be discussed further on in this study.

According to Said, British colonialists saw one form of establishing superiority over the Other, and in Egypt in particular, through the power of knowledge. Knowledge of the Other is another form of physical superiority of the mind and logic. This was used to justify the reasons why Egypt should be colonized because they knew its history and its origin. As Said explains: “[k]nowledge and power, the Baconian themes. As Balfour justifies the necessity for British occupation of Egypt, supremacy on his mind is associated with ‘our’ Knowledge of Egypt” (Said, 1978, p. 32). Said explains how they used this justification of colonization through the power of knowledge: “[t]o have such knowledge of such a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it. And authority here means for ‘us’ to deny autonomy to ‘it’ – the Oriental country – since it exists, in a sense, as we know it” (Said, 1978, p. 32).

Returning to the point made about establishing norm of superiority, Said highlights this issue when he discusses how Balfour sees this superiority in the West rather than the Orient because he sees its culture, politics and religion superior: “[t]he Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, ‘different’; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, ‘normal’” (Said, 1978, p. 40). According to whom were these characteristics placed? Of course, the characterization of the Oriental took place through the norms of the “self”, which in this case is the Western “self”. Because the person
establishing these frameworks is Western, then the norm which is the right and superior
norm is through Western perception. Through these established Western norms, the Other
is judged to be inferior because he/she is “different” “not normal”, which are very
abstract terms. This brings us to an important question about how “normal” and
“different” are defined, and who has the agency to define these terms?

In terms of the physical inferiority of the Orient, Said gives many examples of
how British colonialists Balfour and Cromer justified rule over them. Cromer states in his
book *Modern Egypt*, which Said quotes: “[a]lthough the ancient Arabs acquired in a
somewhat higher degree the science of dialectics, their descendents are singular deficient
in the logical faculty. They are often incapable of drawing the most obvious conclusions
from any simple premises of which they may admit the truth…. He will contradict himself
half-a-dozen times…. He will often breakdown under the mildest process of cross-
examination” (Said, 1978, p. 38). First these colonizers established the inferiority of the
mind; then they produced characteristics according to Western norms to be inferior. They
use these perceived inferiorities as a justification to institute them as the Other. This in
turn moves the Other even farther away from the norm, and in this sense, being less
human. And when one is seen as far as possible from the self, it is easier to accept them
as different, as the Other, as inhuman; therefore the same laws of sovereignty,
independence, and humanity no longer apply to this dehumanized Other.

This “Third World” difference is historical and oppresses most women in the
Third World because it is under this production that Western feminists “colonize”
through the system of homogenization and systemization of the oppression of these
women in the Third World. It is through this that Western feminists implement this power (Mohanty, 1988, p. 335). When women are placed in one particular category, then there is an assumption of sameness of women with shared oppression. So an average Third World woman is seen as oppressed, sexually constrained, ignorant, poor, uneducated, traditional, domestic, family-oriented, and victimized. This is in contrast to the self-represented Western woman which is perceived as modern, educated, free to make her own decisions, and have control over her sexuality (Mohanty, 1988, p. 337).

Mohanty explains that there is a difference between Western feminists representing themselves and Western feminists representing Third World women. This takes on the same form and justification as Balfour and Cromer had in seeing the Oriental as inferior; therefore, they cannot represent or rule themselves. This, in Mohanty’s view, is what makes the Western feminist recolonize the very same women they seek to liberate by imposing their own Western cultural norms and ideologies onto these women.

There are analytic principles found in Western feminist discourse towards Third World women that Mohanty criticizes. She lists three categories of the analysis that are used to produce these ethnocentric universals. First, the strategic location or category of “women” and the assumption that it is a coherent group without taking into consideration their differences assumes they have similar interests and desires regardless of class, ethnic or racial differences. The second category is using methodologies that are uncritical in providing proof of universality. The third category is the model of power and struggle they imply and suggest towards Third World women.
Mohanty argues against these kinds of assumptions towards these women and the implications that arise as a result of this. In rebutting women as universal dependents, she explains: “if shared dependencies were all that was needed to bind us together as a group, Third World women would always be seen as an apolitical group with no subject status” (Mohanty, 339). According to her, it is quite the contrary: “it is the common context of political struggle against class, race, gender and imperialist hierarchies that may constitute Third World women as a strategic group” (Mohanty, 1988, p. 339).

The colonial move towards Third World women arises from the supposition that all Third World women are oppressed. These beliefs then put women in generalized categories that strip them from their agency, keeping them in the “object” status. This prevents these Third World women from ever becoming subjects like their Western counterparts can. Butler agrees with Mohanty’s analysis and the frameworks that place Western women in the position of agency while imposing the Western normative culture on Third World women. These frameworks misread their agency and produce inaccurate conceptions of what Third World women wish for.

The binary divide between East and West has caused great strife throughout history and up until the present. Many scholars have tried to explain the complex relationship that had been formed between the two worlds and the dominant frameworks that have been placed against the Other. Western Colonization of the East played an important role in establishing such frameworks of the Other as static, oppressed, physically and politically inferior, and invisible. These frameworks arose from the various discourse that was placed on the Other via the superiority of power and
knowledge claimed by Western civilization. It is the political and moral inequalities that produced these dichotomies and divisions between the two worlds.

If we treat the Iraq war as a narrative from the postmodern gaze of interpretation, then the Iraqi women are reinterpreting and rereading the war through their representative works. In this way, one is able to understand the interpretation of the events through their readings of the events; however, this is potentially problematic as it shifts the focus from the factual and historical truths that occurred within the narratives and as it is represented within the text. As Michael states:

Indeed by highlighting history, postmodern fiction demonstrates its inextricability from sociocultural discourses and the specific power relations inherent in the continuous reproduction of those discourses. In its direct engagement of its readers through a common received history, which it both co-ops and subverts, postmodern fiction reveals itself as culturally responsive and belies the charges of aestheticism often leveled against it. (Michael, 1996, p. 42)

In postmodernism, the idea that history = truth is challenged, just as fiction is a narration, from the postmodernist perspective history is a constructed narrative as well, the only difference is one deems it as truth, “postmodern theories and aesthetics do not deny that events occurred in the past but rather question how events are recounted” (Michael, 1996, p. 41). Hence history is problematized and its facts are questioned just as is fiction is questioned as fact. One can take on another perspective because this has the potential to allot space for women to engage in history and contribute from a female perspective,
since historically it was men who constructed the narratives of history. Just as one reads the Iraqi narratives of fiction and finds accurate events that actually took place, postmodernist fiction includes historical events in the narratives, “regardless of the accuracy of the context, as a radical means of illustrating history as a culturally constructed narrative rather than a series of raw unbiased facts or events” (Michael, 1996, p. 41). While there are some truths in the way that history is perceived in the postmodern gaze, there are limitations to the way the texts can be read. Fundamentally all texts due to historical concern are politically readable. We cannot postmodernize the text as it depoliticizes the texts because these texts are historically constructed. They themselves narrate history, politics and the articulation of suffering, which is all rendered through the narrations of the Iraqi writers. This employs their discourse to explicate their experience of war and exile through their experiences and their stories. These narratives focus on the idea of exile and what it means for a woman to be exiled. There is a whole register of suffering revealed in their narratives which blurs the lines between fact and fiction; hence the postmodern reading would be inappropriate. Why is this the case? Because the whole concept of the Iraqi narratives is to articulate the story of suffering through their main narrative plots and their sub-narratives, and it is not a subjective affair. War affects a nation, and then it affects a community collective, which in turn affects the subject, the women, who are suffering from the psychological trauma and the consequences of war.

Then there is the material destruction of the nation state. These effects are interlinked through the destruction of the psyche along with the destruction of the physical land, which in this instance is Iraq. In the postmodern sense it is only
psychological, the person’s psyche\(^{18}\) is what matters: it is the subject and nothing else. However, here it is more than just the subject – the history, the community; the society and the nation are all at play as well. They are all intertwined and interlinked through a historical postcolonial conscious since their writings are politically driven. They utilize their narrative fiction because it allows them to go as far as they can with it without drifting away from fact and the narration of events. At the same time, it gives them freedom to not follow certain boundaries a nonfiction narrative might otherwise impose. The use of imagination and the narration of events from an Iraqi female gaze, their maternal instincts in protecting the human side of their nation, and their feminist impulses that reveals strength in the female Iraqi voice all provide a realistic and a crucial perspective to the Iraqi national narrative.

In a similar stratum, the postmodern view blurs the lines between fact and fiction. The dichotomies between reality and representation become indistinctive which delegitimizes the power structures that may have existed. The view of the postmodern impulse is that representations and reality are culturally constructed, and thus are not as rigid as one perceives them to be. “The notion that things and events are always already represented problematizes the conventional distinctions between reality and representation, life and art, fact and fiction, truth and falsehood” (Michael, 1996, p. 37).

\(^{18}\) The psyche is a term in “[p]ostmodern psychology [which] relies on using a range of different methodologies rather than a singular approach, to embrace the complexity of reality and avoid oversimplification. Postmodernism challenges a systematic, analytical approach to the understanding of the human psyche, as inherently flawed by the impossibility of taking a detached, 'objective' position; and favors instead a transmutable position which may maintain the possibility of taking conceptual hold of a self that is itself decentered” (Childers, Hentzi, 1995 p.71-72).
This is significant as it question the cultural norms, weakens the hierarchal structures in society, and allows room for change. If these representations are constructs, then they can be deconstructed. The meaning of texts is not fixed and can be continuously reconstructed and redefined. Interpreting a text becomes a process that is continuously changing, allowing for rereading of the texts from different perspectives.

Narratives in the postmodern context introduce new ways a narrative is told and do not necessarily fit the conventional structure of a story. For instance, a narrative can be fragmented and mixed with other forms of narration; such fragmentations are present in the novels of Iraqi women. Flashbacks, different narrators, and the use of various languages are tools Iraq women writers use in their texts – in this particular instance, a postmodern reading allows more freedom for the narrative to take any shape and form it chooses to take. Iraqi women do not appear to adhere to a certain strict form or style in their writings as they also experiment with flashbacks and create their own styles in their novels and narratives. One good example of this is Hadīyah Ḥusayn and her use of a dead child, ‘Amal, to narrate the story of a family destroyed by the war. This same family’s story is continued through the adult niece whose name also happens to be ‘Amal. Luṭfiyah al-Dulaymī’s Sayiddāt zuhal jumps from one narrator to another in each chapter and from one era in history to another. It has all the features of a fragmented, frenzied text.

The scholars that were discussed attempt to resolve the boundaries set between two worlds. Butler writes:
We would be wrong to think that the First World is here and the Third World is there, that a second world is somewhere else. These topographies have shifted, and what was once thought of as a border that delimits and bounds, is a highly populated site, if not the very definition of the nation, confounding identity in what may well become a very auspicious direction. (Butler, 2003, p. 49)

Within these boundaries, Mohanty sees a relationship that shapes the periphery. “‘Woman/Women’ and the ‘East’ are defined as Others, or as peripherals so that (Western) man/Humanism can represent him/itself as the center. It is not the center that determines the periphery but the periphery in its boundness that determines the center” (Mohanty, 1988, p. 335). These scholars problematize the relationship between East and West through inequalities produced by Western norms. They used different frameworks to discuss the various struggles faced through certain forms of colonization. Discursive colonization is what Mohanty and Said emphasize in defining the Other. By claiming the Other as incapable of ruling themselves or representing themselves, Western discourse instituted a form of hierarchical claim over them. Judith Butler sees a discourse that went even further to the point it had erased, derealized and even dehumanized the Other. This kind of discourse does not even acknowledge the Other as human anymore. Once one has been erased, then their existence is no longer acknowledged. In order to counteract this discourse, Iraqi women’s texts provide a framework where one can redraw this dehumanized image into a humanized one that belongs to a people who have endured suffering under certain power structures and discursive colonization.
By establishing themselves as the primary subjects, the West was able to control discourse about the East. Edward Said states, “[a] certain freedom of intercourse was always the Westerner’s privilege; because his was the stronger culture, he could penetrate, he could wrestle with, he could give shape and meaning to the great Asiatic mystery” (Said, 1978, p. 44). Because the West was able to formulate such a discourse and such an image, it allows us to question: how were they able to do all of that? If we contextualize this, we know that this only occurred through certain kinds of powers. These powers took various shapes and forms, whether it was through the state and government ruling over certain parts of the world by means of colonization, or through discourse which placed the power of knowledge over the Other.

Colonization of these lands have explicitly ceased; however, the discourse that had been developed and produced to make the Other as inferior has continued and has had great implications towards how we perceive the East up through the present. Edward Said writes about how deep Orientalism had established itself in our consciousness, noting that “[t]he Orientalist reality is both antihuman and persistent. Its scope, as much as its institutions and all-pervasive influence, lasts up to the present” (Said, 1978, p. 44). One can find a plethora of evidence to prove how this kind of discourse has affected the colonized, in addition to the colonizer, and which Franz Fanon highlights in *Black Skin White Masks*. The inhumanity of all of this is when one begins to profoundly believe in such a superiority/inferiority binary between Western and Eastern civilization. It begins to take shape in all forms of life and formulates inaccurate perceptions, frameworks, and discourse. The tragedy of all of this is when these false man-made perceptions transfer
into reality, whether this reality is explicit in the way we act towards the Other or implicit where it is deep down ingrained in our unconscious mind.

This is what Iraqi women writers attempt to describe in their texts: how have these atrocities, sanctions, and experiences caused by war been justified? The double standards that are placed and practiced towards one people and not the Other are examined through their narratives. The theories that have been discussed provide us with an understanding of how these world views are accepted in society today. They did not originate recently but rather through a long term process of the dehumanization of a people based on their races, background, and/or geographical space. There is a need for the voices of Iraqis and especially the Other voices of Iraqi society such as women. To read and understand what they have to say about their experience gives us valuable insights and helps us unmask the Other, turning them back into humans again. We see how their lives have been affected by the tragic events of their country and how the West reads or identifies with those lives. Investigating the works of Iraqi women writers and their works of fiction, in particular the novel, allows a discussion of how different the Iraqi story can be from what has been perceived and overlooked by stereotypes, biases and assumptions, just as mentioned by the examples of scholars and their arguments against these misconceptions.

Judging from the manner in which Iraqi women narrate the wars in their novels, these Iraqi writers appear to have a burdened responsibility to narrate the wars, sanctions, and exile, and to discuss the lives of many women and men that have been compromised, cut short, and destroyed due to their nation’s political tragedies. For this purpose, many
of the novels presented here include events and sub-stories (sub-narratives) of random Iraqi women and their experiences and tribulations. Whether these women existed in reality or not, these are stories familiar to Iraqis: they have heard them or have known someone who have been subjected to a similar fate, just as Zangana explains in the forward to her novel *Nisāʾ ’alā safar* (Women on a Journey). Her readers assume she is writing about a character she knew or encountered. She explains that readers identify characters in her novels with real Iraqi women they knew in their lives, which reveals just how close the reality of the situation truly is in these ‘fictional’ stories narrated by Iraqi women in their novels (H. Zangana, 2007).

**Iraqi Writers, Feminist Impulses, Maternal Instincts**

“Authored by a male God and by a godlike male, killed into a ‘perfect’ image of herself, the women writer’s self-contemplation may be said to have begun with a searching glance into the mirror of the male-inscribed literary text” (Gilbert, 1979, p. 15). In Western literary culture, the male writer usually wrote about women as the angel, originating in the Middle Ages after the image of the Virgin Mary. Virginia Woolf see this “angel in the house” as one of the most destructive image created by males written about women (Gilbert, 1979, p. 20):

Lacking the pen/penis which would enable them similarly to refute one fiction by another, women in patriarchal societies have historically been reduced to mere
proprieties, to characters and images imprisoned in male texts because generated solely, Anne Elliot and Ann Finch observe by male expectations and designs. (Gilbert, 1979, p. 12)

Similarly, Arab men writers had their own prototypes and characters for women in their fiction. The image of the virgin women can also be seen in men’s writing’s. Hassan Al-Nassar writes of the “virgin widow” and compares her to Zayynab, the Prophet Muḥammad’s granddaughter and Ḥusseīn’s sister. However, it can be read more as a symbol of the tragedy of Ḥusseīn’s life and the suffering of Iraqi Shi’ah women using the symbol of Zayynab. These metaphors of suffering are especially important for Shi’ah’s, which is evident in his mention of the name of the seventh Shi’ah Imam Abu al-Jawadayn (Musa al-Khadim) (Khādim, 2010; Shirazi, 2010). It does not appear to be problematic in terms of the images invoked of Iraqi women since Iraqi women utilize similar metaphors images in their novels. However, the significance lies here on who holds the tools, the pen, and who narrates the tragic story of Iraq. Now Iraqi women take this powerful role of discourse and narration upon themselves.

The emergence of Arab women writers allowed a different image of the female in Arab literature. In particular, Iraqi women writers introduce new images of the Arab women, such as the lonely but independent and resilient woman, with new concerns and issues as they relate to the war and exile they endured. It is not evident that Iraqi men in their literary writings fell into dichotomy between them and women Iraqi writers, because just as Iraqi women wrote of the suffering of Iraqi people, so did a few Iraqi men writers
who resisted the lavish incentives the regime offered to those who propagated their actions. One example is the Iraqi poet Hassan al-Nasser, who chose exile after he was coerced to write propaganda poetry. Al-Nassar wrote a poem entitled *The Widow*, referring to the many Iraqi widows suffering in Iraq. Describing the widow’s suffering and their prayers for the men to return home, he does not, however, reveal their victimhood as a weakness. He writes:

The widows are Bridges

Under them flows the rivers of sorrows. (Khādim, 2010)

There were many Iraqi writers who supported the wars and the battles, but such as there were Iraqi men writers who were supported by regime in order to promote their wars, there were Iraqi women writers as well. Iraqi women writers during the decades of war also wrote of the male combatant hero and their triumphs, and did not really focus on the sacrifices and pains of the women (Khādim, 2010).

Historically the image of the female in Arab literature was confined to certain images produced by male writers. Fortunately the simplistic and limited images of women in Arab literature have since evolved. The difference between Arab women writers and Arab men writers is in the contribution and introduction of new forms of writing to the field. Among those contributions of the Arab women writers which differed from the Arab male writers was their introduction of new characters. The women writers included female characters who were heroines of the story. The female characters were
now professional and independent; they held good professions such as doctors, journalists, and other occupations. This was an innovation in the Arab novel because the Arab men writers normally included women in only two types of roles. The first role was the mother who was quiet and loving, and very passive and submissive. The other role that male writers portrayed women in was the role of a prostitute (J. T. Zeidan, 1995). This simplistic image of the female character is rarely the main focus in the literature of Arab women; however, this does not mean the image of the passive mother ceases to exist in the fiction of Arab women writers. In particular for the Iraqi novelists, the mother figure is still existent in the novels. These two types of characters were no longer the main focus in the writings of the Arab women because Arab women were concerned about the women’s place in society, their problems and issues, and how to improve them.

Arab male writers wrote about foreign women in their novels when they wanted to include female characters (J. T. Zeidan, 1995). In Arab men’s fiction, the images of the women characters differed from those of the Arab women writers. Arab male writers tended to use foreign and minority women as heroines, not Arab. Arab women writers began writing about Arab women as heroines and diversified the character types they wrote about (J. T. Zeidan, 1995, p. 233).

Nevertheless, Arab male writers are not completely to blame for such limitations in female characters in their novels. This only reflects the reality of their gender restrictive society, as they were not exposed to women outside their immediate families due to male/female segregation. Therefore the only characters that a male writer could describe best would be his mother, and the prostitute is the only other female in Arab
society that had the exceptional freedom to mingle with men. This is where men would
go to be if they wanted to be with women. The foreign woman had typically more
freedom than Arab women, and many Arab males would more likely have relations and
contact with foreign women, so they were more familiar with them. Another important
aspect of this is that writing about certain issues or relationships with a foreign female
character is more accepted in Arab society than writing about the same topics using an
Arab female character. Male writers were limited in terms of their description of their
private relationships with female characters such as a wife; this however has gradually
become more accepted.

In Arab women’s novels the male characters were not very compelling either,
because of the same reason of restricted access to men. This is the same argument
Charlotte Bronte had as to the way Victorian women in England wrote about male
characters, yet Elaine Showalter believed it was more of a self-censorship on the part of
women writers. The Arab women writers focused their male characters on the father
figure who is more conservative and a male chauvinist or a younger more liberal man
who thinks he is liberal but deep inside he is a chauvinist as well (J. T. Zeidan, 1995).
The male characters were not very developed, partly because many of the women were
first-time writers who did not have sufficient expertise in the literary genre. They tended
to write more of an autobiographical type of novel which was mainly based on their own
lives – hence the similarity of themes in the beginning of their writings. This is not the
current case, however. Arab women writers developed this literary art a great deal, and
with the gradual change of society, more and more issues are presented and discussed in their fiction.

Arab women writers contributed to the enrichment of Arab female characters as they described them through different roles other than the typical mother or wife. Most female characters of Arab women writers do not accept marriage and motherhood. The rejection of patriarchal society was a visible feature for the women writers, as they were critical of the way the father controlled the family and the way the mother submitted to and implemented rules of oppression on the daughters.

Although these women spoke of issues in their novels they struggled with, they did not find or provide solutions to the ills of their societies. The main characters of these novels, as Joseph Zeidan mentions in his book *Arab Women Writers*, fall into a vicious circle in which after the girl rebels and tries to set herself free she finds herself taken advantage of by society or a man, only to return to her home, broken, finding solace in the lesser of two evils. This is because these women fail to see that although a female might find power to set themselves free, they need society to accept them as such.

In addition to this, the second half of society, the men, also have to have a tolerant and liberal view of women. As is in al-Zayyāt’s novel *al-Bab al-mafiḥ*, Layla, the main character, is only able to fight for her independence when a male character encourages her to. In Ḥanān al-Shaykh’s novel *The Story of Zahra*, just when Zahra feels she might have a chance for a decent life without being sexually and physically exploited, the man she briefly confides in and who gives her a short lived hope betrays her as he puts two bullets in her back.
Other ways Arab women wrote differently than men is through their use of language. They focused less on the form and the rigid structure of the language and included more colloquial Arabic and foreign words in their dialogues. Their command of Arabic was not as good as the Arab male writers; for one thing, some of the women were very young when they wrote, and others were educated in foreign schools in which Arabic was not too emphasized. Some women such as Collette Khouri and May Ziyadah wrote their first poetry collection in the French language before they began writing in Arabic (J. T. Zeidan, 1995).

Another aspect that is distinctive for Arab women writers are the use of colors to express emotion or the description of moods, which was the innovation of the Arab women writers. There is a higher sense of color in their writings and it is found that they use colors in their novels to describe various things such as feelings, death, and sexual experiences. One reasoning behind it is that the woman’s surroundings and her decorating space in the house gives her this awareness of color. The beautification of women and their cautiousness of what they wear and how they look also provides them with a deeper understanding of the variety of colors; therefore this is more readily employed and reflected in their writings (J. T. Zeidan, 1995).

If one analyzes all these works, the conclusion would be that these Arab women wanted to get their point across to the general public that they were not really concerned with the writing styles or maintaining the traditional complex language use traditionally seen in Arabic novels. Perhaps this was done on purpose; they could have used this as a sign of rebellion against the traditional Arabic writing, although one might doubt this was
the case. When they set out to write, these women were not very experienced and many of them were unsuccessful in their writing careers. Many just wrote one or two books and then stopped because the themes of the works were already tackled in the first book; writing more about the same topic might be too redundant and dull for the readers (J. T. Zeidan, 1995).

Arab women today are more aware of their surroundings and are more educated. The development of Arab women novelists was not an easy path, but their struggle became stronger as times went by and Arab society began to modernize. Arab women were able to establish their own standards in their writings and tackled the issues that specifically concerned them. Through their writings, Arab women were able to express their views, convey their feelings, and allow their voices to be heard.

Similar to their Arab male counterparts, women found opportunities to publish in the rising popularity of the printing press which first began in Egypt. Many women’s magazines developed in an attempt to provide Arab women with not only a space to write but also to find an audience, as Labiba Hashim explained during her introduction of her woman’s magazine, *Fatāt al-Sharq* (Young Woman of the East) in 1906: “it is a place where women could publish, but which ‘men of the East’ would also enjoy reading ‘from the hands of its women’” (Booth, 2001, p. 47). As Labiba Hashim perceived it, Arab women are more capable writing about themselves and their intimate lives, which in turn will attract more women readers as they can more readily identify with the same gender issues. This was the pioneering era for Arab women writers. This period saw the emergence of a few elite women writing – they began as they were concerned with the
development of Arab women in their society, especially towards their knowledge and education. They however kept a conservative view towards women’s role in society or in terms of dress; some women, notably, were not against the veil and wrote defending it. Overall, the quest for personal identity saw more outspoken Arab women writers that wrote about their personal issues and concerns, such as freedom to choose in marriage or to dress and act in certain ways. These types of themes in Arab women’s writings coincided with the fight for independence form colonialism and imperialism in that part of the world. As the situation in the Arab world deteriorated and Arabs saw themselves defeated, such as in the 1967 war, Arab women shifted their focus to national concerns. They now had a more important cause to focus on in their writings.

Has this shift continued to this day? The tremendous increase in women’s writing in the Arab world introduced a variety of themes and writers, such as Nawal el-Sa’dawi, and many like her do not separate their national concerns with the freedom of women. El-Sa’dawi can credit much of her success to her shocking style of writing and in her conveying her views, but this is how she was able to be heard and received in the West. This is necessary because there is an audience in the West which many Arab women would like to reach. Unfortunately, the reception of Arab women writers in the West is contingent on how sensationalist they are and how much they distance themselves from their religion and traditional culture. Only certain women get the fortunate circumstance to be translated; meanwhile, the rest are left to publish for a minimal Arab audience that does not put their literature at a high level. It should be noted that this does not stop them from writing. Nevertheless, the future for Arab women writers is brighter, and they are
better equipped to write more about the issues they please. Many are doing just that. Their novels are more complex, their characters more developed, their writing styles and forms are more creative, and they are introducing new themes. They are more involved in their society and they are writing about the female experience in that turbulent part of the world in their novels that are focused, such as in Iraq, on war and exile. These Arab women writers and their fiction express and experience a life which is essential for the reader to understand. These experiences provide Arab women writers a space to express and create superb novels that narrate the tragedy of a people. For one to understand such a people, one should look into their literature to find the deep common humanity we all share.

What makes a narrative a feminist text, and do Iraqi women who write novels write from a feminist perspective? It is important to distinguish between a feminist text and a feminist writer. The label, “feminist”19 can be self-ascribed; that is, it is up to the writer or scholar to call themselves a feminist or not. A text however can have feminist features, or as it is referred to in the book *Feminism and the Postmodern Impulse*, by Magali Cornier Michael as “feminist impulses”. She elaborates:

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19 The term “feminist” connotes a person who stands for and believes in equal rights for women and in the change from the traditional patriarchal gender roles. Feminism and feminist theory has taken on different meanings and movements throughout the years, among them is transnational feminism which represents women from developing countries who ask for gender rights but from their perspective and not from (as they perceive) a “Western” influence. Feminists are often perceived as rebelious and misunderstood, hence some women may advocate women’s rights but they are hesitant to attribute themselves as feminists. Another issue is that some women may advocate certain aspects of women’s equalities while other may differ in the kinds of freedoms and approaches, therefore presently the movement has taken in several directions and embodiment and lacks strong cohesion.
It is necessary to distinguish between texts written by women and feminist texts. Since women necessarily write from a culturally constructed position that is gendered, women’s writing is likely to contain insight into the specific and shared experiences of women in a culture that has relegated them to a position inferior to that of men. Feminist fiction is written from a specific position assumed in relation to gender as cultural constructions. (Michael, 1996, p. 29)

According to Michael, feminism is a position one takes that is interrelated to gender, and a man or woman can be a feminist, despite the predominant view that a man is still in the position of authority. More women tend to be feminist because many of them are not in a position of authority and are more likely to be conscious of issues related to gender bias. Therefore, there is a distinguishable difference between feminism and women who write fiction and their texts. A text can include feminist issues and have certain feminist elements, but that does not designate the text a feminist work as a whole (Michael, 1996). In this same instance, one can find feminist impulses in Iraqi women’s narrative fiction. This does not however entail that it is a representative feminist work in its entirety; neither does it make the Iraqi women writer herself a feminist. Awareness of the feminists attributes in the texts is necessary, however, to understand the Iraqi female perspective and the gendered issues she intends to point out that are exclusive to her experience.
A lot has been said about feminism, and much of it has been critical and misperceived, mainly due to a lack of understanding as well as a lack of cohesiveness within the dogma itself. For that reason, many thinkers and writers shy away from the term, and scholars such as Mohanty are critical of some of its approaches. Within the Arab framework, a well known writer who proudly attributes herself to be a feminist is Nawāl el-Sa’dāwi. Other Arab writers may share similar aspirations in terms of women’s rights and freedoms but may not openly ascribe to be feminists. Writers such as Luṭfīyah al-Dulaymī are active in women’s issues in the Arab world. She writes about the historical roles of Iraqi women such as in her 1999 study *Sharīkāt al-maṣīr al-ābadī: al-mar’ah al-mubdi’ah fī ḥaḍārāt al-‘Irāq al-qadīmah* (*Partners in Eternal Destiny: The Creative Woman in the Civilization of Ancient Iraq*). She as well as other Iraqi women writers specifically write about the experience of Iraqi women within their fictional novels. They narrate stories about Iraqi women who live through and witness the wars in Iraq. It is perceptible to see sub-narratives about several Iraqi women within the framework of their main narratives to give voice to these women. The women writers may not palpably identify themselves as feminists for writing about Iraqi women; however, writing and revealing the strength and fortitude of Iraqi women gives it a feminist quality and impulse.

Furthermore, one can sense the feminist characteristics of the text implicitly but not explicitly. It is not evident that Iraqi women write their narratives under the gaze of feminism. This does not mean that the way they write and the strength and patience revealed by these women does not represent a feminist vein. The endurance and survival
of Iraqi women alone in isolation and their ability to hold on under the extreme conditions they face are representative of the way these texts convey their feminist impulses. It confirms their independence and power, and if these women weaken in times of crisis, so do the men in their narratives; even more so than the women, in point of fact.

This leads to an interesting feature in Iraqi women writers in which they are inclined to present a maternal instinct. They present women characters as they struggle to hold things together, to carry on and survive, while at the same time presenting the apprehension of the male counterparts, as they are their sons, brothers, fathers, and lovers. The men are not, however, considered the enemy, as this is not their concern; the real enemy is the chaotic nature of war and the lawlessness of it, which produces the beastly features of man.

**Writing, A Form of Power**

According to Gilbert and Gubar, writing is a form of power through which one can formulate history. In patriarchal Western culture, the pen is perceived as a metaphor for the penis. It is a symbol of power like the sword; the male is the creator of the text which embodies this power. The correlation of the pen and the male’s phallic part “is not just the ability to generate life but the power to create a posterity to which he lays claim, as in Said’s paraphrase of Partridge, ‘an increaser and thus a founder’. In this respect, the pen is truly mightier than its phallic counterpart the sword, and in patriarchy more resonantly sexual” (Gilbert, 1979, p. 6). This power the male historically held in Western
literary tradition is not different from the literary tradition held in Arab literature; it too was dominated by the male writer who possessed the same power as did his Western counterpart. As Stefan Meyer explains, the Arabic novel took on a patriarchal attribute, aspiring to enlighten the masses as it took on this paternalistic role in society (Meyer, 2001). This explains the renowned didactic nature of the early Arabic novel. Western women writers began to challenge this male literary authority at an earlier time than did Arab women. Arab women writers did not explicitly confront the male dominated pen, and they wrote in similar ways as their male counterparts, but gradually began to make a space for themselves and to utilize this pen on their based on their own requisites and creation.

In literary paternity, the same way an author both generates and imprisons his fictive creatures, he silences them “and kills them - the pen here becomes mightier than the sword in its power” (Gilbert, 1979, p. 14). Just as Anne Finch describes the pen as a tool men that utilized which was foreign to women (Gilbert, 1979), Iraqi Women use writing as a tool of discourse which gives them a kind of power over their stories and narration. Writing fiction is especially empowering since they have the power to create and construct their characters as well as to formulate their personalities. By narrating the stories they feel relevant to the Iraqi lived experience. Even if these stories are drawn from and reflected from the realities and their lived through experience, or are a reflection of the stories of real people, it still gives them agency and power. This ability to narrate and construct the characters in addition to creating their own endings allows women to have this agency not found through other real life means, such as changing the
outcomes of the political situation, or in a society where this power is limited to certain woman in society. Lynne Hanley also supports the standpoint of the power fiction has over our memories and our past. As she states:

They shape our memories of the past and they create memories of pasts we have never had, of experiences not remotely like anything that has ever happened to us. And these narratives of exotic experience may have the most power over us of all, because we can’t challenge their authenticity with the evidence of our senses. We can’t say to H.G. Wells, ‘No, it wasn’t like that when Martians landed in my backyard’. (Hanley, 1991, p. 4)

Here the task of fiction plays a critical function in narrating the past and the experiences one lives through in times of war, exile, or any experience the novelist narrates. The tool of the pen and the role of fiction is evident here. That is, it is not merely written for leisure, but to create a historical reality through the discourse and the story it tells; henceforth the critical need to read and understand the fiction of Iraqi women and the themes of war and exile. Their story of pain and suffering is the story a nation experienced and its people endured. Just as it is important to read the story of the male Iraqi writer as he narrates his nation’s memory and of the tragedy and experience, it is also important to read the narration of the Iraqi woman writer that has a story to tell of war beyond the front line, beyond the battlefields but into the homes of Iraqis, Iraqi women, their loneliness, and their seclusion.
Another important aspect is that the war experience in Iraq cannot completely be compared to America’s war experience in WWI, WWII, or Vietnam, just as each war cannot be compared to one another, because each war has its own setting, circumstances and space. These wars were also fought away from the nation, whereas in Iraq the war was fought within the country and the casualties were civilians who experienced, heard, and survived the rockets, the shootings, and the bombings, which serves as another reason why these narrations are vital for us to read and understand.

**Essentialism and its Consequences**

When reading Iraqi women’s texts, one understands the issues they have to deal with in their society under the problematic political conditions they face in their nation. However, one cannot assume that all Iraqi women partake in the same experience and relate to the same conditions. Perhaps the Iraqi women mentioned in the texts and narratives are a fragment of Iraqi society – they may relate to the majority, but this does not mean it represents all of Iraqi society. Just as in any experience, there are some instances where Iraqi women did not endure hardships, or they belonged to a certain class that did not experience similar situations. This is particularly relevant before the 2003 war, where the ruling class may have been immune to certain hardships. In this light, it is important not to essentialize Iraqi women into one category. This is what makes the narratives idiosyncratic, as Iraqi women present sub-narratives that attempt to represent the many Iraqi women that make up Iraqi society and their numerous experiences.
In a somewhat similar note to Mohanty’s argument, in “Decentering The Center: Philosophy for a Multicultural, Postcolonial, and Feminist World”, Umma Narayan explains essentialism and points out the major issues that might impede or are obstacles to women’s rights and feminism. Narayan argues that essentializing cultures and labeling women into groups like “Indian Women” and making general assumptions that all “Indian Women” share common cultural values is incorrect and problematic. Women’s experiences within a nation state may differ greatly according to class, education, and geography or region. She gives a good example of *suttee*, which was not practiced in all of India but was then made part of the culture by a colonial power; this then helped establish this practice as part of “Indian culture”. This in turn produced culture through colonialism, which as she explains promotes rather than decreases the idea of cultural essentialism (Narayan, 2000).

Another very important point Narayan mentions is when one divides cultures into Western and non-Western cultures. Oftentimes, non-western women are depicted as marginalized, underprivileged, submissive, and illiterate, whereas Western women are seen as modern, independent, and well-educated. This is a very distorted and generalized view because they are assuming all women in the West fit into this framework and they do not face problems of poverty or violence and discrimination. This turns very diverse people into a homogenous group. She blames colonialism for creating these binaries between the Western and non-Western cultures to differentiate the civilized West from the uncivilized Other. This, however, was far from reality because of the unjust actions the colonizers engaged in.
Cultural essentialism in the Middle East can hinder feminists’ progress. This hegemonic “cultural identity” often operates in a way that discourages women from challenging the status quo; otherwise they will be seen as deviants if they do not conform. Anti-essentialists argue that there is a need to redefine the image of culture as not being separate entities or as having boundaries that are very distinct from each other. While Narayan argues that this should be done by restoring history; it does not mean that it will be relevant to changing the static picture of culture.

Narayan brings out good points by advocating anti-essentialism. Essentializing culture does prevent women from moving forward or changing the traditional cultural identities reestablished or emphasized in some instances by colonizers. Culture does not necessarily have strict boundaries that one cannot change. Although there are many cultural practices and traditions many people try to preserve, there are at the same time cultural practices many are willing to do away with. With the rapid movement of people in today’s society, cultural essentialism will become vague as more and more people will choose to adopt different cultural identities that best fit their needs. While this may not be true for all of societies today, as many are turning to more religious and traditional ways, transnationalism, globalization and technology, can blur some boundaries between cultures and people.

In addition, since women face more social surveillance and control, it is thus easier for men than women to adopt different practices as it best fits their need. This is an issue feminists repeatedly focus on. Narayan explains that a woman who does not follow
the status quo is considered a sellout (Narayan, 2000); but will a man that does not follow
the status quo or preserve his cultural values be considered a sellout?

One therefore needs to be cautious when analyzing works by Iraqi women into
assuming they are all a homogenous group. Many of these Iraqi women writers may
belong to a specific social class that had better access to education or assume an elitist
perspective. The Iraqi women writers I focus on belong to different sectarian groups from
Iraq and had different backgrounds, whether they spent all their lives in Iraq or began
writing from diaspora. Yet despite their differences their unity is within the topics and
themes as reflected in their writings. Although they may have an idiosyncratic approach
in their writing and in developing their own style of fiction, their work shares intersecting
realities that reflect their pains and everyday struggles.

Gayatri Spivak in her infamous essay “Can the Subaltern Speak” problematizes the
subject, and puts forth the question of how the “Third World” subject is represented
within Western discourse. She argues that western intellectual production is complicit
with Western international interests (Spivak, 2010):

The subaltern’s whose identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable
subaltern subject that can know and speak itself. The solution for the intellectual
is not to abstain from representation. The problem is tracing the subject to offer an
object to the representing intellectual. How can we touch the consciousness of the
people, even as we investigate their politics. (Spivak, 2010, p. 285)
She says there is a problem of representation that cannot be ignored. In this instance she asks whether or not the subaltern speak from the other side of the international division through the epidemic violence of imperialist law and education (Spivak, 2010, p. 283). After deep analysis and critiques of Western elite intellectual philosophers such as Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, and the like, she concludes that the subaltern cannot speak (Spivak, 2010). To what extent will a certain voice be heard over others? Iraqi women writers attempt at giving a voice to Iraqi women and to highlight their suffering, but do they represent all marginalized voices in the society? To be sure, not all Iraqis think the same or have the same political ideologies. Although the novelists happen to agree on certain issues on Iraq, they are not a clear representation of all Iraqi society, particularly all Iraqi women as they belong to certain class, namely those who were educated and mainly belonging to the middle-class. It is true that most Iraqis and Iraqi women had access to education due to the generous socialist policies of the country, but that does not mean all women had access to education. The plurality of Iraqi society makes it more challenging to get a clear representation of all voices, especially all women’s voices.

In Wrestling your Ally, Sonia Saldivar–Hull writes of the problem with white liberal feminists and their placement of colored, Third World women on the periphery of the literary canon. Her argument is of the exclusion of Chicana women from important literary texts such as the Norton Anthology of Literature of Women, noting that “Chicana writers have been exiled from the pages of important texts” (Broe, 1989). These women who exclude other minority women from the cannon are just as guilty as the men that have excluded them. She argues for the need to confront the contradictions Western
liberal feminist have of “Other” women. “White middle-class women who fetishize an abstract marginalization, oblivious to the concerns of the alienated women who exist only at the periphery of the women’s movement, the contemporary exiles of the feminist literary and critical projects” (Broe, 1989, p. 183). How does this relate to women of the Middle East, who oftentimes can be misrepresented or utilized for political agendas? The literature of women of the Middle East has also been excluded from the literary feminine cannon until only recently as there are more translated works available to be read and critiqued. But to realize the importance of not misrepresenting the case of Iraqi women, their oppression and the call for the need for an invasion is a great example to begin with.

A significant reason for the study of Iraqi women who write about their homeland and the experience of war and exile is to provide a counter narrative of the situation in Iraq from the point of view of Iraqi Arab-Middle Eastern women. Oftentimes the image of the oppressed Arab women serves as a basis to colonize, conquer, and attack, such as the case of Iraq and the justification of its invasion. Haifa Zangana discusses how Iraqi women residing in America were utilized to argue for the case of war, referring to them as “colonial feminists”, “between Iraqi women and the colonial feminists claiming to speak on our behalf” (H. Zangana, 2007, p. 94). Zangana critiques these women who took it upon themselves to speak on behalf of the Iraqi women and were used by the Bush administration to promote the invasion of Iraq, noting that “colonial feminists spared little concern for their sisters who would suffer. The war has been, in the final analysis, a war on Iraqi women” (H. Zangana, 2007a, p. 85). Nada Shabout also explains how Iraqi women were utilized to argue for the independence of Iraqi women from their oppressive
lives in her essay entitled *Images and Status Visualizing*. Iraqi women under the Western-American gaze Iraqi women remain subjugated and the specific intention is to liberate them to the status of American women. “In other words, the new colonial rhetoric of the ‘democratizing project’ that replaced that of the old colonial ‘civilizing project’ has been extended to Iraqi women, perpetuating the dominant binary oppositions favored by the West” (Shabout, 2010, p. 152).

While Baghdad was being shaken to its foundation by B52 bombings, and while US-led troops were using thousands of tons of DU explosives and cluster bombs against the population, destroying much of the Iraqi civilian infrastructure that had been rebuilt after the 1991 war, members of WFFI made more than two hundred media appearances. (H. Zangana, 2007a, p. 88)

Certain voices of Iraqi women were allowed to speak before the onset of the war who then became the representatives of Iraqi women’s voices under the claim of liberating them, a false assumption that Zangana refutes. This is another example of how the real Iraqi voices were marginalized and the women who had to endure the bombing and living under the difficult conditions of sanctions and bombing were yet to be heard.

Women in general are also perceived as irrational and emotional, but Iraqi women subvert these images, revealing through their narratives that they are able to survive in exile on their own as well as under the duress of war and sanctions. Isolation, loneliness,
and pain are all characteristics found in their narratives, but these impulses are also shared with their Iraqi male counterparts.

Marginalization of people in society and the suppression of certain voices and perspectives leads to the idea of power and inequalities. Who had rights over certain representations? And who has authority to speak for a community or a society? White middle class Western women? Or is it Iraqi expatriate women or elitist women? The origin of inequality in the human species, as Rousseau explains, takes shape in two forms or kinds, one physical and the other political and moral. The physical inequality in man is through age, health, body, mind, and soul, while the moral and political is through authority, power, possession of greater wealth, and honor (Rousseau, 1761). The physical inequality is caused through nature while the latter is caused by man him/herself. Both kinds of inequalities affect humans and their abilities to achieve equality.

These two kinds of inequalities have not been resolved throughout history and have been a struggle for the human ever since its origins. Perhaps their shapes and forms have shifted or evolved into new forms and shapes in our modern times, yet these inequalities exist even in our current society in which we live in, a society that we claim is modernized and civilized. While these two forms are equally important in the struggle to find equality, I intend to focus on the moral and political form of inequality that Rousseau explains as the “prejudice of others”. This political and moral inequality is differs from the physical because it is controlled and “authorized” by man. This perhaps will allow us to understand the frustrations expressed in the writings of Iraqi women in regards to the war in Iraq. The people in Iraq did not have any power or authority over
the events that took place in their country; they lived under an authoritarian government that dictated to them what they can and cannot do. They were not permitted to refute the war, it was not permissible to resist going to war, and if they did they were heavily chastised or killed, accounts of which are narrated by Iraqi women’s novels. The Iraqi soldiers were impoverished and yet they had to pay for their uniforms, something the narratives also mention. Another part of the power struggle are the powerful nations that invaded Iraq. Again, Iraqis found themselves against another violent struggle against a powerful character that caused destruction, death, and physical and emotional damage to a nation.

Through this type of moral and political inequality man justifies or establishes the Other as inferior in physical and in nature. By establishing this physical inferiority of the Other, man justifies his superiority, power, and authority over the Other. Contemporary scholars that explain this kind of inequality which served as the basis for racism, dehumanization, and the colonization of the so called Other; these ideas serve as a powerful backdrop for a discussion of Iraqi women novelists and their work.
Chapter 3: Narrating the Victims of War

This Chapter will present certain themes Iraqi women focus on in their narratives, paying particular attention to the manner of which they approach the male in their writings. They depict and write about the male soldier, which is a archetypal image of a man in narrative themes on war; however, they also provide a different view of the male. From this standpoint they present their suffering and their victimization. This reveals the maternal instinct Iraqi women write from as well as the feminist impulses that are not necessarily hostile to their male counterparts. This is an important characteristic because it allows us to read their works from the place they situate themselves. It is a powerful position, hence allowing us to read them from that position of power.

The Male as a Victim of War

In her introduction in *Women and War*, Jean Bethke Elshtain discusses the gender paradigm imposed on men and women in the West, where the man is a representative of war and the warrior, and the woman is a representative of peace. In Hegel’s term, women represent “the beautiful soul”, which is a pure and innocent view of the world. The culturally constructed dichotomy between genders presumes that men are violent and women are nonviolent nurtures of family and children. She argues that these socially
constructed identities are not a real reflection of women and men during war; however, it is setup to maintain the roles of women as civilian noncombatants while men play the roles of warriors and soldiers.

These paradigmatic linkages dangerously over shadow other voices, other stories: of specific males; of bellicose women; of cruelty incompatible with just-war fighting; of martial fervors at odds – or so we choose to believe – worth maternalism in women. No conscious bargain was struck by our collective foremothers and fathers to ensure the outcomes. Rather, sedimented lore-stories of male war fighters and women home keepers and designated weepers over war’s inevitable tragedies-have spilled over from epoch to the next. (Elshtain, 1987, p. 4)

This important statement uncovers an essentialist belief that women are the victims of war while men are the perpetrators of it. Relating this to Iraqi women’s writing on war, one observes the contrary of this image; they do not always portray the man as the aggressor or the warrior, although the image of a soldier still remains since it is men who go to the war front and fight.

Elaine Showalter writes in her book Literature of Their Own that Victorian women wrote male characters through their own standpoint and fantasies of a man and were ignorant of the real nature of man. “Therefore, women’s men were all absurd,
contemptible and unrealistic; all were either angels or devils” (Showalter, 1977, p. 134). The duality of the male hero was a reflection of a woman’s idealization of man.

The main characters Iraqi women in their fiction are Iraqi women who struggle to maintain a normal life amidst the chaos. They also create characters of Iraqi men and soldiers who are unwillingly positioned in a place they did not choose to be. These soldiers are forced to put on a uniform they did not choose to wear. In her first novel, Zubaida’s Window, Iqbāl al-Qazwīnī writes: “The soldiers who die today are the same soldiers who died yesterday, but are dying one more time. They die, then come back to life to die once again. Then the cycle begins again until the spark of life has completely disappeared” (Qazwīnī et al., 2008, p. 11). If one wishes to perceive fiction as an ethnographic image of Iraq, one will find fragments of reality within the women’s narrative which are evident in their writing as they are heavily influenced by their experiences as Iraqi women living in war-torn Iraq and in diaspora.

There are fundamental components to war that are unavoidable, such as death, destruction, soldiers, and casualties, and therefore these components are naturally considered to be a part of war literature. The soldier, one of the main figures in writing about war, also acquires certain attributes in the literature. Paul Fussell in his book Great War and Modern Memory on the memory of World War I is blamed for producing this image of a soldier as a victim of war, as if the war has no effect on any other part of society but only on the soldier (Hanley, 1991, p. 31). In war there are many victims, such as women, children. Everything living and non-living gets affected by it and that cannot be ignored, but also the role of a soldier in war cannot be ignored either. Suffering occurs
at all levels of society and to all members, such as the individuals Iraqi women try to write about in their fiction, and yet they do not ignore this characteristic of a soldier. This explanation given by Hanley as to why women write characters of men with such attributes:

All concerns of wives and children are ultimately deferred to the necessity of making the soldier ready to desert them. Perhaps this institutionalized infidelity is what makes it so difficult for many women writers to connect to the men they love with the men who make war. Few women writers like to see their lovers as killers. (Hanley, 1991, p. 135)

Iraqi women describe the Iraqi soldiers in a manner some feminist writers may criticize, which is to approach the soldiers as the victims. But Iraqi women stretch this victimhood a bit more to include the male as victim in time of war or in the struggle to salvage the nation. So does this make this image of the male or soldier inaccurate or biased? If it is taken within the context of Iraq and within the context of Iraqi society, then drawing this image of the soldier provides power to the women who survive and have the ability to not just survive the hardships of war but to sympathize with the wounds of soldiers as well. This power should not be considered in a negative manner but rather in a positive light for it prevents the essentializing in which one tries to avoid in regards to women of that geographical region of the world.
In regard to the Iraqi context, in Iraq it is understood that a soldier is supposed to be heroic, strong, and willing to die for his country willfully, especially through the image of martyrdom. When writing the character of a soldier or a man and of the vulnerabilities of the soldier that rejects the soldier’s role as well as the soldier’s image, this in turn reveals the true image of a soldier rejecting that image of the willing martyr. It uncovers the false heroism and machoism that was often times encouraged and endorsed during the Ṣaddām regime.

The image of the idealized man viewed as the hero soldier is not clearly present in the narratives of Iraqi women, or even the man comes to the rescue to save the woman, the absence of these fantasies like narratives reveal the realism they use to write in their fiction. They were not writing about idealized romantic relations anymore, but they are writing about real life relationships broken due to the circumstances of war and politics.

The literature by women in America who wrote about WWI, present a different memory of war, which does not focus on the “sad tale of the soldier”, but Hanley continues to explain “but even these feminist challenges to the male canon focus on the memory of the front. Though they expand the zone of war to include the “home front”, they still imagine war as a particular place one is at in a particular historical moment” (Hanley, 1991, p. 33). The historical memory of the particular place depends on the war and its circumstances. One cannot ignore the particular space of war because of its cause and effect, and what happens on the battle affects what happens on the home front, for instance in terms of the missing or killed soldier, losing the war, and the overall cost of war. In the particular context of the wars in Iraq, the particular memory and space is
dependent on the war one refers to, for the case of the Iran-Iraq war there is a distinctive space between the home front and the battle fought by the soldiers; however, this was not the case for all of the geographical regions of Iraq.

The Persian Gulf War was fought in Kuwait but was followed by debilitating sanctions, and during the last war of 2003 there was no such thing as a home front and battlefront for Iraq and the Iraqi people. The war was fought on their land and on their turf; therefore there is no distinction. The casualties were not merely soldiers on the front line, but civilians, civilians that died of rockets, of bombs dropped from the air, from explosions, from snipers and from any use of a deadly weapon that was available during the war. That particular experience can be narrated by those who lived through the war in Iraq whether male or female.

Iraqis who lived in exile also wrote about the war but from the periphery, from a safe haven, but did this give them a reconciliation of comfort? What then did they find problematic if they were not present? This absence from the nation while at war opens up new problems and tragedies for Iraqis. Memories that haunt them of the past they struggle to come to terms with; the fear of the unknown of what will befall their shattered nation, and the fear of the safety of their families and loved ones. They feel helpless and handicapped, passive and not proactive, which results into guilty consciousness with consequences that land them into therapy and depression in a cold, lonely land. This is a feature several Iraqi women mention when they describe life in exile, when it is usually in the West; their description of the exiled land is frequently cold and lonely.
Luṭfiyah al-Dulaymī Novels: Ḥadiqat ḥayāḥ and Sayyidāt zuḥal

A seasoned Iraqi writer who witnessed the challenges Iraq faced in the past several decades and is currently living in ʿAmmān does not consider herself as a writer from the periphery but as an Iraqi writer who witnessed some of her nation’s turmoil. She endured a brief exile in France only to be brutally mugged, al-Dulaymī decided to live out the rest of her exile in an Arab country neighboring Iraq. Al-Dulaymī focused her latest novels on the themes of war and exile. Like other Iraqi novelists, she felt the turmoil and the atrocities of her country should take precedence over other themes in her narratives (Al-Dulaymī, 2010).

In her most recent novels, Luṭfiyah al-Dulaymī narrates similar experiences by Iraqis such as other writers have, especially the experiences of Iraqi men. In her book Sayyidāt zuḥal, sirat nās wa-madīnah, 2009 (Women of Saturn, A Tale of a People and a City), she illustrates the way Iraqi women writers have shifted their focus to the Iraqi national narrative that has become steeped with war, death, oppression and a plethora of hardships and atrocities.

Sayyidāt zuḥal (Ladies of Saturn) and Ḥadiqat ḥayāḥ (Ḥayāt’s Garden) are two of the most recent fictional novels written by the Iraqi author Luṭfiyah Al-Dulaymī. Her most recent novels are a reflection of the chaotic state in Iraq and the agonies of war on its inhabitants. In her latest novel, Sayyidāt zuḥal (Ladies of Saturn) published in 2009, al-Dulaymī describes her novel as a biography of a people and a city. Ḥadiqat ḥayāḥ
(Hayāt’s Garden) was published in 2003 which she wrote “two month before the occupation of Iraq and the fall of the regime” (Obaid, 2010). These two novels hold many similarities among each other especially in theme and tone. Sayyidāt zuhāl, the most recent novel of hers, emerges as a continuation of the quotidian stories of struggles Iraqis faced in light of the turmoil they were witnessing. Although Ḥadhīqat ḥayāh was published before the war, remnants of the previous wars and the sanctions had a profound effect on Iraqis. With the onset of war the situation in Iraq deteriorated. Sayyidāt zuhāl details the new calamities they had to deal with in their city, Baghdad, through a series of stories different characters went through as a result of the war. War and the question of exile are very much the main themes of both of the novels, whereas her previous works dealt with other social issues Iraqi faced in the past. Ḥadhīqat ḥayāh and Sayyidāt zuhāl both chronicle the lives and stories of Iraqi women trying to live in war-torn Baghdad and the men that are and are not present in their lives.

In her novel, al-Dulaymī clarifies the role of the male characters, revealing how the regime tortured them through the cutting of the tongue and castration in order to emasculate them. She explains that there are two types of masculinities: one that is biological and the other derived from tradition and society that contrasts itself to femininity. There is a difference between the masculinity that builds civilizations and humanity and the masculinity as actions and manners. Those who belong to a form of masculinity that is violent and justifies killings and violence usually also targets the males who oppose them (Obaid, 2010).
Al-Dulaymī’s style and form and her language use is often described as musical and harmonious and full of imagery, but the way she compiles the events in her novel is quite different (Obaid, 2010). Al-Dulaymī jumps from one character to another, not concentrating on one main story followed from the beginning to an end. The events jump from one time to another, making it a challenge to follow in some instances. This is especially observed in Sayyidāt zuhal where she intersects the present with the past in her attempt to tell a story of her city, Baghdad, and its historical and current state and experience. Her depiction of her main character as holding several identities and names also provide us with a vague designation which can also cause uncertainty in the identity and the character to the reader. The vagueness of the identity was purposely done in her novel Ladies of Saturn as she explains it through her character Ḥayāt al-Bāblī.

Ḥayāt al-Bāblī is in search of her uncle Qaydar al-Bāblī. She is also waiting to be with her lover Nājī al-Hajali who is present as an image or a memory in her life and whom she recalls stories about throughout the novel. She describes him as the only beautiful reality in her life in the midst of war. She does meet with him on occasions, but throughout the story she is waiting to reunite with him. Nājī al-Hajjālī becomes the symbol of patience and hope that love can bestow upon a person.

As the story begins in Baghdad in April of 2008, Ḥayāt inquires about her identity: “Am I Ḥayāt al-Bāblī, or am I someone else? And who is Assia Kan‘ān, that one that I hold her passport?” (al-Dulaymī, 2009, p. 9). She asks, “Can others know who we are when we do not know ourselves? Is it possible for others to know us better than we know ourselves? Perhaps this is possible when we are in love, but in war, we are merely

137
nameless and anonymous numbers, unknown, without a past and without a future” (Al-Dulaymī, 2009, p. 19). The main character in the story *Sayyidāt Zuḥal* is Ḥayāt al-Bāblī, but she is also Assia Kanʾān, and at one point she is Zubaida from the time of Dawūd Basha as well. These names hold symbolic meaning to the identities of these characters. The name Ḥayāt in Arabic means ‘life’ and al-Bāblī refers to roots of her family going back to Mesopotamia and the Babylonians. In an interview with al-Dulaymī about her book *Sayyidāt Zuḥal*, she describes Ḥayāt as the core of the story, as the heroin and one of the many faces of the female life, the protector of life, and the messenger of love (Al-Dulaymī, ND). Assia Kanʾān refers back to the Arab heritage and culture of Iraq as well as the name Zubaida al-Tamīmī, for which al-Tamīmī is a name of one of the major Arab Bedouin tribes. Luṭfīyah al-Dulaymī comments on this confusion of identities and of Ḥayāt’s as she explains, “It is not mysterious, but it is a temporary confusion in her identity (Ḥayāt) within the great disorder the country is living through. A confusion she went through while she was under the pressure of fear and facing death in the cellar of her house or the cellar of her vision, and among the chaos of events she loses her ability to determine her identity. So she is in between accepting that she is Ḥayāt al-Bāblī or carrying the name of Assia Kanʾān that she carried in her passport, or between submitting to the personality of Zubaida al-Tamīmī from the time of Dāwūd Pasha, 1824 in Baghdad (Al-Dulaymī, ND).

Al-Dulaymī attempts to clarify the reasons for the mixing of names or their insignificance in the story through Ḥayāt, the main protagonist as she explains:
Every time I completed a booklet and I return to it I am surprised by the disappearance of names and the events become interconnected, it erases all our names and becomes related to all of us so I recreate the compilation of names for it only to disappear over and over until I gave up my attempts. The thought of losing the names and intersecting them frightened me, and I lived a fear that was ten times more terrifying, for what had happened to Hāla in the Abu Ghurayb prison could have happened to me, and what the men of al-Qaida did to Manār and her family is what happened to Rāwiyah and perhaps what occurred to Lama, is what exactly happened to Helen. What the prisoners did to my mother in the beginning of the seventies could have happened to me in the nineties; and whoever hung my brother Mājid in 1991 is the same one who abducted Fatina, my uncle Qaydar’s wife, and castrated my divorcee, Ḥāzim. (Al-Dulaymī, 2009, p. 20)

Here she tries to explain why the names of these characters are irrelevant, because it could have happened to anyone in Iraq, not just one person or another. No one who was there in Iraq escaped the wrath of these tragic events that took place in their city, Baghdad. If one tragedy happened to one person, another one happened to another, to the point that she could not keep up with the names of the victims.

In another instance in the novel, the reason for the ambiguity of identity is also explained:
In Baghdad we no longer have the ability to provide proof of who we are, for names no longer signify any meaning or anyone. All lineages were exposed to attacks and all races became vulnerable to race and sectarian centered conspiracies, they burned some of it in 1992, and forged the other ones, they provided the others with our names during the calamity of plagiarizing our current identities, and we remained in a confused state. We carried forged identities in order to evade our killers in fear of being associated with one group or another. (Al-Dulaymī, 2009, p. 28)

Hayāt tells her story and other stories through a series of 30 episodes or booklets that she compiles throughout the years of war and occupation. She describes them as the stories of “our love, stories of loss, pain, imprisonment, disappearance, the shame of emasculation, and the amputation of the tongue, (and) the humiliation of rape” (Al-Dulaymī, 2009, p. 20). Due to the multiplicity of tragedies and events, one sees the chaotic nature of the story told as the line between reality and imaginary, and the present and past becomes intermixed.

The city, Baghdad plays an important role in the novel and the whole narrative revolves around this particular space, its historical memory through its journey to the past and to its unfortunate present state. Baghdad, the city is the heroin in the story because all the narratives of the people belonged and were from this place. Al-Dulaymī writes during her opening night of her novel Sayyidāt Zuhal, “This novel is an ode to Baghdad and its places, its music, its art, its buildings, its people, as well as it is an ode to humanity which
faces the malice of war in order to preserve the culture of beauty” (Interview, 2009, para 4). She continues to explain that this could be an elegy to the city but love and hope gives it power to live. She compares the city of Baghdad to a seductive female that disasters, oppression, despotism fell upon it through its invaders.

Al-Dulaymī wrote the novel over a three year period while she was displaced, moving from one city to another outside of Iraq she lived in Paris, and ʿAmmān. However al-Dulaymī is one of the few Iraqi writers that lived through most of the wars in Iraq and had witnessed the horrors and pains of the past three wars in it (Interview, 2009). Al-Dulaymī also writes in another interview about the importance of Baghdad in the novel as she says, “Baghdad is a memory whose monuments, features, its liveliness, contradictions are threatened to vanish… the narrative of Baghdad is entangled with the narrative of its women and its people where the “ladies of Saturn” Sayyidāt zuhāl are embodied in it… Baghdad is my youth, and my old age, my love, my books, my wounded freedom and my friends, in it I discovered the beginnings and the ends” (Obaid, 2010).

The language in the novel of Sayyidāt zuhāl jumps from first person and second person narrative to the third person throughout the novel. Al-Dulaymī does not write her novel in a documentary form or as an imaginary story because she had witnessed and lived through the atrocities of war and destruction and saw the pains of the women and men of her city (Interview, 2009). She says it is an attempt to salvage the memory of survival and perhaps to salvage her city that was in ruins. Al-Dulaymī, just as other Iraqi women do, she denies that this novel is based on her own biography and her own
experiences. Ḫayāt al-Bāblī, the main protagonist, is not completely her, but she admits she shares a few similarities with Ḫayāt al-Bāblī and Qaydar al-Bāblī, Ḫayāt’s uncle (Obaid, 2010). The whole novel reflects the reality Iraqis faced in times of tribulation and war and serves as another example of how Iraqi women writers create their sub-narrative to present the stories of their people and the problems they faced and continue to from the wrath of war they have witnessed since the 1980’s.

Like other novels about the Iraqi war experience, this novel emphasizes the voice of the women in war through the female characters in the novel who lived alone in the house with no real male characters around them, and through the particular violence the Iraqi women faced in terms of threats, rapes and killings. One of the sections in the book is called “The Book of Girls”; this section is a series of compilations of stories she wrote in her booklets. Each booklet is dedicated to one of the stories these girls go through as she tells of each one’s own tragedy and experience. In the beginning of the book, Ḫayāt mentions that she is given a few stories of the girls in ʿAmmān at the refugee center. The eight section of the book “The Book of Girls” starts with booklet number 27 entitled “The Girls in ʿAmmān”. Here she writes about exile and the difference between being in Baghdad and ʿAmmān: “There are no traces of the scent of Baghdad or its pains, nothing from it, ʿAmmān does not resemble anything but itself” (Al-Dulaymī, 2009, p. 268). Ḫayāt describes exile as she writes “a small paper changes us from displaced citizens into refugees in other countries” (Al-Dulaymī, 2009, p. 268). The girls who lived in Baghdad, Rāwiyah and her sister, Helen, Ḫayāt and Manār, are reunited in ʿAmmān in the refugee center. They were trying to decide where they should seek asylum, and which countries
would accept them. Those who were not able to find another country remained in ‘Ammān, Jordan.

We see the feelings of hopelessness in some of these women, when Rāwiyah recalls a conversation with her mother as she tells her to preserve their culture through cooking traditional foods so that they are transmitted to their children. Rāwiyah responds to her: “Generations have been lost and their lives ruined, I will not have children, because I will not have children to die” (Al-Dulaymī, 2009, p. 270). Ḥāla’s mother recalls to Ḥayāt that her uncle says he had seen the planet Saturn which disturbed him because this meant something terrible curse will happen to the country. Ḥayāt says this does not change a country’s destiny; all countries create their own destinies with their own hands, and they create their own curse and destruction and it they that bring what’s good and secure. She says, “it is what we do, not the stars that determine our destinies” (Al-Dulaymī, 2009, p. 285).

Ḥāla gets imprisoned in Abu Ghurayb, accused of aiding a terrorist group; she suffers through interrogation and gets raped there. She says, “[m]y dishonor is delayed thirty-five years to explode in a scandal of rape in time of insanity” (Al-Dulaymī, 2009, p. 297). Ḥāla was engaged to Muhannad, Ḥayāt’s brother, but he dies before they get married. She was prevented from getting married by her mother until her brother Ḥaydar death gets avenged. Another tragedy for Iraqi women that Hadīyah Ḥusayn’s relates to in her novels as well, and in particular Maḥāsin in Bint al-khān, is when she loses her fiancé to the war and her hopes of marrying and relieving her loneliness and isolation are shattered.
Manār’s story is another tragedy she lives through just before she was planning to leave to ‘Ammān after she received threats for giving medicine to the hospitals due to the shortages they faced. She gets raped by militia men who are Mujahidin because she was getting medicine from foreign countries and giving them to her brother Rāfid, who is also a doctor like her. Four armed men raid her house during a time when they were preparing food for iftar during the month of Ramadan. They kill her brother Rāfid and her mother, and they rape her and leave her to die. She is found by her sister ‘Amal who is also a doctor. ‘Amal decides to leave Baghdad as soon as her sister Manār recovers. Two months later, Manār begins to show signs of pregnancy, and ‘Amal decides to have her get an abortion despite her lacking enough blood and energy to go through with it (Al-Dulaymī, 2009).

One of the first stories was of Lama who commits suicide by burning herself. Lama plays the violin and she leaves it for Ḥayāt to give it away. She leaves a note for Ḥayāt, explaining her reasons for killing herself, as she explains that the death that we choose is much easier than the death our killers decide for us. In a very clear message to the suffering and perseverance of Iraqi women in times of war, she writes in her note, “[w]e wanted to prove to people our ability in living without men in the lands of war that swallows its children, we wanted to develop a balanced and loving life, protected by art, and music...then it becomes visible to me that humans are condemned to betrayal without exception and their reality is exposed at a moment of flight and weakness” (Al-Dulaymī, 2009, p. 36-37).
Hayāt al-Bāblī’s own story is tragic. She lost all her family members throughout the wars in the Iraq, and each one of her family members had suffered throughout the struggles of her country. Hayāt’s father was a university teacher. She explains her family has lived in Iraq for five generations, as her great grandfather’s name is Rashīd Ibn al-Sheikh Na’mān al-Tamīmī whose father is originally from Mosul and mother from Egypt. Her brother Muhammed was killed in Darbandikhan (al-Sulaymānīyah area in Baghdad), and her brother Mājid was executed the day before the invasion of Kuwait. Both died; her brother Hani disappeared for several years. The only one left alive from her family is her Uncle Qaydar that she searches for in the novel. Her brother Hani, who also has his own tragedy after the loss of his wife while giving birth to their son, lives a life in hiding after he changes his identity from Hani al-Bāblī to Allā’Abd al-Majīd al-Ḥusayn, an engineer. He even informs the hospital that his newborn baby died when in fact he survived. Hani kept this other identity for eighteen years. Throughout these years, he raises his son in a protective way, away from hate, corruption and censorship by isolating him from people but allowing him to read all the books he is able to read. His son Sirmid is a genius and gets kidnapped for ransom money in the novel. After he pays his ransom, Hani decides to leave the country, but he had to get falsified paperwork for his son since he was not recorded as a citizen in Iraq after he reported him as dead when he was a newborn. This is another example of how chaotic the nature of the country was and how identity and names became meaningless amid this chaos and corruption (Al-Dulaymī, 2009).

Hayāt explains that she is the granddaughter of Zubaida al-Tamīmī and she is also her as she lives her life with Nājī al-Rashidi, which happens to be named Nājī as Hayāt’s
lover. She compares these two intermixing of characters to the city she lives in, as if the women are the symbols of this city through its present and its past, as she explains: “I carry the memory of two women, Ḥayāt and Zubaida and between them the interweaving of other ladies. Their life events extend from me like colored threads that soon become interwoven like cotton that wraps around me and is submerged in a way that’s hard to manage” (Al-Dulaymī, 2009, p. 24). Ḥayāt is a forty year old divorced woman who was married to Ḩāzim. She does not love Ḩāzim, but lives a routine married life with him, despite his good treatment of her. Hani gets picked up and imprisoned during the time of the previous regime for his work with human rights and finding crimes committed by the regime during the 1990’s. They castrated him while other prisoners watched; when he tried to attempt suicide, the doctor prevents him from doing it, saying “You are not free to choose how you die, we are the one who decide this, and when and where” (Al-Dulaymī, 2009, p. 169). After he leaves prison he divorces Ḥayāt and expresses distaste with the world and people.

Ḥayāt meets Nājī whom she is in love with and who gives her hope amidst all the pain and loss she lives through. She writes about Nājī, and her conversation with him and her brief meetings with him; however, throughout the novel she is waiting with the hope that she will be with him or reunited with him one day. She meets with him in Cyprus, Nicosia, but had to return to Baghdad when her brother Hani’s son gets kidnapped.

The novel does not meddle into politics or try to attempt to take certain sides or even blame anyone. It is not about Iraq and its occupiers but it is about the stories and experiences of a people who witnessed and suffered through the harsh realities of war,
whether it was under the hands of the occupiers or their own people who formed their own militias. Everyone in this novel participated in the atrocities, even in the beginning of history. It is not only about this war, but it is about the past wars, the previous regime; even the past, back 180 years to the time of Dāwūd Pasha and 1258 AD to the time Holako and the Mongolian invasion, which is considered the first sacking of Baghdad; and to the time of the Babylonians and Gilgamesh, which she always refers back to in her other novels as well. The writer is in search of a common historical memory that is shared by the inhabitants of the city of Baghdad. It is in search of a great civilization that is left scattered into pieces.

Luṭfiyyah al-Dulaymi’s novel, حديقة حياة (Hayāt’s Garden), was written in 2003, shortly before the U.S invasion of Iraq; the novel shares the same mood and tragedy as “Ladies of Saturn” does. The narration was mainly in the third person, but some sections were in the first person narrative. The second person narratives were referred as “papers”; for instance, section three was entitled “from the papers of Maysā’”. In section five Ruwaydā narrates in the first person, “I am Ruwaydā. death took me, and death kept, death gave me a voice from the wind, do you hear my light shaky voice?” (Al-Dulaymi, 2003, p. 95). Here the author gives voice to the dead through Ruwaydā as she describes how she died and her deep innermost feelings. Ruwaydā describes her death: “I am now thirty eight years old when the rocket that landed in our house and exploded killed us, I was also thirty eight years old, twelve years have passed by but I have not grown older...I am still thirty eight years old” (Al-Dulaymi, 2003, p. 97). She describes herself as a woman of courage after her death; she can say what she could not
say when she was alive. Similar to Ḥusayn’s protagonist, the young girl ʿAmal in ʿĪf al-ṭarīq ilayhim (The Road to Them) dies at an early age and narrates her family’s life story through her ghost. Death and destruction becomes very much part of Iraqi people’s lives to the extent that the dead and those alive are not very different from each other. This is a characteristic common in their novels. Ḥusayn uses this interconnection with the dead and living in two of her novels.

This chapter is one of the most interesting in the novel, as al-Dulaymī describes the experience of death through one of her characters who was already dead. The deceased character Ruwaydā is Ziyād’s mother. She and her husband Hesham and her two children all died when the rocket hit, but Ziyād was not there. She describes in details how the bomb hits and how her husband dies before her under the concrete. She describes how a piece of metal that had “USA FORCE” written on it went into her leg. As she pleads for one of her friends to hear as if she is dead but at the same time present with them telling about her experience. In another section of the novel, Ḥayāt has the following conversation with Ruwayad, “Umm Ziyād”; it foreshadows what is to come and perhaps what is to become of them:

“Good morning, Umm Ziyād. I thought I was the only one who woke up before dawn.”

“The raids. We couldn’t sleep all these nights. The two girls are traumatized, and Hishām and Ziyād spend the night following the news and playing chess. There’s nothing we can do. We get some sleep during the day.”
“Well, the past two days the raids stopped. Perhaps...”

“Hishām says news analysts predict they’re preparing for a bigger assault.”

“Perhaps the bombardment will stop.”

“Who knows! You and we are the only people now left on the street. I suppose we’re to guard the neighbors’ houses.”

“More people left?”

“All of them left. Left Baghdad altogether. They left at night. ‘Amal and her three children and her husband went north, and Basma’s family went to Najaf. They left the house keys with us. You’re staying, Sitt Ḥayāt, right?”

“We’re staying no matter what happens. Where would we go to and why?”

“Suaad told me we must be crazy. She wondered what kept us from running away to save ourselves.”

“We all are crazy and staying is our brand of craziness.” (Al-Dulaymī, 2003; Shakir, 1999, p. para 7)

In Ḥadīqat Ḥayāh, the question on whether to stay or leave the country was a matter of dispute to some Iraqi’s who resisted leaving their homes and giving up on the state of affairs of their country. This is also visible in the “Ladies of Saturn”, but it was not a question of principle or patriotism because in the end many of the characters ended up escaping to Ḥammān and meeting in the refugee affairs office there. This escape meant life or death because it was no longer safe to be there, so those who could leave did. Ms.
Tomas is another character in Hadīqat ḥayāh that refuses to leave Iraq when her son pleads with her to come live with him in America:

She witnessed the slow erosion of both the family and the house, and the dispersal of its descendants into grave and exile.

“They want me to leave home and go there.”

“All your relatives left years ago,” Suzanne would tell her. “You don’t have anyone left here.”

“Listen, Suzanne. My people are here in Baghdad and Telkief. My father and my mother, and my uncle priest Behnam, and my aunt Josephine and my aunt Victoria, and my cousin Joseph, and my cousin Matti. And Tomas’s father. They are all here.”

“But they’re all dead.”

“No, Suzanne, they’re not. They are more alive to me than those who left me. Those who went away. I mean alive, you know, they come to me every night in dreams. Every night, during the Virgin Mary’s feast, I see them going up to the mountain. (Al-Dulaymī, 2003; Translator Shakir Muṣṭafā, 2004, p. para 15)

The novel Ladies of Saturn can be considered a continuation of the tragedy Iraqis faced even before 2003, amid the sanctions and the fear people lived through under the control of Ṣaddām’s regime. The characters in Hadīqat ḥayāh do share some similarities as the characters of her most recent novel; however the stories are not as tragic. The female
characters in both novels take the dominating role because the narrative revolves around them and because it is a reflection of how Iraqi women live through and survive war, when half their men are either dead or missing. The women characters are left to fend for themselves under difficult and depressing conditions. This is a clear instance of the feminist Impulses Iraqi women writers bring in to their narratives. Al-Dulaymi illustrates the resilience of Iraqi women with such empowering features in her novels, a pattern observed in other narratives by Iraqi women as well.

A main difference between the two novels is that many detailed stories of men suffering under the regime were written in the latter novel Sayyidāt zuḥal. The story of Ḥāmid who was an English teacher becomes “Ḥāmid the mute bird man” whose tongue gets cut off after he recites the fourth section of Macbeth. That part included a dialogue between Malcolm, the king Macbeth’s son, and Macduff because it discusses the oppression under the ruler. They cut off his tongue a few month after his brother gets killed in the events that took place in Kufa and Najaf in 1991 (Al-Dulaymī, 2009). These types of accounts of crimes committed by the Ṣaddām regime were never explicitly mentioned, and in this detail in her previous novel, Ḥadiqat ḥayāh; but it is visible in her second novel, Sayyidāt zuḥal. which she wrote in 2009 after the fall of the regime. It is also interesting to note that the regime itself is not mentioned by name specifically.

Luṭfīyah al-Dulaymī clarifies the role of the male characters in her novel and how the regime tortured them through the cutting of the tongue and castration in order to emasculate them. She explains that there are two types of masculinities, one that is biological and the other derived from tradition and society and femininity is their contrast
to them as social and traditional situation. There is a difference between masculinity that builds civilizations and humanity and masculinity as away in terms of action and manners. Those who belong to a form of masculinity that is violent and justifies killings and violence usually also targets the males who oppose them. In this sense, their castrated masculinity symbolizes the castration of their future thoughts and fertility. The oppressors are the ones who are against future advancement and the enemies of femininity. The cutting of one’s tongue like in the case of Ĥāmid is by the oppressor to limit those voices who call for freedom of thought, they are the enemies of language and expression, so they feel they it is their duty to control the power of language and to strip the Others who oppose them from this powerful weapon. The castration of Ĥāzim, HECK’s ex-husband and the mutilation of the tongue of Ĥāmid are two ways they attempt to destroy the future, to control and suppress language and to maintain the language of the oppressor (Al-Dulaymī, ND).

Another similarity between the two novels of al-Dulaymī is the names of the main characters. Ḥayāt, which means life, is the main character in Ḥadiqat hayāh, and Ḥayāt al-Bāblī is the main character in Sayyidāt zuhal. The name Ḥayāt appears to have some significance to the character in the story. Ḥayāt’s character in “Ḥayāt’s Garden” is an Arabic teacher whose husband goes missing during the war and has an only daughter named Maysā’. Ḥayāt is waiting for her husband, Ghālib, to return, although she does not know if he is alive or dead, but she refuses to accept that he may have died. Maysā’, her daughter, is engaged to Ziyād, but he is not in the country and she is waiting for him to return.
In this novel, the men of the city are described as being hopeless. They no longer smell the flowers or enjoy the music, and she describes Ziyād in such a way: “[h]e is like them, a man from hopelessness, silence, dust and smoke, and from its pores the scent of war and the dead appears” (Al-Dulaymī, 2003, p. 7). The men in Iraq do not enjoy the simple pleasures of life anymore. “The Calamity has spread on the face of the earth and their memories and dropped ashes on the meadows and thick trees, and not one of them attempts to return the great breeze (Al-Dulaymī, 2003, p. 7).

The style the novel is written in is similar to that of Sayyidāt zuḥal where she intersects stories, images and “papers” or letters to every section of the novel. She does not employ the same structure she did with Sayyidāt zuḥal where she separated each story as a booklet, but we can see al-Dulaymī is attempting to tell several stories in her novel and not just one or concentrating on one main character. This signifies the writer’s concern with the Iraqi social structure and in particular the circles of space women are living. It is not about an individual person’s struggle but rather the whole collective struggle that Iraqis face as one. With both novels, the many stories within them share the same mood of anxiety, stress and somberness but with different experiences, although these experiences are a result of one causality or event, which is the calamity that struck and still remains in their city, Baghdad. Al-Dulaymī’s attempt to include the history of Iraq is to revive the historical memory of the nation and to remind themselves and others that a lot worse has happened in their history, yet they survived and managed to make it to the present. This is perhaps one of the many symbols of hope she tries to convey in her novels. The story of Gilgamesh is very much present in her novels and in particular she
dedicates a whole dialogue in *Hadiqat hayāh*. Telling stories of the past within her novel is also an attempt to preserve the collective Iraqi identity during a time when they feel they have lost control of its cohesiveness or structure. In one of the sections, Maysā’ writes a story to Ziyād entitled *Gilgamesh and the Willow Tree*. She writes it in a theatrical format with dialogue.

The issues of culture and tradition women face and struggle with in the midst of tribulation is dealt with in a subtle manner in both novels. One example of this is the hardship of women traveling without being married. In both stories there is at least one character who is obliged to have a temporary marriage in order to travel outside the country. In *Hadiqat hayāh*, the following dialogue gives us a glimpse of this:

“Finally, I’m leaving,” Shirmīn al-Azmīrī called and told her.

“How?”

“I found a young man interested in emigrating. For three thousand dollars he’s agreed to a temporary marriage contract. The price of my freedom. We got the contract today. Aren’t you going to congratulate me?”

“Are you planning to stay with him?”

“Well, if I find him likeable during the trip. Why not?”

“And if he refuses?”

“Why would he refuse? No, he wouldn’t. Many would love the opportunity. What more could he want? Emigration? I’ll help with that. Money? I have a lot of it. Charm? You know your Shirmīn. What about you?”
“You know how complicated it is. I’m really being held hostage now.”


This dialogue takes place with Shirmīn and Suzanne; both women have their own issues. The very elegant and beautiful Suzanne cannot leave because she was engaged to a man by the name of ‘Abd al-Maqṣūd al-Ghannām whom she chooses over Ghassān, the man who really loved her. ‘Abd al-Maqṣūd and Suzanne have a marriage contract which means they are legally married, but he never consummates the marriage, leaving her as a married woman legally while he goes and marries his cousin. He refuses to divorce her and instead blackmails her into giving him half her house. She is left hostage by ‘Abd al-Maqṣūd and cannot get married to anyone else unless he divorces her. This is an obvious example of some of the issues Arab and Iraqi women struggle with when there is a separation because the laws do not allow them the flexibility to divorce easily unless the husband is the initiator in certain cases. It wasn’t until he died in a robbery that she was able to continue forward with her life. She tries to convince Ghassān to marry her and leave the country with her, but he was among the characters who refused the idea of leaving their homeland to be exiled somewhere else.

Music and art are two ways people in Iraq coped with war and the difficulties of daily life. It gave the characters a sense of hope and love. In many novels written by Iraqi
women, there are always characters who artists or express themselves indirectly through art. In *Hadīqat hayāh*, the issue of music and studying music appears to be in how it is perceived in society as the following dialogue reveals:

Women saw Ḥayāt and her daughter as an odd pair.

“A vain woman. She works day and night so that her daughter studies music.”

“She wants her to become a player at the telephonic orchestra.”

“No, no. The symphonic orchestra.”

“And who is going to marry a woman like her?”

“If my son ever dares a thing like that, I’ll banish him to the end of the world. A woman who plays music!”

“She’s destroying her daughter’s domestic future. She’ll have to put up with a spinster.” (Shakir, 1999)

These stories of women and their personal lives and struggles amidst the war reveal to us the perseverance and patience that Iraqi women face in addition to the everyday societal issues that make coping with life more difficult. Whether it is waiting for a lover to return or not knowing what became of a husband, they all seem alone and lonely and left to fend to themselves in times of hardships and war.

The ending of the novel *Hadīqat hayāh* was more optimistic and not as open ended as *Sayyidāt zuḥal*. As Ghassān takes a picture of a man on the street who looked disoriented, sad, and does not remember anything, the man tells him he has not
remembered anything for years. He just walks from place to place, not recalling anything. His sadness is what makes Ghassān take a photo of him during the opening night of his art work in Ḥayāṭ’s Garden. Ḥayāṭ looks at the picture, and as she observes it closely she tells Ghassān to hold her as she is about to faint. She sees her missing Ghālib in this image; he was the man who cannot remember anything.

The novel ends with the hope of finding Ghālib in the city. The ending of Ladies of Saturn is more open ended when Ḥayāṭ al-Bāblī meets with her uncle Sheikh Qaydar in the Monastery. He asks her to go with him and says that Nājī al-Hajjalī, her lover whom she left in Cyprus, will be able to find her. The choice between remaining in her al-Dāwūdi neighborhood in Baghdad or following her uncle remains a mystery, but her asking to write to Nājī to follow her to the mountains allows us to assume she chose to follow her uncle there.

Luṭfīyah al-Dulaymī’s two most recent novels reflect the realities of the Iraqi people and their hardships in dealing with war. They watch their city deteriorate as they watch helplessly, but all hope is not lost. Al-Dulaymī attempts to preserve hope and optimism by bringing in the past to their present. By reviving the past, one is reminded of the rich and deep history of Baghdad and the Iraqi people. Their will and power to overcome these hardships in the past, such as the first sacking of Baghdad through the Mongol invasion or through colonialism and other historical events, allow Iraqis to cling on to the hope that their country will salvage its glories and will prevail just like it had prevailed in the past. She attempts to convey Iraq as an internal civilization with its rich history and the diversity of its people. Hope also comes from love and from the hope that
this love will show up even though it is far away and not present, such as in the case of 
*Hadiqat hayāh*, where a main character refused to believe her husband was dead. In the end she discovers he is alive she just needs to search for him, and Ḥayāt in *Sayyidāt zuḥal* gets life and hope from the comfort of knowing that Nājī will come for her and will find her. The loneliness of the women conveys to the reader the realities Iraqi women faced alone in times of war and the atrocities they had witnessed, but yet under the most difficult situations and after some of the women were raped and left for dead they did survive and they did live. These Iraqi women in al-Dulaymī’s novels are determined to overcome oppression and the calamities of war through perseverance and through the will to live and survive even under the worst conditions of suffering.

**Martyrdom and the Expectations of a Soldier**

Not many Iraqi women novelists focus on the battlefront, but a few attempt to write about their experience, such as Khuḍayrī’s *Kam bada’t al-samā’ qarībah* (*A Sky So Close*) where she renders a small perspective of a soldier through the letters of the character with whom she had a relationship. Salīm writes to the main protagonist in the novel from the front line after he was forced to enlist in the army. Here we see voices of male characters written from the gaze of the female writer. The soldier is depicted as a victim of an involuntary war; its significance was noted when one takes into consideration the context of Iraq and the image of the martyr and the hero that sacrifices
for his nation. All of these factors went into play in Iraq, and both religion and nationalism justified it.

Salīm and the main protagonist remain in contact with each other through his letters describing the war from the battlefront, as he distraughtly describes to her: “...I will be assigned the task of returning the bodies of the dead soldiers to their families” (Khudayri, 2001, p. 171). After reading this letter another military communiqué is released stating that the prisoners taken from the other side are children no more than 16 years old. She describes this as a nightmare following her through the newscaster’s voice. That night she dreams of her childhood friend, Ḥasūn asking him for Khaddouja. Ḥasūn keeps running until he trips and falls on his face. She turns him towards his back where she sees a pool of blood coming from his belly. It is important to note that she mentions this and the children taken from the supposed enemy side are from Iran, revealing a sympathetic tone to the young victims of the other side of the conflict.

Furthermore, in one of his letters, Salīm describes his discontent for carrying the wooden coffins of the martyrs and delivering them: “I can no longer bear to think. Every time I recall his dismembered body being transported in that oblong box, the hairs on my scalp stand on end and I feel them piercing my skin like needles” (Khudayri, 2001, p. 173). He continues to describe in his letter how he vomits from the window and questions when all of this will end “When will these calamities cease? I delivered the martyr, or what remained of him, to his family. Nights without end have gone by and I’ve been unable to sleep; so I write to you. Forgive me if you find that I’ve become a different person” (Khudayri, 2001, p. 174). Khudayri thus gives a new dimension to how one
views an Iraqi soldier. Through Salīm, we are able to put a face and an emotional side to the soldiers who were forced to participate in the war. This depiction is not restricted to this writer, as other Iraqi women writers do the same. It is not a typical perspective as is expected from its populace. There are no patriotic slogans and no support for the war that anyone can make sense of. However, this by no means reflects lack of nationalism by the writer or her characters, but quite the contrary it reveal the humanism and their discontent with a senseless war that hurt their nation and its citizens.

**Roxanna Varzi’s Fictional Vignette, a Comparison**

The Iraqi soldiers in Iraqi women’s writings resemble Roxanna Varzi’s description of a soldier from Iran during the war between the two nations, which will be discussed in further detail. Similar to that of Iraqi women writers, Varzi also narrates a different side of a soldier in the battlefront. Roxanne Varzi in her book *Warring Souls: Youth, Media, and Martyrdom in Post-Revolution* dedicates a chapter which she refers to as a “Fictional Vignette”. In this fictional story within her book she describes the experience of an Iranian soldier during the Iraq-Iran war. It is worth noting the reasons behind her choice to write this fictional vignette within an anthropological study about Iranian youth. The author explains her rational behind it: “it was the easiest way to get around my own internal censor. Fiction is the most effective way to protect the identities of those being described, where uniqueness and individuality are sustained within a rubric of fictional identity” (Varzi, 2006, p. 16).
Women, according to Varzi, find a kind of freedom through the use of fictional characters. Considering the kind of limitations that Middle Eastern women may encounter in their societies and the spaces they write from, fiction becomes as a type of conciliation between art and reality. Varzi uses a fictional character to allow her to express a certain view that will face censorship even if it is her own, yet she explains that this fictional character does not mean it does not reflect upon the perspective of a real soldier. She continues: “The fictional vignettes are my understanding of a character and the events surrounding that character based on interviews, participant observations, journal entries, and archival research in Iran” (Varzi, 2006, pp. 16-17). These fictional accounts of Iranian soldiers are comparable to some of the fictional descriptions of Iraqi soldiers that female writers describe.

Varzi uses war memoirs, last will and testaments (vasiyat-namehs), interviews by Basij, as well as films to put together her story. She constructs her characters like the soldier Amīr based on a number of sources and through the use of her imagination. She explains this character is based on her conversation with a middle-class Iranian soldier who respected the Basij (volunteer martyrs), but yet he did not believe in the reclaiming of Karbalā, the holy city for Shi’ah Muslims (Varzi, 2006), which was the main rational for the war by the Islamic Iranian republic.

Amīr describes the battle as such: “[o]ur battalion has given so many martyrs that we’re almost obsolete. We could easily have martyred our whole unit at the front today but thank God our battalion leader has some sense; he says that it is pointless to get killed without a strategic purpose…” so we spend the day sitting in our tents listening to rowzehs
of Imam Ḥusayn and to Khomeini’s speeches on tape.” (Varzi, 2006, p. 73). Varzi’s work reveals the importance of religion in amassing momentum; however, not everyone is convinced. When Amīr is forced to dangerous zones to fight, he wonders how fellow soldiers may be asking themselves “how Imam Ḥusayn would have done that for his troops” (Varzi, 2006, p. 72). Amīr continues, “I am the last person in this unit who wants to die in the supposed path of God, but I suddenly feel the overwhelming urge to go to the river. Maybe I just want to one-up all these scared hypocrites” (Varzi, 2006, p. 73). The story continues through Amīr’s perspective on the battlefront:

He covers his head and begins to pray. He thinks the Iraqis have spotted him on the beach and are trying to kill him, but the silence behind him suggests otherwise…. He turns to look behind him where all that remains of his unit’s tent is a smoldering heap of canvas and flesh. He is overwhelmed by tears that do not fall, shaking that has yet to start, sadness, anger, and finally the depression that comes from unexpressed anger that is turned upon oneself: as though he has already been through all the motions and what is left now is numbness. He turns towards the Shat al-Arab straits and sits back on his heels and begins to weep. (Varzi, 2006, p. 74)

Similarly, Varzi’s character Amīr also shows distaste of the war; it is clear that this was not his choice that he is fighting in the war, as he describes it. He was the one to get the
water, which they describe him as a hero, and this is why God saved him: but this is his reaction:

Did God save me? Does God agree with me that this is crazy? Perhaps he is not egotistical and crazy enough to desire people to needlessly die for Him. Why would he put us here in the first place? Dying seems like escaping God’s real purposes for us, whatever they may be (Varzi, 2006, p. 74).

Amīr commits an act of resistance, as does al-Qazwīnī’s character; he takes the journals of the dead soldiers and he writes: “This was not my choice, I was fooled. I do not want to die. Pray I return alive”. He signs off with the name of the operation “ Karbalā Five” (Varzi, 2006, p. 74). Thus Varzi’s narration, as an Iranian woman, parallels the concerns of the Iraqi women who have been writing about the war, and both see the soldiers as victims of an involuntary war forced upon the men to fight with causes that they are not convinced in. Karbalā Five has significance for religious Iranians because this is the site where Ḥusayn was believed to be massacred, and it was in Iraq. This becomes a modern day revenge for Khomeini, whom they are supporting, to retake this holy city in Iraq.

There is an uncanny resemblance between two foes that fought a war against each other for almost a decade during the 1980’s. In Iran, such as in Iraq, martyrdom was exemplified and encouraged; both sides used the glorification of the Islamic martyrdom where soldiers, if they fight for a just cause, end up in heaven. In the case of Iran, this martyrdom was the main catalyst in the war, especially through the ritual sacrifice
commemorated twice a year, once in the nineteenth night of Ramadan and Muḥarram where Ḥusayn was killed in Karbalā while Ṭālī was in the mosque while he was praying. Commemorating such events reinforces the Sunnī-Shī’ah divide which Khomeini’s regime in Iran capitalized on to keep the will of the people strong during the war against Iraq. For both sides, it was a holy war. The T’āziyāh passion plays were encouraged in post-revolution Iran while during the Shah these plays were banned. Iranians in 1973 went into rooftops and violated the ban, then it spread into the streets where 700 people died (Varzi, 2006).

In the same vein, in Iqbāl al-Qazwīnī’s narrative Mamarrāt al-sukūn (Zubaida’s Window) the male characters in her novels were allowed the chance to express their dissatisfaction and pain rather than being portrayed as violent perpetrators of aggression. They were in fact not able to cope with the calamities of war more than their female counterparts. Among the very few characters al-Qazwīnī’s novel, two of the men commit suicide, The Warbling Nightingale and the mad painter, as she describes them. The Warbling Nightingale’s is Zubaida’s relative, Taḥsīn, who also came to live in East Germany. As Zubaida watches the war in Iraq unravel though her television set, he calls her:

“It seems like you’re crying, Taḥsīn.”

“Yes, but silently this time.”
“I don’t think there is any hope left! The dictator has been defeated as expected, but it seems to me that hope itself has also been defeated. We need to act wisely, Taḥsīn!”

“I’m going to commit suicide”…

“How can a person live without a home country, especially when this country is impossible? That the home country should vanish into thin air is beyond endurance.” (Qazwīnī et al., 2008, p. 75)

Zubaida attempts to comfort Taḥsīn and offers to meet him at the train station in Leipzig where he resides. He agrees, but once she arrives he does not appear. Zubaida goes to his home. When he is not there she leaves him a note and takes the next train back to Berlin. A month passes and she does not hear from him until she reads in a local Leipzig newspaper about a foreign-looking man who threw himself in front of a train only to die. Zubaida suspects it is Taḥsīn, but her sorrow deepens when she finds out his body has been cremated. These examples of the male characters allow the reader to see the victimization of the men as well as the women as a result of the war.

Another example of the victimization of the male characters by the wars and the events in Iraq is when Zubaida reads a letter she receives from her cousin Fu’ād in Iraq. In the letter, he writes about her brother Ahmed. She recalls: “[s]he had left him when he was a child, and he remains in her memory as a youngster who has not grown up; when she imagines him at the front, she imagines a child carrying a rifle taller than he. Fu’ād’s
letter confirms that he shoots into the air, as she has hoped he would, but he has disappeared.” (Qazwīnī et al., 2008, p. 29).

Kulīzār Anwar’s ‘Ajalāt al-nār

Another example of how the Iraqi soldier is illustrated in the Iraqi women’s fiction is Kulīzār Anwar’s ‘Ajalat al-nār (Wheel of Fire). It is among the few novels written through the perspective of an Iraqi soldier. It commences with an account of the war from the point of view of an Iraqi man, a former soldier in the army, Rāghib ‘Abd el Salam. The main character in the story loses consciousness and falls into a coma in 1985 during the Iran/Iraq war.

Her idealization of what a good man should look like (romantic, religious, highly moral), just as one observes in the characters of men in Iraqi women’s literature and in Anwar’s production of the character Rāghib, in her novel. Anwar’s novel is also a great reflection of the image of an Iraqi soldier and the victimhood disavowing him from any guilt associated with violence or acts of war a soldier might engage in. The description of a battle is not a focus in the novel as much as it is more a novel about an Iraqi man’s feelings and how he attempts to reconcile and rebuild his life after years in a coma. The romantic aspect of his life takes precedence in the novel, after he meets a Kurdish girl in the cemetery. From the point of view of Anwar, he was able to rebuild his life by assimilating back into society through a traditional relationship. This reveals the extent of fantasy and idealization a woman writer might have of a male character, so much that the
daily struggles of a soldier getting back in normative civilian society and forgetting the combat days are not even mentioned or realized, as if these problems do not exist for a soldier.

The novel begins with the description of a battle and bombing during the war in March 1985, hinting that the people who took the Iraqi soldiers of war spoke Persian. The narrator describes the soldiers that imprisoned them as “Their faces tight sad, and despiteful and their deep sunken eyes are bluish black in ragged military uniforms” (Anwar, 2003, p. 9). They tied them up and began executing them, “I opened my eyes widely before they tied them up for it may be the last time I will see the light of life” (Anwar, 2003, p. 10). He was shot and fell unconscious. The narrator then wakes up from a ten-year coma in a military hospital in March 1995.

When he leaves the hospital, he finds that many things have changed. He asks for his mother, and eventually learns that she has died as a result of a cruise missile that hit her house: “one rocket was enough to transfer the house into debris, dust and fire and towhomever was in it, and my mother was alone in the house” (Anwar, 2003, p. 32). After discovering his mother’s death, Rāghib begins to lament her death by paying visits to her grave to read Quran for her. His brother also explains to him about the new war their country was in while he was unconscious. The war he fought in during the Iran-Iraq war had ended only for another more powerful and more ferocious war to begin in 1991, one which they were still in the midst of.

The question of loyalty and betrayal is revealed in this novel, which is an issue many Iraqi women had to deal with when they did not know the fate of their men. They
were stuck in a dilemma: should they wait for them in hopes they will return or move on with their lives? In the case of Rāghib, he wakes up to his disappointment to find that his fiancé has moved on with her life. Wafā’, the girl he was formerly engaged to, does not wait for him and moves on to marry someone else, explaining that she was afraid of not being able to conceive children at a later age. Ironically, the name “Wafā’” means loyalty in Arabic; however she did not appear loyal to Rāghib. Despite her concerns about children, her marriage to another man does not result in children.

Rāghib feels betrayed by her for not waiting for him, especially because his situation differed than other Iraqi soldiers and men whose fate went unknown for many years up until the fall of the regime. Many Iraqi men were either taken in by the regime to never return, and their families had no information about them, or they were soldiers who were killed or imprisoned in war and their bodies may not have been identified. Ėlib’s Qiyāmat Baġhdād also addresses the many cases of women who do move on with their lives after they lose hope in their husbands’ return; dramatically, they end up marrying their brother-in-law, and when the husband does return, the shocked women are unable to choose between the two men, especially as they have children from both husbands. In some cases, the women end up leaving both men out of embarrassment (Ēlib, 2008).

Anwar’s ‘Ajalat al-nār is a rare sense of nationalism and patriotism not seen in other novels written by Iraqi women. When Rāghib meets his old friend’s mother, she tells him he has died in a battle, but she seemed strong and says “how many did we sacrifice, in the time of war everything gets their turn and not only human beings but it is not worth more than the nation” (Anwar, 2003, p. 57). When Rūzayn sees him sitting in
deep thought in his view of the Tigris River, she asks him, “[d]o you like it to that extent? He replies, “I love everything that is Iraqi. Tigris, Euphrates, al-Ḥowr, Madnān, and its people…all of Iraq.” He continues:

They say that the war causes bitterness; today I discovered they were wrong. Despite the sanctions and the remnants of war and destruction, the joy of life still gathers around the streets of the country. Everything around us, even the trees, are silent as if they were in prayer. (Anwar, 2003, pp. 71-72)

Anwar presents a tone of hope in her novel, spoken through former soldiers, such as Muṣṭafā who has found love and is trying to build his life in his country again despite the years of war and destruction. His brother sees his happiness because he has fallen in love. Muṣṭafā tells him he notices three themes in his life: love, the nation and women. “The woman is the nation, and the nation is love, and love is life” (Anwar, 2003, p. 77).

Muṣṭafā the writer explains the purpose of writing as fighting for creativity “and for life to move forward, not through weapons but through the pen and brushes, and colors, and knowledge” (Anwar, 2003, p. 83). Another artist adds “we try through our paintings, our stories, and poems, to gather the wound of our nation and to rid it from the cloth of war for it to return again and to move forward into the future (Anwar, 2003, p. 83).

Later on in the novel, Muṣṭafā confronts Rāghib and narrates to him the details of how their mother died when her house was hit by a rocket. She wanted to remain in her
home waiting for her son Rāghib to return home after he awakes from the coma, and he asked her son and wife to leave to a safer place. Muṣṭafā explains, “This war in particular taught us courage. In the past I used to be afraid even from shadows and darkness and every time a rocket falls a strand of comfort runs through my soul that climbs to the voids of the heart, and I become cheerful. Thank God… the fate of war did not choose our house” (Anwar, 2003, p. 108). Muṣṭafā maintains that although the war has ended, the sanctions which are even worse continue on in Iraq.

Rāghib realizes everything has changed after his return. Everyone he had known has either died in war or emigrated, and whoever stayed was no longer the same as before, such as his former fiancé who has since gotten married. He mentions the manner of which morals have changed, which he blames on the war.

Despite the novel’s focus on death and destruction, love is also present in the novel. It is significant that is through his visit to his mother’s grave to be closer to her in spirit that he meets a young Kurdish lady who is also visiting her mother’s resting place. Her name was Rūzayn, a Kurdish name meaning the path of life. Their relationship progresses through the story as they fall in love and eventually get married. They take a retreat after their marriage to the Kurdish cities in Iraq. The city Dihok has a Kurdish identity; however, when they went to visit Rūzayn’s city they are surprised by the city and how its features have changed. Most of the building structures are Persian and all the new map plans are coming from Iran which seems to surprise them, as she recalls:
The last time I visited Dihok it was seven years ago and it was not as such, everything in it proved its Kurdish identity! But now the embroidery is Persian, and the cloth is Syrian, and the food is Turkish, and the taste is European! I became very sad! Despite all the races of its civilization and culture because I felt it had lost it identity and I am aware of what it means for a city to lose its identity!

(Anwar, 2003, p. 118)

They travel to several cities in Iraq, mainly Kurdish. The novel draws to the end when Rāghib feels the need to return to the heat of Baghdad despite its destruction, sanctions and heat. The connection and feelings towards the city of Baghdad is not isolated in this Kulīzār Anwar’s novel, but is seen in several other novels as Luṭfīyah al-Dulaymī’s novel which describes the city of Baghdad. They are both novels written from the center inside Iraq, not from exile, which gives the reader a more dramatic perspective of the Iraqi experience during and after the invasion.
Chapter 4: Narratives of Exile and Identity

In his book *Reflections of Exile*, Edward Said describes nationalism and exile as necessarily related to one another. Said was implying that in discussing one, the Other also surfaces. He describes exile as a “discontinuous state of being. Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, and their past. Exiles feel, therefore an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people” (Said, 2000, p. 177). Many Iraqi writers who were part of the new generation in the mid 1980’s began to write from exile. Iraqi writers found more freedom away from the ideological and political restrictions of their country. Many left the country because of economic reasons in the 1990’s, and most of them were academics, writers, poets and artists (H. Zangana, 2007).

Several of the novels written by Iraqi women, were written in or about exile and about the Iraqi expatriate community living far away from the homeland. These literary productions include Haifa Zangana’s *Nisā’ ʿalā safar* (Women on a Journey, Between Baghdad and London), Iqbāl al-Al-Qazwīnī’s *Mamarrāt al-sukūn* (Zubaida’s Window), Hawara al-Nadawai’s *Taḥta samā’ Kūbirdāgın* (Under the Sky of Copenhagen), Inaam Kachachi’s *Al-Hafeeda al-amrīkīya* (The American Granddaughter) Dunā Ghālī’s ʿIndamā tāstāyiqūz al-rāʿīhah (When the Scent Awakens), and several other novels written from adjoining countries in ʿAmmān and the Middle East. Hence we find that
many of the Iraqi women writers write about the war from the periphery, away from the war front. For others, Iraq becomes the space for the battleground and the home front where some experienced at least one war there first hand.

These authors who write about war events lived out those experiences, such as ‘Āliya Ṭālīb’s *Qiyyāmat Bağhdād*, who wrote about the latest war of 2003 and the destruction that followed. But other writers because they were not physically present and were in exile in a foreign land, write about those wars from a periphery. In the latter’s case, their only experience of the war was through news casts and television, which, oddly enough, become the main and most reliable source for them about the war. The question thus arises: do these authors have the authority to write about the war if they were not physically there? Historically women’s literature on war was excluded for this very reason, that they were not present in the battle, therefore they would not know how to narrate war. Hanley in *Women Writing War* argues that this absence (here referring to the women) from the battleground, “permits literary criticism to remain unabashedly sexist on the subject of war”. The emblematic image of the war narration places more importance of the war narrator that was present over other voices who write the war story who were not present (Hanley, 1991, p. 134).

Exile is difficult for anyone forced away from their homeland, but it is especially for those who refuse to let go of their homeland, where they had left behind families and memories. Al-Rāḍī reveals how difficult it is for Iraqis to deal with being forced away from their nation: “Iraqis are not good at immigrating. Being virtually landlocked,
immigration to them is a serious matter, one that’s been almost forced on them for the last twenty-five years” (al-Rāḍī, 2003, p. 136).

When asking her friends about their exile, his reply is that he feels like a garbage collector (low in social standards), while another friend tells her that being outside your homeland, you are nobody. Her friend Khaldūn says that he has always been in exile ever since King Fayṣal left, then when the French came into Syria and Iraq. Mubajal responded to her question in a similar way, she has always been exile then she decided to exile herself in exile by not leaving her house. Her friend Freako says “I saw it coming twenty years ago... and I took the decision to leave. But I’m still angry” (al-Rāḍī, 2003, p. 140). Al-Rāḍī herself feels the degradation of being in exile despite her background, she states “one certainly gets one’s fill of humiliation” (al-Rāḍī, 2003, p. 140). Al-Rāḍī describes the way the Lebanese guard treats her when she goes to the embassy to renew her visa, and the struggle to get it renewed. She criticizes this treatment by remarking, “One would think that after suffering for twenty years a pariah nation, the Lebanese would be slightly more sympathetic towards others going through the same process” (al-Rāḍī, 2003, p. 140). An exile can feel estranged by the new host society, adding to the sense of isolation and coldness, forcing them to be more conscious of their “Otherness”. Gurr explains, “[t]he normal role for the modern creative writer is to be in exile, he is a lone traveler in the countries of the mind, always threatened by hostile natives” (Gurr, 1981, p. 13), even though he is referring to a mental exile a writer who places him/herself in, a physical exile will endure a similar experience.
Al-Rāṭī also describes life in Jordan, a country close to Iraq in which most Iraqis sought refuge in, as exile:

Jordan is not really exile as we’re so close to the Jordanians. I completely disagree with that statement – not the people, not the country, not the dress, not the buildings, not the stones, not the customs and habits, not even the Arabic is the same – it’s a different dialect. And definitely not the climate or the people. They are placid and we are most volatile – the same goes for the climate. (al-Rāṭī, 2003, p. 140)

Although Iraqi writers residing in ‘Ammān were grateful for living there, they still felt the sense of nostalgia toward Iraq. What al-Rāṭī signifies in her statement about Jordan is it becomes to them a provisional stop where they end up traveling to the West or returning home. One explanation for this feeling of estrangement in a neighboring country that shares borders, and to a certain extent a language and culture, is the feeling of instability. Being far away from home from kinship, from the social network that one is familiar with intensifies the experience of exile.

Many Iraqi woman writers resided and produced their novels in Jordan, such as Ḥadiyyah Ḥusayn and Batul Khuḍayri. ‘Ammān became a destination as well as a setting in many of their novels. Ḥadiyyah Ḥusayn’s Ma ba‘da al-ḥubb takes place mainly in ‘Ammān after she flees Iraq and waits for a chance to immigrate to a Western country. Ḥusayn’s Nissa‘ al-‘atābāt is also set in ‘Ammān where specific places and
neighborhoods are mentioned. Iqbāl al-Qazwīnī travels to ‘Ammān to cross the border to Iraq, in Zubaida’s Window. In Khuḍāyri’s Ghāyib, Abu Ghāyib travels to ‘Ammān to sell his artwork which is the same reason in Ibtisām ‘Abd Allah’s Misuputamiya (Bayn al-nahrayn). Ahmed Nur aldeen, a business man, had his employee Dalīya travel to ‘Ammān to transport Iraqi artwork (Abd Allah, 2001). ‘Ammān becomes a central point for Iraqi’s forced to leave their country for a safer place; therefore the narratives include ‘Ammān as a major city in their stories. Their life and their experience in ‘Ammān becomes part of the narrative they want to relate to the reader. ‘Ammān however, does not bring about the kind of nostalgia and isolation these writers may have experienced while in exile in a Western space. Al-Dulaymī for instance returned to live in ‘Ammān rather than remain in Europe as she felt more comfortable with her surroundings. The culture differences are not major and the identity crises these writers may find themselves in are not a major issue there.

There are, however, some advantages to being a writer in exile. It allows the authors to see their native land from a different perspective. It also gives them the ability to freely express themselves creatively: “[f]reedom to write is the major stimulus to exile, and exile creates the kind of isolation which is the nearest thing to freedom that a twentieth century artist is likely to attain” (Gurr, 1981, p. 17). Writing fiction allows the writer more freedom to break from certain social taboos or restrictions. Among those authors residing in Western lands, Haifa Zangana writes in Women on a Journey about Iqbāl, one of the five female characters in her novel, who dates an English man and gets pregnant from him, something she would be chastised for in Iraqi society. One of Dunā
Ghāli’s protagonists presents an appropriate case of identity crisis. Nahlā changes her name to Helena, divorces her Iraqi husband, and chooses to form a new identity in Denmark while denouncing her previous Iraqi identity:

Distance gives perspective and for exiles it is also the prerequisite for freedom in their art. Freedom to write is a major stimulus to exile, and exile creates the kind of isolation which is the nearest thing to freedom that a twentieth-century artist is likely to attain. (Gurr, 1981, p. 17)

Not only does isolation offer freedom to the writers, but it also allows them to be in a social space that does not require the writer to abide by the censorship typical of their native countries. This yields emancipation from the normative cultural constructs that force a writer or anyone in the traditional society to conform to. For female authors, exile creates a new type of space that frees them from the normative social constraints and grants political and social freedom, specifically enabling the freedom to choose. In turn, allowing them to negotiate the cultural constraints they otherwise would not have been able to reject in their homeland. The reasons for this are because they are now dealing with new rules and expectations in their exiled land where the exiled subject is not expected to fully and immediately assimilate. The new land is not there to hold them responsible for their native cultural constraints unless there are members of their native land imposing such constructs on them, such as in the case of Huda in Taḥt saˈmāʾ kūbinhāgin, where her parents are the ones who dictate and assume the role of the home
In such a case the actual domicile transfers into a border of the homeland where all the roles of the native home society are imposed, implemented and expected.

In addition to the freedom from social restrictions, “[a]lienation from a cultural or physical home has radical effects on a writer’s mind as well as his choice of theme. A writer can become an “internal émigré”, by constructing an exile within himself/herself from the society he/she lives in, or society can send the writer into exile” (Gurr, 1981, p. 17). This attribute can also be found in the hybrid identity of a native or an exile struggling and negotiating dual identities of their two cultures. The Iraqi writer, Al-Ḥawrā’ al-Nadāwī fits into the model of an internal émigré, living in the Danish society yet writing in a different language (Arabic) not native to her but native to her parents, and writing for and about a subculture within the main culture in Denmark. But just as someone can be an “internal émigré” one can construct a homeland within his/herself, an “internal homeland” where a person constructs an image of a land they perceive is their native land and the image of it is immortalized, fetishized, and embodied in the conscious and the unconscious of a person. Palestinian people are for example of those who internalize the homeland and writers and poets such as the famed Mahmoud Darwish immortalizes the concept of homeland through metaphorical images of the mother, the land, and the nature domestic to the native land, with an aura of nostalgia.

**Eluding Censorship Through Exile**

In an attempt to analyze works of Iraqi writers who wrote about the Iran-Iraq war, Miriam Cooke explains the dilemma of choosing the texts and whether or not to reveal
the dissidents among them or whether to focus her analysis on works of Iraqi exiles and expatriates. Here it is evident that authors, who write from exile and were able to elude censorship, wrote more freely and were not under the same threat as those who wrote from within their country. She explains Loseff’s view on analyzing the Aesopian language of writers, and the dilemma of focusing on those who had left the country rather than the writers who were still writing within the borders of Iraq, so as to not endanger the lives of the writers who were still under the control of the state apparatus (more about the Aesopian language in another section) (Cooke, 1996, p. 264).

Many Iraqis had to endure exile from their country since the inception of the Iran-Iraq war. In Iqbāl al-Qazwīnī’s Mamarrāt al-sukūn (Zubaida’s Window), the main character had been in exile for thirty years and was watching the March 2003 invasion of Iraq. Iqbāl al-Qazwīnī, the author herself chose to live in exile after Ṣaddām Ḥusseīn took power in 1979, as a member of one of the largest Arab women’s rights organization, the Iraqi Women’s league she had ties to the Communist Party. When Ṣaddām Ḥusseīn and his Ba’thist regime took power in Iraq, they began to crack down on members who belonged to political parties opposed to the regime. Al-Qazwīnī was in Berlin when the regime came to power through a coup d’état. She was a delegate representing the Iraqi Communist Party for the Women’s International Democratic Federation that was held in 1978 (Qazwīnī et al., 2008). She had legitimate grounds to stay away from Iraq, as Haifa Zangana, another Iraqi writer, was imprisoned during Ṣaddām’s regime for being a member of the communist party (Zangana, 2009). Many Iraqis who belonged to the Communist Party, Arab nationalists, non-Ṣaddāmist, Ba’thist, Islamist and Democrats
fled Iraq to avoid persecution. Iraqis left in two waves; the first wave was after the Iraq revolution in 1958 during which the Iraqi monarchy fell. The other wave left in 1991 after several failed uprising attempts against Ṣaddām Ḥussein (Al-Ali, 2007; Qazwīnī et al., 2008).

**Stories of Exile and Nostalgia**

Authors working from exile write with nostalgia about the past and the places that they left behind. Haifa Zangana writes in her introduction for *Nisā’ ʿalā safar* (Women on a Journey) that exile writers rely on their past in order to preserve it, “for some memory becomes life itself” (H. Zangana, 2007, p. xiv). Andrew Gurr also describes exiled authors in his book *Writers in Exile*, he explains that exile writers use memory to recreate the image of home that they had as children “hoarding childhood memories like nuts (drawing from squirrels as metaphor) for the long winter of exile”, it is “the finest kinds of creativity” an element which exiled writers share with each other (Gurr, 1981, p. 26). This is observed in the novel, *Mamarrāt Al-Sukūn* (Zubaida’s Window), where Zubaida lives her life through constant flashbacks to the past, refusing to let go and to live her life in East Berlin even after thirty years of residence.

Al-Qazwīnī’s character Zubaida suffers in exile, but she is not able to go back to Iraq. She can only observe what is happening to her country through the television set. She sees the bombs falling during the March 2003 invasion which leads her to fall into depression. She decides to visit Rolf Richter’s grave, a socialist German writer from East
Berlin. In a powerful statement about war and politics, she rationalizes the death of her comrade Richter: “Richter did not die in war, but because of it; not in socialism, but because of it; not at the wall, but because of it; not in the snow, but because of it; not in death, but because of it” (Qazwīnī et al., 2008, p. 89). Her friend Richter had a yearning for the Middle East, especially Baghdad. Zubaida begins talking to Richter as she sits close to his grave:

Equal to you in exile wiping tears from your cheeks, sharing with you a warm smile and weeping for you and myself. I tell you they are burning they city you loved, they are burning your Baghdad and don’t know it. This city that I promised you I would return to, that I would never forget. Whenever we met, you used to repeat, ‘Don’t ever forget that you will be going back. Hold on to your dreams and never abandon them.’ Baghdad is burning my friend. (Qazwīnī et al., 2008, p. 89)

One perceives here that regardless of Zubaida’s protracted exile, she still laments her country. Her personal exile and nostalgia is overshadowed by her sadness at the atrocities that the war has inflicted on her country. Her personal pain of exile and the collective pain of war her city is enduring are conflated. This shared pain is explained in her conversation with Richter when she articulates “Baghdad is burning”. Zubaida clearly does not differentiate between the two, because the war has now become the main reason
why her exile is prolonged, while at the same time it is responsible for destroying the very place she longs for.

When Zubaida in Zubaida’s Window was in ’Ammān, after meeting the Iraqi women near the bus station, the nostalgia and longing for Iraq is sensed as she narrates this experience:

For an instant she forgets the years of exile, the long estrangement, the strange cold cities, the Other languages, the pale complexions, the summer rains, and the foreign passport and stands watching the bus leaving for Baghdad, and traveling with it in her mind. Her soul travels, and her body remains. (Qazwīnī et al., 2008, p. 95)

Edward Said writes: “Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted” (Said, 2000, p. 173). When Zubaida is in the taxicab in ’Ammān the driver notices she is not from there and he tells her that many people come from Europe bored, and depressed. He tells her,

“Ultimately, man doesn’t die from hunger, but could certainly die of cold and loneliness. Death in exile is very difficult. Even the rich, when they get older and feel that they are nearing death they come back to their homeland. How will one
be buried in exile? Living in exile is possible, but dying in exile is unthinkable. It is heartbreaking.” (Qazwīnī et al., 2008, p. 96)

Said’s statement is confirmed by al-Qazwīnī’s description and dialogue of exile. Their visions of exile are the same. Both see it as a kind of punishment one is forced to experience far from one’s homeland. Detachment from homeland is as painful as a tree ripped out by its roots.

**Imagined/Hybrid Identities in Exile**

Through the two novels, Iqbāl al-Qazwīnī’s *Zubaida’s Window* and Batūl Khudayrī’s *A Sky So Close* one can reflect upon the Iraq war(s) from the standpoint of two very different women protagonists who have been intimately involved with and affected by Iraq’s plight. The significance of these novels rests in their description of the war(s) and exile which through fiction, arises out of the effect the war had on the writers’ personal lives as well as on the people affected around them. Through their narratives, these two Iraqi women fictionalize and cope with the war torn situation of their country. Their style is distinct in their literary approaches, as we will see, in the focus on the interrelationships between public and private spaces. For instance, the public intrudes into the private and the women deploy their private spaces to try to take some control over public turmoil.
Zubaida’s Window is about an Iraqi woman living a self-imposed exile in East Berlin. The novel takes place during the March 21, 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. Zubaida, the protagonist reflects upon her thirty years of exile and Iraq’s struggle since 1958 with the fall of the Monarchy under the rule of ‘Abd al-Karīm Qāsim. A Sky So Close by Batūl Khudayri is a story of a young Iraqi girl, an unnamed “woman,” and her memories growing up in Iraq. Within the story the Iran-Iraq war breaks out, as well as the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

Khudayri and al-Qazwīnī both use flashbacks, this allows the protagonists to remember and share with the reader certain scenes from their childhoods to underscore the contrast or establish continuity between then and now. Khudayri uses second person narration in the beginning of the novel when she is directing her speech to her father with the use of “you”, but this switches back and forth with her first person narration of the story. The protagonist’s name is never mentioned, however; we assume it is “Batūl” because, although it is a work of fiction, it has remnants of her life story; the author herself, like the protagonist, was born to an Iraqi father and a Scottish mother. Iqbāl al-Qazwīnī writes her novel in the third person frequently jumping from Zubaida’s Iraqi past to the present where she is in East Berlin watching the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Through her description of Zubaida’s state of mind one is able to sense the loneliness and melancholy she goes through while in exile contrasted with her recollections of a better life as a child in Iraq. The mood of the novel is somber and full of longing for her home country.
Similar to other war narratives by Iraqi women, al-Qazwīnī’s novel includes many references to Iraqi history. As Zubaida begins her flashbacks, she recalls her grandmother’s stories about the King of Iraq and his family. Zubaida remembers the time of the monarchy with nostalgia as she recalls the story that her grandmother told about King Fayṣal II\textsuperscript{20} surrendering, while holding the Quran in his right hand. Her grandmother would repeat “yours is a white flag, Fayṣal” after she describes to Zubaida how the King was killed, “King Fayṣal holding the Quran and the white flag and walking towards the soldiers who had attacked al-Rehab palace, where the royal family lived. They shot him dead.” Her grandmother describes the young king with sadness and with prayer because he was about to be wed and the whole country was getting prepared for the celebration. Zubaida’s recollection of King Fayṣal was just as nostalgic, although she was five or six years old when the events took place. She remembers his body being dragged by a mob in Adhamiya\textsuperscript{21} district and her pregnant mother fainting when she saw his body. Zubaida laments the King’s demise with a very poetic description of his death:

March forward, king, your history has come to an end, and another’s history, though still undefined, has arrived. March forward, king, whose smile disappeared in an instant, the instant the first mortar fell on Al-Rehab Palace. March onward, you beautiful king, for the mob will kill you, and the moment of your death shall be a shameful blot on history’s page. How grievous to see you as a victim.

\textsuperscript{20} Died at age of 23 along with the whole family, machine gunned in the palace
\textsuperscript{21} A predominantly Sunni area and mixed neighborhood area in Baghdād; the main character from Zubaida’s Window grew up in the neighborhood.
March forward, king, the hooligans will enjoy killing you. (Qazwīnī et al., 2008, p. 35)

This event resonates heavily in Zubaida’s memories as she remembers her father blaming the backwardness of society in Iraq and the Iraqi’s lack of awareness, he also says: “On that day, war began in Iraq: small wars, and catastrophic wars between Iraq and its neighbors, and between Iraq and the world (Qazwīnī et al., 2008, p. 35).

In Zubaida’s Window, al-Qazwīnī is offering a clear explanation as to why Iraq has seen wars throughout the years. Perhaps it is an attempt to find answers to the atrocities the country had witnessed throughout the three wars. At one point in time the country had great potential and prospects for the future. Zubaida presents the reasons for all these events through her grandmother’s rationale:

Whenever the two rivers went dry; whenever the Tigris and Euphrates overflowed; whenever Iraq was overtaken by pestilence; whenever they dragged people on the streets; whenever Iraqis fought one another; whenever houses were on fire—it was King Fayṣal’s curse, for they killed him while he came to them in peace and held the holy Koran in his hand. (Qazwīnī et al., 2008, p. 35)

Reminiscing about Iraq’s past and repeating her grandmother’s words is a way for Zubaida to express her longing for a reversal of her country’s historical events, and to try to explain Iraq’s present state.
Clash of Identity Batūl Khudayrī’s A Sky so Close

Batūl Khudayrī’s book Kam badat al-samāʾ qarībah (A Sky so Close) was first written in Arabic in 1999 and later translated into English in 2001. Khudayrī’s novel opens with a first person narrative of an unnamed woman speaking to her father through memories and flashbacks of her childhood at six years of age. Dialogue between the characters occurs within the text helping the reader see the story not only through a lens of the past but also through that of the present. Khudayrī’s A Sky so Close, presents life in Iraq from a point of view of a little girl, who struggles with her identity being half Iraqi and half Scottish. As her mother struggles to assimilate into the Iraqi rural society so does the young girl who find herself struggling to please both hybrid identities that reveals at time the polarity between the Western and Eastern cultures.

In this semi-autobiography, life under war and sanctions is disclosed as a daily reality for the Iraqi people, beginning with the incomprehensible Iran-Iraq war, through its unfolding midway, and as it breaks out in 1980 after a dispute over Shatt al-Arab waterway. Khudayrī’s story explains the reasons for the war which was due to the breach in the agreement between the two countries over the boundaries set for the waterway that joined the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers. Forced to adjust her life, the war becomes a part of the main character’s life. Khudayrī describes the change that took place in their lives after war began:
A few months after full mobilization, our lives are transformed into mere fragments of the lives we had before the war. They soon became a series of days that resembled memories. The events that followed started sliding into a gelatinous ball, growing and growing. As the number of military communiqués from the government increases, the misty undulation of the mercury ball becomes distorted in our dreams, and our days are trapped between two questions: Why, and until when? (Khudayri, 2001, p. 106)

As the narrator’s life unravels through the effects of war she questions the purpose of the war even though she is well aware of the events of circumstances that led to it. She inconspicuously critiques the necessity of a war that did nothing but make their lives more difficult and complicated.

In the midst of the scarcity of resources and living through days without the basic necessities of water, and electricity, the novel describes how life changed and became more complicated. The Iran-Iraq war saw the society change its priorities, as did the more recent Iraq wars, which other Iraqi novelists have narrated. Marriage and children were encouraged, and rationing became a way of life. During the war “Iraqi women were slowly relegated to being ‘mothers of future soldiers’ and eventually ‘mothers of martyrs’. Women were no longer regarded as necessary civic participants. Instead, their only value lay in performing a biological God-given duty; i.e., reproduction” (Shirazi, 2010, p. 150). This was also the case in Iran, as Roxanne Varzi explains in Warring Souls, where women were encouraged to have as many children as they could for the
sake of Iran. It is ironic that both states on either side of the conflict used similar tactics to fortify their respective war machines, including the production of children for martyrdom, preferably boys to become soldiers on the front. Women and their bodies are transformed into making children to feed the war machine.

Similarly, Varzi documents how the Iranian state restricted access to information about Iran, and in turn Iranians were restricted from access to more information and perspectives about the war. Khudayri also writes about the increased isolation to the outside world, where travel abroad was restricted, and foreign newspapers disappeared. The novel does not explicitly say that the regime was becoming more restrictive and oppressive, but such tactics are implicitly implied in the text.

Hopes for the war to end, fluctuations in the price of foodstuffs and medicines, lack of building materials, how to maintain and artistic output when the private galleries and painting exhibitions have closed down, the lack of prizes for new artistic works and stage productions, the scarcity of glossy paper for magazines and ordinary paper for books and other publications. (Khudayri, 2001, p. 143)

Nuhā Al-Rāḍī in *Baghdād Diaries* also refers to her friends’ experiences in dealing with the 1991 war sanctions on Iraq: “I can’t afford my hair dye, she said, ‘so I’m using vinegar.’ Her mother apparently now puts eggplant skin on her hair! Assia is now washing her hair with Tide, she can’t afford shampoo” (al-Rāḍi, 2003, p. 95).
A Hybrid Identity

In alluding to her hybrid identity, Khudayri employs an interesting feature of narration. The young protagonist directs her dialogue towards her father and not to her mother. Her mother is Scottish and her father is Iraqi; they struggle to raise her each according to their own traditions. Khudayri from the beginning describes the conflicts the young girl had to endure through her parent’s recurrent arguments. She describes her features being closer in resemblance to her father’s Brown skin: “I inherited from you the exaggerated darkness of my skin” (Khudayri, 2001, p. 19), in contrast to her mother’s white pale skin. This explains why her conversation is aimed at speaking to her dad while ignoring her mother.

The protagonist does not prefer one culture over the other or her mother over her father. It is however through her mother’s eyes we do see Western culture as the dominant underscoring. Chandra Mohanty’s observation that: “Woman/women and the East are defined as Others, or as peripheral, that (Western) man /Humanism can represent him/itself as the center”. As she best puts it: “It is not the center/that determines the periphery, but the periphery in its boundness determines the center” (Mohanty, 1988, p. 353). In the context of Khūdayrī’s novel the periphery is the man’s, the father’s culture, and the mother, is not East but West and wants to dominate through her perception that her culture is the superior one.

The setting of the story begins with a young girl living with her parents in a small village called Ẓafrāniya, twenty miles south of Baghdad (Khudayri, 2001, p. 6). Based on
her relationship with her young Iraqi friend named Khaddouja, one senses the struggle of class difference, poverty, and cultural anxieties. These cultural anxieties are what Mohanty describes as Western women representing themselves as powerful and in control while their counterparts are seen as the opposite. As Mohanty puts it, “Third World (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition bound, domestic, family oriented, victimized, etc.). This is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, modern, as having control over their bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions” (Mohanty, 1988, p. 337).

In Khudayri’s novel, the protagonist’s Scottish mother feels that she needs to save her daughter from the more traditional and backward Iraqi society her daughter is being raised in. When the main character comes home from playing with Khadouija her mother asks, “in an English as white as her skin”:

-Hello, Where have you been?
She’s expecting my reply.
-Outside, in the farm.
As usual she flies into a rage. The bowl of hazelnut gets knocked over as she leaps up.
-You mean you were with that dirty little girl again. Didn’t I warn you not to mix with that lice-ridden child?
-But Mummy, she’s my friend.
She scolds:
- No! She’s not your friend; she will only give you her diseases… My God!
Haven’t you seen how her mother uses dried cow dung for the fire which she
bakes bread? Haven’t you seen the hordes of flies that swarm around that cheese
they make with their filthy hands?” (Khudayri, 2001, p. 9)

In Khudayri’s novel, two main issues apply here: first, the oppression or dominance is
observed through the mother’s view of herself. Perceiving herself as coming from the
more advanced and dominant culture (neocolonialist view). This results in her reaction to
the indigenous people (in this case considered the subaltern) in the land she lives in as
filthy and backwards; therefore not wanting her half Scottish daughter to associate with
them. The other main issue is the role of the father in which he is not the stereotypical
patriarchal oppressor often pointed out in Western feminist discourse, but representing
this subaltern group. The struggle he has is with the mother’s fight to keep her daughter
from learning the traditional Iraqi culture, whether it is through associating with the
natives or speaking the Arabic language.

One can see in analyzing identity between East and West, the complexities and
challenges that Iraqis face. These complexities go beyond politics and war, through
culture, traditions, and the superiority/inferiority relationship between the two worlds. In
other words, the conflict is also about dominance that takes many shapes and forms.
Struggles with western hegemony take place in the privacy of the home, in the public
domain, and on the battlefield.

The struggle between two cultural identities is just one of the issues that Khudayri
portrays in A Sky So Close in a novel that begins with the narrator’s childhood and it
takes her through adulthood. Her life coincides with the Iran-Iraq war up to the Persian Gulf War. Khudayri brings in an interesting perspective on the war from the firsthand experiences of the protagonist, military communiqués, and through her friends describing the situation to her in letters. Her life’s main struggles are not only about issues perhaps a Western reader is used to reading about in Arab women’s writing such as, an Arab woman’s struggle for personal freedom. The author goes beyond these issues to offer larger historical contexts on how life in Iraq affected the private sphere (or vice-versa), and the cultural and political dichotomy between East and West.

In 1991 Iraq invades Kuwait, the UN condemns the act, and countries prepare to send their militaries to Iraq. Just like in Zubaida’s Window, the narrator in A Sky so Close watches the road to the 2003 war through her television set: “A television screen flickers in the corner of the shop. A map of the Middle East is laid out, decorated with groups of tanks, armored personnel carriers, military units, equipment, and soldiers” (Qazwini et al., 2008). Living in Europe, both al-Qazwini’s and Khudayri’s protagonists join rallies calling for peace and not war in Iraq. The war to them at a distance is just as painful as it is if they were there. Their sense of hopelessness and not knowing exactly what is happening makes the television screen a valuable tool that connects them to their homeland.

In another case of exile and identity clash, Dunah Ghali’s ‘Indamathastayiqzu al-râ’îhah (When the Scent Awakens) opens with a woman talking about Narjiss, a Sumerian goddess. Narjiss, goddess of pain, destruction, and sadness did not possess the beauty people there worshiped, and she was forgotten after her death. Thus she held a
grudge against her people, and it is for this reason that destruction befell them. But after the destruction in the land, everyone began to worship her (Ghālī, 2006, p. 10). Ghālī presents a metaphor of the history of Iraq and the continuous destruction of the country throughout the history of the nation and presently.

The Danish lady narrating is a counselor from the social services sent to assess the situation of Iraq refugees and assess their mental health, in Denmark. Marwā al-Bāsry is the first patient she communicates with from the start of the story, they communicate in English. The counselor works with a number of Iraqi Refugees there in Copenhagen. She studies the different situations of those who are sick or those who are difficult to diagnose, then she gives her final assessment of their personal and psychological state. Reḍā is another patient the counselor meets with and his wife, Nahlā, whom he is separated from. As Reḍā and Marwā are seeing the same social worker, the doctor suspects that it is he and his wife that Marwā talks about in her sessions with her.

Reḍā does not admit he has any problems; he only wants to see the doctor so he can qualify for government assistance. When he talks to her he discusses the identity problems he faced in Iraq. How their loyalties are questioned because he is of Persian nationality and citizenship: “we are told that our loyalties are questioned because of our Persian citizenship, and because we have no right to our nation” (Ghālī, 2006, p. 76). Marwā also has her views on different groups in Iraq, as she discusses some aspects and differences between Shī‘ahs and Sunnīs in terms of mourning and generosity. Both Reḍā and Marwā, the psychologist notices, mention the exile of Iraqi Sh’īa to Iran. The novel is
a recollection of the Iran–Iraq war and the situation of Iraqis who went into exile during the 1980’s. Exile of Iraqis began as early as the 1970’s to the 1980’s.

As she looks at her files, the Counselor notices that Marwā discusses some people in her family and especially talks about her friend Nahlā, but does not mention who was executed in her family by the security forces or the problem her and her sister Narjiss faced in harassments from them (Ghālī, 2006, p. 21). Marwā later disappears and the counselor is worried, as she believes she is suffering from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and had attempted suicide twice.

The story is written from several points of views one of them is from the Danish woman and her perspective as she observes her Iraqi patients in Denmark and their situation. She refers to Ṣaddām Ḥussein as the dictator and is described as oppressive in his rule against religious and ideological dissidents. The point of view of the psychologist and Nina Nahlā’s friend offers a Western perspective towards them as Iraqis, and as well as the point of view of Nahlā, who is dealing with her own identity crisis. The whole conflict in identity appears through the personality of Nahlā.

Marwā is an artist and presents her works in an art gallery. She wants to forget her memories, to forget the torture and the importing of young men to the war front and to the Iranian camps, and seeking refuge in other countries. She also mentions identities of people whether Sunnī, leftist, having Iranian loyalties or Jewish roots, and the communist or the religious and the jails along with the hidden graves. Marwā remembers someone telling her “[w]e choose incorrectly, we are loyal incorrectly, and we commit treason incorrectly... I ask myself which identity connects us together”? (Ghālī, 2006, p.
Marwā is in search of a common identity among Iraqis at a time where these same multiplicities of identities may have disconnected them from each other.

Reḍā breaks down when he remembers how his sister died, he is upset not because she died young but because he feels guilty he did not die instead of her, “death is for young men not for young women” (Ghālī, 2006, p. 82). Marwā is the one that recalls to the counselor the way Reḍā’s sister died, she died with her two children the day he and Nahlā were supposed to be married, a rocket hit their taxi. Reḍā’s mother, sister, and his prison friends all died one after the other. Reḍā tells her of Marwā’s family, her brother is executed by the regime; he was a painter. His family had to pay for the bullets that killed him, a matter mentioned in other novels. The lives of these old Iraqi friends which were interconnected then disconnected in exile were interconnected once more through their Danish counselor.

It is revealed in the narration that while Reḍā was serving in the military, during a training course on mines, a mine exploded, he and his friends were there, three among them died, and fifteen were wounded. The tragedy is when they were accused of planting it themselves and were unjustly forced to go for trial and perhaps get executed or imprisoned. They were accused of the incident as he rationalizes, because they were from Basra. Here the geographical significance leads to this accusation as it reveals their Iraqi background hence the suspicion of either planning a coup because they were communist or belonged to the Dawa party (Ghālī, 2006, p. 94).

The crisis in identity is most starkly evident in the character of Nahlā in the second part of the novel, which is entitled and narrated through “Helena Saba” who is
really Nahlā, Reḍā’s wife. Nahlā/Helena, in observing her friend Nina’s life in Denmark says,

This society gives me confidence in myself, I feel light now for freeing myself from makeup and high heels and jewelry, the kitchen, the family name, the husband, appearances, social obligations, age barriers, and a million of other minor things people mind their business in. (Ghāllib, 2006, p. 103)

She now has identity issues and has problems with dealing with her husband Reḍā, since she can see the many differences between them after she has lived in Denmark and has assimilated into the new society. Reḍā, however, refuses to learn the language and resists any changes she may undertake in her whether it is cutting her hair. She feels now they are different in everything which may not have been the case before. In Suad Joseph’s study “Geographies of Lebanese Families: Women as Transnationals, Men as Nationals and Other Problems with Transnationalism”, she found that women were less likely to feel a sense of longing for their land and nation as much as men did. Her results contrasted with the normative data found on transnational families:

Among the transnational families, with whom I am working, I found, contrary to the scholarship, that transnationalism, rather than fracturing nuclearity, facilitated it, in part driven by the women’s desire for nuclearity. Second, I found that the sense of “nation” was amorphous at best, and that the women identified with or
longed for Lebanon as a nation less than the men did. Third, challenging the presumed bifocality, these families occupied multiple national sites, with women at times being the more physically and culturally mobile. (Joseph, 2009, p. 122)

Although Joseph’s study is focused on Lebanese immigrants to the U.S, there are many similarities that can be drawn between Lebanese women and Iraqi women, for one, they share the traditional Arab culture and norms, which exile appears to provide them with a sense of freedom, and second despite this not being a factor in Joseph’s study, the Lebanese women at one point endured a long civil war, hence they have their own historical memory of war. Nevertheless one can observe this very notion Joseph observes in the female characters of Iraqi writers. One can see for instance, Reţā’s reaction to Nahlā’s changes upsets him as he sees her as lost: “[y]our obsession with the empty Western culture, your admiration to it”. She responds, “[w]hy don’t you come with an American flag and burn it in front of me” (Ghālī, 2006, p. 127).

Your feeling of inferiority is what pushes you to attach yourself to the Danish and to kneel to them in order for them to accept you, you are going to be a joke to your children when they grow up, and did you think about your age, ha? Helena Saba after twenty years, in your fifties, ha? Are you going to get back “Nahlā Sabah”, did you think about it? Did you imagine how they will call you with this name when you return to Basra? There is nothing strange in that, this is your roots, it is the root of your mom and grandmother. (Ghālī, 2006, p. 128)
Nahlā does not respond to Reḍā, but she begins to detest him, and says to herself and who said that I will return there? Nahlā wants to forget her old Iraqi identity and everything that ties her to it she wants to live a life new and free and Reḍā no longer fits in that picture so she wanted to get a divorce from him. Reḍā’s attachment to Iraq and Nahlā’s detachment from it is comparative to Joseph’s ethnographic conclusions of the male and female Lebanese immigrant’s connection to the homeland. Why then are the females more readily willing to do away with their native land and not the men? This is explained by the cultural freedoms women gain in exile while men stand to benefit little from it. An example of this detachment is when Nahlā changes her name because it the one she chooses not her family chose for her, and it is easy to pronounce in that society. She does not see anything wrong with it because many names get changed because they are pronounced incorrectly.

In an essentialized view of men, Dunā Ghāli’s novel draws comparisons between Western and Eastern men. From Nina, Nahlā’s Danish friend’s perspective, the difference between Eastern men and Danish men are as she explains, “[t]he Eastern man puts boundaries to his personality and knows exactly what he wants; however a Danish man is confused he does not know what he wants and what the woman wants from him” (Ghālī, 2006, p. 110). But Nahlā disagrees and sees in Danish men the ideal image of a father and husband and he believes in equality and does not understand why to Danish women that is not enough. This type of essentialism and drawing binaries between not the male female differences but in the differences between the cultures and backgrounds of men,
and putting them against each other allows women writers the agency to analyze men as the object and as women as the subject. Nina tries to explain to Nahlā that their situation as women is not perfect and that men and women no longer give value to sexual relations between men and women and it became a norm such as doing exercise nothing special about it.

Nahlā also engages in intellectual discussions with Nina about the differences between the two cultures, relationships as well as politics and communism and how it might differ in both societies; both Nina and Reḍā have communist sympathies. Nina tells “If there were any intellectuals they are communists” (Ghālī, 2006, p. 122). Nahlā tells Nina about the Iraq regime: “[y]ou cannot imagine the extent of what we have been through in Iraq, can you imagine a regime in the world that kills its citizens until they are extinct?” (Ghālī, 2006, p. 124).

Marwā has her own personal crisis and attempts suicide after her husband Adnan disappears in Iraq. After her brother and father’s death, their house is nothing but sadness and women wearing black reflecting their sorrows. The story later begins to be read through the voices of Marwā and Reḍā. During the story, Iraq invades Kuwait, so they are considered political exiles before the latest wars take place in Iraq and Ṣaddām was in full power. It is through the voice of Reḍā that the political discussion on Iraq occurs with one of the Iraqi exiles who used to be a political minister (Ghālī, 2006, p. 181) comparing Democracy in Denmark and their ability to implement Islamic principles.

It is clear the novelist, Ghālī, is bitterly critical of the regime, while the main protagonist Marwā shares many similarities with other characters from other novels. She
feels the loneliness and sense of loss, holding on to the past and the trauma she had been through seeing her brother jailed and killed and her father dying and her mother going blind from what they have been through. She saw her family diminish left alone with no immediate family except one brother Narjiss, whom she uses as a symbol in the story. These features and themes of isolation with no family to turn to anymore, not only a husband or a male partner but the immediate extended family is absent as well – this is recurring in the character’s lives and are continuously seen in these novel written by Iraqi women.

The male characters, such as many that we have seen in Iraqi women’s novels, are also broken; but Ređā has a voice of his own which is rarely seen in other novels. Ghālī does a good job in depicting a male voice in the novel and she tries to do that by showing his lifestyle, his relationships and through his discussions about politics with his friends.

Unlike other novels, Ghālī’s ‘Indamā tastayqizu al-rāʾīḥah’ does not appear to be critical of any invasion of Iraq nor does it mention in details the war experience other than the brief flashbacks from Ređā, the male character. The main critique and concern was the oppressive nature of the regime against Iraqis and their forced exile from the country due to their political dissidence. Like most political activist in other novels the political dissident belonged mainly to the communist party.

Identity and the clash between East and West is certainly another theme in the novel, while some Iraqis embrace the Danish culture and turn away from their heritage such as Nahlā, others like Ređā try to hold on to it but even if it comes with some denial. He questions Nahlā what will you do when you return to Basra? He contradicts himself
when the wife his family sends to him from Iraq decides not to stay in Denmark and to return. He does not agree to return with her when she asks him to go back with her to Iraq, but yet he does not appear he was enthusiastic in denying this chance. His Iraqi wife questions Reḍā and all Iraqis in diaspora:

I don’t understand the truth behind the reasons why you want to remain in country that is cold and cruel, shocking with no purpose in it, just as I do not understand the reason behind the exodus of thousands of Iraqis and their exile. (Ghālī, 2006, p. 189)

One reason to explain their discontent in their new exiled land is their status as refugees. Also, living in a cold, cloudy country may be a cause for their depression, but it is not enough for them to compel them to return back to make a change in their country

When Marwā calls Nahlā and she answers as Helena, Marwā admits she cried after she hung up because Nahlā said it with such seriousness that she believed she was Helena. She questions the life Iraqis lead in Denmark and if they are convinced by the way they lead their lives there (Ghālī, 2006, p. 222). Ghālī describes Denmark as cold and cloudy not only because the weather in that region is such but it is a reflection of the way they feel and their mood in exile. This is the norm in the novels by Iraqi women, the countries they are living in are usually cold, and frigid a reflection of the society perhaps or the feelings of loneliness they feel there.
Marwā meets with Reḍā at the end of the novel and as they discuss their countries situation, Reḍā attempts to get closer to her by touching her hair and kissing it. This description of the physical intimacy is seen in the Iraqi novels written in European settings. Compared to the novels written in Baghdad and Iraq, the novel written describes the women in such communities in a more physically intimate way with men, and the novelist mention the Iraqi women’s relations with foreign men as well, a trend not seen in the novel written within Iraq. This is a reflection of the freedom they have when they are outside of their country and outside of their social norms. It is also an emphasis on the change or hybrid identity they have acquired while living abroad and in exile. These women struggle with such identities and relations.

Reḍā, in his conversation with Marwā, critiques her and the Iraqi women and blames them for rejecting their own cultural values and replacing them with Western ones

I imply the imitation of the nonsense Western way, this stubbornness in the matter of your independence and freedom, your persistence in announcing it every time you see a man. Stop your flirtation with this society… This look that you direct towards me and your likes with the intention to strip me out of my masculinity. They do not differ, Suad, Shahināz, Ole, Rebecca. I am tired of searching for a convincing reason to your actions, I am the accepting and encouraging one, you step on my pride and destroy my grace. (Ghālī, 2006, p. 231)
It is clear here that women are able to develop their own freedoms and to negotiate their identities in the new space of exile, which concerns the male Iraqi who wants to preserve the traditional patriarchal roles set in their native culture, but yet cannot because the cultural rules are now different. There is no societal pressure for a female to conform to certain stringent traditions set forth by the native culture; however the concern is stripping the Eastern identity and replacing it with a Western coat which does not necessarily improve a woman’s situation or life. The question merits itself why are Iraqi women more likely to embrace such Western ways and not the men in this novel? One response is that in the social context men’s freedom is not significantly improved in the Western culture since this freedom had already been allotted to them in their native patriarchal culture, yet for women this new space allows females the same rights otherwise reserved for males only.

Marwā notices his tone and his speech is directed in the feminine form, referring to all females and their way of thinking, this highlights a major issue that not only do women face in exile but men face as well. Iraqi men no longer feel the control and glory they had and this threatens them, such as in the case of Reḍā. He bluntly says you are threatening my power and pride and it is not only Iraqi women he see this from but all women in that Western society. He later explains to her, you are all similar, the Muslim, Christian and Jewish or Buddhist women, you all want to disobey us. This becomes a power struggle between the two and this is why Reḍā is the one that tells Marwā everything will be ok when we go back to Iraq, he wants to return to Iraq or so he thinks he does, but yet all the Iraqi women do not seem that enthusiastic in returning back to
their native land and that provokes a sense of insecurity in him and a criticism as to why all you women embrace this Western culture so willfully. As per his conversation with Marwā:

> our situation will not improve until our return… it is difficult for our girls to live in such societies” she responds to him “can you tell me the number of people that think of returning, and what will they find once they return, and this waiting is a fantasy, do you think you yourself will return, and do you think you have a place there, did you think of that? Then why are you still here, and tell me what remains there that you can call a nation? (Ghālī, 2006, p. 230).

Dunā Ghālī tackles the issues facing Iraqis living in exile and their denial of certain situations; through Reḍā, one sees the hope of returning back to their country of origin or the desire to return, yet it is not possible due to many factors. The novel was written during the period of 2001-2004 in Denmark, so at that time, Ṣaddām was still in power. Marwā the character remembers the time of the Persian Gulf War and refers to the month of August, as August was when Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990 – the Persian Gulf War began in January of 1991. She wakes from a nightmare to hear the sounds of rockets and wonders if this would be a beginning of liberation or an invasion. A man with her tells her that it is only a new year’s celebration and that she can go back to bed. But the novel ends with her thoughts that it was during the month of August. Perhaps this is a sign of optimism or hope or a pessimism and fear of what is yet to come (Ghālī, 2006).
Haifa Zangana’s *Nisāʾ ʿalā safar*, Writing the Personal and Political

Haifa Zangana writes both fiction and biography. In her work of fiction, *Women on a Journey*, Zangana writes about five Iraqi women in exile in London and their struggle with their past and present. In the forward to the translated version of *Nisāʾ ʿalā safar* (*Women on a Journey Between Baghdad and London*), Zangana provides an outlook to the world of Iraqi writers, their experiences of politics, exile and social issues. Just as I argue in my research on Iraqi women authors writing about their personal experiences as well as their nation’s tribulations, Zangana also describes their writings as personal and political. In fact, she states that “I maintain that it is very difficult to separate the personal from the political when both are directed at the same immediate objectives” (H. Zangana, 2007b, p. xiv).

Her fiction and nonfictions both deal with the experiences of Iraqi women during the reign of the regime, and in exile where most of her novels were written. Many of the Iraqi authors who write in Exile were involved politically in Iraq, particularly in the Iraqi communist party; Haifa Zangana was among them. Many were forced into exile to escape political persecution due to their ideologies, political activities or their disenchantment from the Ba’athist regime. Those who were committed to the communist party found themselves isolated especially after the fall of the Soviet Union.

Authors in exile, as Zangana describes it, forces one to rely overwhelmingly on memory as a tool to preserve their past and their experiences. This memory carries the
nostalgia towards their homeland as they left it for a strange land whether it was for a Western or an Arab country that was closer in proximity, such as ‘Ammān or Beirut. This memory they have of the homeland affects the themes of their novels, such as their plight to escape, serving in the army, as well as torture or imprisonment. These are among the recurring themes for Iraqi women writers in exile as well as Iraq men authors. These women who are among the Iraqi diaspora writers focus more on women’s personal issues. Although male characters are present, they do not however take the same main roles as the Iraqi women in the novels.

Just as other Iraqi writers, for Zangana it is difficult to separate the personal from the political, “I believe that writers should strive to find the right balance between the individual and society, creativity, and moral responsibility, imagination and reality” (H. Zangana, 2007). This plays an important factor for Iraqi women in their writings, as they attempt to incorporate these identities, their personal as well as the national. Their individual needs are not separate from the collective need as they are intertwined and affected by their national identity. They attempt to balance this out in their writings about their lives and their homeland.

When Iraqi writers write from exile they are writing both about their longing to their homeland, and lamenting at what has become of it. They watch from afar as their nation falls deeper into destruction, without having the ability to do anything about it; except perhaps attend a rally against further wars or bombings of Iraq. Iraqi writers present characters with personal struggles of their past and present struggles with their newly formed or hybrid identities that have developed from living in the West. Some
characters embrace these new cultures and ideas they are exposed to while others do not. This is witnessed in Ghālī, ‘Indamā tastayqızu al-rā’īḥah (When the Scent Awakens) where some characters, mainly female reject their old identities only to replace them with new ones. The male Iraqi characters indulge in the world of new found land of exile through the economic and secure stability they acquire, however, they still hold on to the old patriarchal and traditional views they came with from Iraq. The binaries between the two cultures of the East and the West present a new challenge for Iraqis struggling with their personal identities, while they become helpless or lack control of their national identities.

Iraqis in diaspora face new challenges and the feeling of loneliness consumes them, although this is also present in Iraqi women within Iraq. This loneliness that comes with living in exile becomes overwhelming because it is not only a separation from the people they long for but it is also a separation of their land, their past and their memories become the only thing they hold on to. Many times this feeling is described in the place they are living in, when it is compared to Iraq, as cold and gloomy.

As the main character of Women on a Journey, Mājda, describes it:

Oh the place was so dirty… She was covered in dust… She would be buried in a cold country… The weather was cold here. The people were cold. Unfriendly. Fear was like weeds and dust… She ought to give the flat a quick clean. Quick… quick… Why quick? Ha, ha. What was the urgency? She was on her own... an alien. (H. Zangana, 2007b, p. 207)
This not only portrays the reality of the climate they live in (mainly in Europe), but also it describes this kind of loneliness and nostalgia. Coldness and frigidity are characteristics of the culture they are forced to assimilate to which emphasizes the individual over the collective. This loneliness, nostalgia and coldness develop into a reality and a penalty they have to pay in living far away from the homeland. It is also the price they pay for their freedom or for rejecting the political situations of their nation. The Iraqis that live away from their homeland have no choice; it was imposed on them because of the state of the country which adds to their misery and alienation.

Guilt is another feature seen in the Iraqi characters in the novels, they feel guilty for not being able to change the reality of the nations, and yet they watch it as it goes up in flames or being attacked by other foreign forces while they are living a safe life in the West, the very countries that inflict this violence on Iraq. The question is does this guilt arise from the feeling that they had betrayed their people and their nation?

*Women on a Journey* is a reflection of the diverse makeup of Iraqi society: Mājda is a former Ba’athist member while Umm Muḥammad is a religious Kurdish women whose son at times struggles with his Iraqi-Kurdish identity and having to speak Arabic. Sāhira is married to a man ‘Abed Kādhim who belonged to the disintegrated Iraqi communist party. Iqbāl whose English boyfriend gets her pregnant also has a son. Adība struggles with her past and sees a doctor to deal with it. The whole story takes place in London; however, it is very much about Baghdad and its memories as it is about living in exile.
The author finished writing this in the year 2000 while Šaddām Ḵūseɪn was still in power. Despite this, Zangana’s novel still criticizes the regime and the political situation in Iraq. This criticism is conveyed through the only character linked to regime among the five women, Mājda. Zangana admits it was the most challenging for her to write because she belonged to the Ba’athist party and she did not know anyone close to her in real life who was Ba’athist. The character Mājda was most interestingly depicted as a staunch loyalist to the Ba’ath party and the “Leader” as she had met him once when he hid in their house. Mājda’s brother also died for the sake of the regime. Mājda’s husband was also part of the Ba’ath party and received a high post; however, he was caught trying to talk to political dissidents and therefore was sentenced to death.

Mājda’s experience and the loss of her husband provides a picture of a former Ba’athist who believed in the party but in the end was betrayed by it, and felt its wrath as well. The character’s loyalty is evident when she remembers how close she felt to the leader:

He was like a father to me at that time, and from him I learned the meaning of Ba’thism and the dream of a single Arab nation. He taught me how to distinguish between Ba’thist, those people who were proud of their national identity, and the Communists, who were lackeys of a foreign power. (H. Zangana, 2007, p. 108)

It is interesting that the author attempts to create a character that sympathizes with the Ba’athist since Zangana was a member of the Communist party in Iraq and was
imprisoned as a result. Zangana attempts as best as she can to present a work that is neutral of ideology, yet at the same time reveals the atrocities and hardships the Iraqi people endured during Ṣaddām’s leadership of Iraq.

While Mājda is at an event to commemorate a poet, she runs into former colleagues in the Ba’ath party, Izat and his wife Samīra. Izat was the comrade who came to her house to report the death sentence handed down to her husband and left promptly without offering any further explanations or any help. Now as they meet her they have also escaped, helped by members of the opposition. Samīra tries to pretend everything is good and that they have joined the opposition movement and now they want to speak out against the regimes and all its mishaps.

She didn’t want to look at Samīra. What was she doing with that hypocrite? Her face painted like a common slut, all the makeup, bright red stains on her teeth and her expensive vulgar clothes? Trollop!” Mājda wondered how she should deal with her when she could not stand the sight of her as she calls her in her mind “filthy cow... daughter of a bitch... vulgar little whore with her pimp of a husband... traitor. (H. Zangana, 2007b, p. 153)

In a fit of rage Mājda cannot hold herself from taking out her anger on Samīra she rips the business card she gives her and yells at her calling her a bitch and whore:
“Now that you’ve run out of ways of making money in Baghdad, you’ve come to London to carry on your” Mājda starts to hit Samīra with her bag feeling the need for revenge for the their role in killing her husband. Mājda then turned her handbag on him and aimed her blows at his head, launching a stream of invective into his face. “Traitors, spies, pimps! Who tortured Sa’id with his own hands, eh, who?... Do you think I don’t know? Torturer... We all know how you enjoyed torturing people… Impotent bastard! Now you and your wife have had enough of money and being pimps… you’ve joined the opposition... I spit on you... Filthy bastard, bitch! You...” (H. Zangana, 2007b, p. 154)

Zangana vents – through Mājda, the frustration over some Iraqi Ba’athists who ran to safety and escaped accountability as the regime fell. After years of benefiting from the system and participating in the torture and oppression of the Iraqi people they escape without harm. This is a very strong criticism to have and Zangana presents it in a bold way through Mājda who herself was a Ba’athist making this a more balance approached to the criticism of former Iraqi Ba’athists.

Similarly, this criticism of some Ba’athist members is also evident in ‘Āliya Ṭālib’s novel *Qiyāmat Baghādād* when she mentions “those that were close to the regime and who became dissidents afterward”(*Ṭālib, 2008, p. 98*). She uses a similar critique to Zangana, that those who were loyal to the regime, they were able to go unreprimanded by cleverly escaping and shifting sides But Ṭālib’s splits from Zangana and extends her criticism by explaining that the rights of Iraqis were lost event after the fall of the regime.
Those that were rivals of the regime who took advantage of the situation in Iraq and benefited from their “dissidence”, that ate the caviar while we swallow the stone with our bread, the bread rations the regime passed out to us” (Ṭālib, 2008, p. 99). She continues to disclose their hypocrisy: “those that called themselves oppressed fighters, and politicians, when most of their history “fighting” is well known to us; between theft, ethical and professional violations. Ascending to leadership on the backs of the real talents those that lived and died without thinking of leaving the country which is always plagued with despots” (Ṭālib, 2008, p. 99). Ṭālib here directs her criticism also to those who left Iraq, or were able to leave it. It is noticeable here there is conflict between those who chose exile and those who remained in Iraq and faced struggles of survival.

Just as Ṭālib recalls sub-narratives of Iraqis affected by the regime, Zangana includes them too through the memories of her characters. It is through Mājda and Adība that one can read the frustrations and oppression of the regime against Iraqis. Adība represents those political dissidents who were imprisoned and tortured. Based on a report her doctor has on Adība it is disclosed that she was tortured and imprisoned by the regime and her husband also disappeared, she does not know if he is dead or alive. Adība is hunted by her experience and meets with a psychologist. Adība’s report by the doctor shows signs of torture such as being beaten, kicked, forced to undress to stand naked in front of interrogators, sleep deprivation, being kept in isolation, and seeing her husband only unrecognizable and blind folded. She never saw her husband after that and does not know what happened to him, whether he is dead or alive.
Based on the experience of torture, she had short term symptoms of bleeding, hemorrhaging in the womb, and memory loss. Her long term symptoms were insomnia, depression, fear, and scarring on the leg from blows by an instrument like a truncheon. Adība explains to her doctor that:

Of the idea of being questioned, of being interrogated. I also felt as Ḥāmid. As Ḥāmid of myself. I was partly thinking about my husband. I don’t know what’s happened to him. I don’t know what he has to go through everyday. Whether he is dead or alive. I was also thinking about my country, which is facing a new attack. My people are hungry and under siege. And the regime is still clinging to power. (H. Zangana, 2007b, p. 136)

Adība still suffers from her memory and experience of imprisonment but this does not discourage her from participating in events for Iraq and making Iraqi friends. She is also concerned for her nation what will happen to it by foreign attacks. Adība does not see herself as a victim or the worst victim of the regime as she admits, “[m]y case is not unique among Iraqis, every refugee has been imprisoned and tortured, or forced to flee their country. Many of them suffered much worse than I have” (H. Zangana, 2007b, p. 136). The struggle of reconciling the past and the trauma Adība goes through is reflected through her dialogues with her psychologist, as she further explains,
How can we calculate the years of humiliation, silence, shame, self-blame, and weakness; how do we quantify the sense of being crushed and marginalized? It’s like a corpse, whose weight increases with the passing of the years. We carry its load internally wherever we go. (H. Zangana, 2007b, p. 139)

Adība struggles to continue her life and to forget seems impossible when the memory of the past still haunts her. In exile things do not get better, they just have more time to sink in and to conceive the level of atrocities Iraqis had been through.

Despite the agreement of all characters that Ṣaddām Ḥusseīn’s regime is the root of all their problems and their cause of exile; they still however resisted the attack against Iraq and participated in demonstrations against attacking Iraq. They believe it is just a plan to destroy the country without getting rid of Ṣaddām. There is mistrust in the Americans and their intentions with their attacks. Another way that the personal and the political intersect is when Iqbāl takes her anger out at her boyfriend once the bombing of Baghdad occurs and they see it on television. She felt lonely and distanced herself from him when he tried to come closer. Iqbāl feels the frustration and her anger turns toward John as if he is the representative of his own nation and what they are doing to Iraq. In a fit of anger, she attacks him by saying, “Don’t be stupid, why do you British keep on telling me ‘I know how you feel’, and we know what you mean,’ etc? If you really understand why do you go on causing this destruction?... Which you don’t want. Apparently... which you don’t agree with.” (H. Zangana, 2007b, p. 193) He tries to calm
her down and to comfort her in the difficult time she felt as she saw her country getting destroyed. This is another example of how the personal and the political intersect.

Zangana employs feminist features in her discourse through her female character, Iqbāl is one of them. She embraces a different kind of lifestyle disavowing herself from the traditional Iraqi customs. Iqbāl’s character is the most boldly written in terms of her identity as an Iraqi woman living a life of a Western woman, she discretely dates an English man. While she is aware of the cultural taboos of her relationship she still lives this double life. Her English boyfriend wants to move in with her but she resists as she does not see it fit and she is happy with him just coming over and enjoying their time together. Iqbāl also drinks alcohol with other Arab colleagues however she mentions their boss, a religious guy may let her go if he finds out.

Furthermore Iqbāl is comparable to the character in Ghālī’s ‘Indamā tastayqīzū al-rāʾihāh, 2006, Nahlā who changes her name to Helena and chooses to live a western life and abandoning her Iraqi identity. This bears resemblance to the character of Iqbāl in Zangana’s. Like Nahlā, Iqbāl decides to leave her Iraqi husband, but Iqbāl navigates through both identities Arab and Western, and does not try to abandon her whole Iraqi identity just as Nahlā chose to do by changing her name to Helena and deciding to start off new. Iqbāl also becomes pregnant by an English man, both taboo subjects and unacceptable in a conservative Iraqi society.

Iraqi narratives written in Western countries possess similar features to one another. They resemble each other by taking on very similar qualities and themes. Both the characters, men and women, appear to encounter similar problems. Sāhira’s husband
Khadim, for instance, in Zangana’s *Women on a Journey* shares some similarities to Reḍā in Ghālī’s novel. Ghālī’s work is based in Copenhagen while Zangana’s in London, but both men were former communist party members, both concerned with the state of their country yet weakened and felt handicapped by the or exiled situation. Both men were politically involved but now, living in exile, they feel this sense of hopelessness or exhaustion.

While Reḍā is now divorced from Nahlā, he attempts to remarry a girl from Iraq but it does not work. Khadim is married to Sāhira but he is useless to her and prefers to be left in isolation with his books. Although he was a communist party member he begins to read more about Sufism, Islamic history and more Arabic books than English. Sāhira is concerned with the way he Kādhim is changing, but her friend Adība reassures her that he is just trying to search for an identity especially after his disappointments of the communist party and the collapse of the Soviet Union. His whole idea and beliefs have been shaken and now he feels he was wrong. The search for an identity causes him to look back at the Arab roots and religion.

Sāhira worries that her husband’s search for identity would mean they would have to turn back to Mecca and to religion, or to the days before Islam. She continues this should have been from the start:

Shame on them for cheating people… misleading them with promises of a happy homeland. Do we know how many people have died? How many imprisoned and tortured? And now Kādhim effendi… the leader who taught them all this magic...
he’s reading all about the history of Arabs before Islam! Isn’t it too bloody late.

(H. Zangana, 2007b, p. 168)

This reveals a sign of disappointment with even communism as it has collapsed and the support for it has disintegrated. Sāhira’s frustration appears to show the wasted time and lives people have put into it for no reason. Kādhim is just a symbol of the failed system and now he is in search of a new identity.

Sāhira complains as well of how her sons are in different places and that she has not seen her daughter for months. She compares their current family state to an English family who see each other on holidays. Iqbāl defensively accuses her of over generalization and that not all English families are as such. Sāhira then scolds her by saying we all know you have an English boyfriend and that’s why you are defensive. Iqbāl mentions to Sāhira that there is a possibility her daughter may have a boyfriend, something that Sāhira does not accept and fully denies and rejects. This reveals the identity and cultural struggles Iraqis face in the West. Some assimilate such as Iqbāl while others try to incubate themselves to maintain their traditional customs.

The concept of freedom is discussed in Zangana’s novel, as her work addresses two types of freedoms. The one with Iqbāl not wanting to get married in order to remain personally free, and have control over her life, and the other is political freedom. Both these women may have found in a society different than their own and in exile. Zangana explains a concept by Eric Fromm, a German psychologist, which creates binaries between good and evil and the love of life and death,
A love of life develops most naturally through freedom; but freedom in the abstract sense of the word is not sufficient. Freedom must be understood here as the freedom to act, the freedom to be creative- to create, to construct- or to roam freely. To enjoy such freedom, human beings have to be active and responsible rather than slaves or cogs in a machine. (H. Zangana, 2007, p. 174)

This concept of freedom is an important aspect to Iraqis especially women who lacked both types of freedoms, due to cultural and political pressures in their societies.

Umm Mohammed is a Kurdish Iraqi woman living with her son Mohammed. She is the most religious among the five women living in London, she fasts and prays. Her son rejects the Arab identity in fact he detests it. He did not want to live around them because as he tells his mother he does not want to see Arabs or hear their language. Umm Muḥammed’s son is briefly mentioned in the novel and it was only this we know about him and that he has an English girlfriend that he moved in with. The novel does not elaborate as to why he has that much hatred towards the Arabs or the Kurdish Iraqi issue.

The novel ends with Sāhira obtaining a job in the place she enjoys shopping most in, a used clothes shop. Iqbāl, after resisting, agrees to get engaged to her English boyfriend and to see if it works out if not she was ok in getting a divorce. Mājda boldly attempts to write a letter to Ṣaddām Ḥusseīn as her feeling of loneliness and isolation increased, she still had faith in him and tries to rationalize everything that happened to her and to her husband. In the end, Mājda locks herself in her home not answering any of
her friend’s knocks on her door. Here one observes Mājda’s self demise through her isolation and her inability to cope with her past and her Ba’athist loyalty. Her sense of betrayal is felt in her denial of it, by her attempt to right to the former leader and to try to reconcile or perhaps understand.

Nevertheless, Adība’s end is the most tragic, as she answers a call to translate for an Iraqi family in the airport, but on her way home she gets attacked by a man who kills her with a knife. Adība had plans that day to call her friends and to go visit her friend Michael and his father; she had even bought them a gift. The death of Adība is unexplainable, since it happens just as she begins to recover and make advances in her memory with her psychologist. Her murder reveals the uncertainty and lack of safety in any space. Adība was optimistic and had plans for her life; however, it was cut short by a random act of crime. This could also point out other unexpected troubles Iraqis may face in exile in a foreign land, as exile does not necessarily mean they are fully preserved from death. Death in a foreign land is a tragedy in itself for a person in exile.

Zangana’s novel *Women on a Journey* provides an outlook to different personalities of Iraqi women living in exile. Through a feminist vein she formulates her female characters by sharing the same pains and memory. Yet they differ in the way they choose to continue their lives and in reconciling with their past. Some assimilated to the Western culture more than others, as Umm Muḥammed and Sāhira struggled to keep their traditional cultural values intact. Some tried to adapt while other women such as Mājda and Adība could not as easily. When Adība nearly began to feel comfortable her life ended tragically on a cold night street in London. It is disclosed in the end that Adība had
been in exile since 1979, her date of death December 1999, just a few years short of the last Iraqi invasion and the overthrow of the Šaddām Ḥussein regime. This reiterates the tragedy for some exiles that spend their whole lives waiting to come home only to face death and burial on a cold foreign soil.

The struggle with the hybrid identity and the rejection of the Western culture by many Iraqis is also detected in al-Nadāwī’s Novel *Taht samā’ Kūinhāgin* (Under the Sky of Copenhagen). While this novel is distinctive from the other novels discussed for a variety of reasons that will be discussed below, it does provide a window upon the Iraqi hybrid identity in Europe and the struggles they face there, particularly the many cultural issues they navigate through and especially the females in the society. This novel is significant first because it is written by one of the youngest Iraqi novelists who grew up in exile; therefore, Iraq is an imaginary memory formulated by those around her that are from her native country and her parents. However, the perspective here is different: their struggle is not loneliness, not nostalgia, but the struggle is negotiating the cultural, religious, and traditional obligations of a distant land that is supposed to be native while living and being brought up in a Western country that hold different ideals and cultures from that of her parent’s. This hybrid identity and the struggle to preserve or to overpower one over the other, is an issue for both a young female Iraqi and an older Iraqi women who had just come to this new culture.

The patriarchal society Iraqi women have to navigate through and negotiate with is an issue for both Iraqi women who live in exile or living in their homeland. At times of war, the chaos that ensues provides women with a different type of freedom when the
fabric and structure of society is disturbed. Unlike many Arab women in the Middle East, Iraqi women have concerns significant to them. This is due in part by the series of destructive wars their country was engaged in since the 1980’s up until present. Many Iraqi women were forced to rely on themselves, be independent when most Iraqi men were preoccupied with the war and away in the war front. In times of war this disturbance of the traditional stable structure of society can either be of benefit or a challenge to women; for Iraqi women it was both. Iraqi society is mainly a traditional patriarchal society, during war this stability weakens when the men are no longer present to preserve the status quo, just as other wars witnessed in history.

When men are at battle the women are left to hold society together and to be the main breadwinners. This allows women more freedom of movement and power in decision making; however, at most of the time it can leave women more vulnerable and in poorer, more dire conditions. How do Iraqi women fair in this type of a situation? In many of the novels these very issues were part of their struggles they had to face alone due to the war(s) and their political tribulations. Henceforth, with many of the female characters in the novels, this independence is viewed more as loneliness, and isolation than freedom. This is evident in reality as the number of Iraqi widows increase, which to them is not a chosen matter but a tragic reality of a nation. This is perhaps why Iraqi women are notable in their experiences in issues, as they are tackling not only themes of war and national liberation, but women’s issues as well. The feminist instincts or features are evident throughout the narratives of Iraqi women.
Another point that must be kept in mind is that many of the Iraqi authors who write these novels belong to a class of women who had the opportunity to take advantage of the national system of education that allowed women to study at the free universities Iraq offered its citizens. This particular class that these Iraqi women belong to sheds a light as to the way these Iraqi women write. The way their characters are formulated in their novels and depicted, the struggles they face on a daily basis in society and at times of war.

The novels that deal with the themes of war and exile, have different concerns from novels that are written about other issues in society, for instance the main focus of the novel is not a complete love theme between a man and a woman struggling to unite in light of a traditional society, or women are not so much concerned about men’s oppression towards women as much as the government oppression towards both men and women. Here the issue of liberation is not about the liberation and freedom of women only but of all of society including the men who are oppressed. This is why these narratives become their national narratives, as these women though their maternal nourishing instincts feel a sense of responsibility toward their nation and to relate their story to the world. Also this is a topic highlighted by transnational feminists and a conflicting point between them and Western feminists. Feminists in the developing world fight for freedom and end of oppression for all of society in order for to gain access to freedom for themselves. This however does not mean that they are satisfied with the way they are treated in their own societies or ignorant of their own struggles.
An important aspect of Iraqi women writers is the feeling of obligation to write about the social issues that impact their societies, just as many novelists around the world have, but another aspect is that they are expected to. Society expects them to write about social issues in Iraqi society.

Writers then and now are expected to represent their people, expressing their hopes, dreams, and ambitions and voicing their problems, especially at times of political upheaval I myself have often been approached by readers and asked to write education, women’s issues, and social changes. In short, writers are expected to play a role that might be far beyond their capabilities. (H. Zangana, 2007b, p. xii)

The writers are not only creating a work of fiction merely for entertainment, but they are also making statements about social justice, oppression and women’s issues, because readers and society expects them to. This is why there is an increase in writing about wars, hardships and exiles, at times of turmoil their readers or country men do not expect them to write about a theme or topic the cannot identify or relate to.

Zangana argues this expectation of Iraqi’s relying on Iraqi writers to write their stories goes back to the time of the “ardhahahalji” (re-representers), scribes who aided illiterate Iraqis to write their concerns and requests. Zangana compares Iraqi writers to the ardhahahaljis in the eyes of society. Their jobs are only to write the problems and concerns of the people (H. Zangana, 2007). This is a very important point she mentions
as one can see this in the novels Iraqi women write and their national concerns. Many women write about various Iraqi characters, they are not necessarily real or writing about the self. But Iraqi women writers feel this obligation to write about the different tragedies Iraqis faced, this is why they utilize the sub-narratives to tell their stories so the world could hear it and understand what they witnessed. Whether it is al-Dulaymī, Ḥusayn, Khūḍayrī, Ghālī, Ṭālib, or any other Iraqi women that writes about the wars in her novels, they all appear to be documenting and narrating events and not producing and imaginary piece of work, it all comes from reality and it is all a reflection of the Iraqi reality. Zangana provides an important explanation as to why Iraqi writers write in such a manner, however, they are not forced to write this way it is by their own choice to choose such topics and themes to write about.

Another aspect that Iraqi writers have to keep in mind is that the Iraqi readers tend to identify the characters in the novels to those they know in real life. The characters are always attributed to real life figures and they assume that the novelists are writing about real people. Although it may just be by a coincidence that the characters and their lives overlap with real characters, people still assume that they are real. Zangana finds this phenomenon interesting enough to point out as several of her readers have asked her such questions such as the incident when an Iraqi woman thanks her for writing about her friend, Zangana’s response is as follows “I hadn’t met or heard of her friend.” “How do you explain why someone identifies with a character to such an extent that she believes she knows the character – or even is the character” (H. Zangana, 2007b, p. ix). Khūḍayrī perhaps feels the same as Zangana as she places a note at the end of her novel, Absent,
stating that any similarities in names, personalities, events, and the mixes of herbs in her works are all factious and from the imagination and are just mere coincidences not done on purpose (Khuḍayrī, 2009).

In the same vein, Ḥawrā’ al-Nadāwī narrative is about a struggle to live in the West as an Iraqi and negotiating a hybrid identity. In her novel about a young Iraqi girl living in Copenhagen, she reveals the life of Iraqi young girls who share the past history and their parent’s Iraqi tradition while at the same time living in a Western space. Taḥt samā’ Kūbīnḥāgin is a lucid example of such struggles between two binary identities, the East and the West.

Ḥawrā’ Al-Nadāwī’s Taḥt samā’ Kūbīnḥāgin, Imagined Identity/Imagined homeland

Ḥawrā’ al-Nadāwī’s novel Taḥt samā’ Kūbīnḥāgin, 2010 (Under the Sky of Copenhagen), is noteworthy in many ways. It provides an illustration of the Iraqi hybrid identity in Europe and the many cultural issues Iraqis, especially Iraqi girls, have to negotiate and navigate in their second homeland in the Western societies. This novel is noteworthy, first because it is written by a one of the youngest Iraqi novelists who grew up in exile; therefore Iraq is an imaginary memory formulated by her parents and those around her. However, the perspective here is different, as the struggle is not against loneliness or nostalgia, but the struggle is negotiating the cultural, religious, and traditional obligations of a distant land. This land is supposed to be their mother nation while living and being brought up in a Western country. This complicates their situation
since it holds different ideals and practices from that of their parent’s culture. This hybrid identity and the struggle to preserve or to overpower one over the other is an issue for both a young female Iraqi and an older Iraqi woman who had just been exposed to this different Western culture.

The story opens with a male character in his 30’s speaking about a girl named Huda who asked him to translate her novel from the Danish language to Arabic. Their correspondence, through a messenger, seems odd to him, and he hesitates as his work as a translator involved minor translation projects, not novels. The novel she has asked him to translate is apparently about Huda herself.

Ḥawrā’ al-Nadāwī’s Taḥt samā‘ Kūbīnhāgin (Under the Sky of Copenhagen) presents Iraqi male characters but the men and women are younger and it is mainly about young Iraqi girls living in Copenhagen. She is distinguished from her fellow Iraqi women writers who are much older in age than al-Nadāwī. In addition, the author herself grew up and was raised in Copenhagen and not Iraq; therefore presenting an interesting and special perspective of Iraqis living in exile and the identity issues they struggle with. This hybridity in identity is more convincing in al-Nadāwī’s work more so than her older counterparts.

In contrast, with the exception of Batūl Khuḍayrī’s, the majority of Iraqi women represented here present older Iraqi women characters that spent all of their lives in Iraq and had just recently been introduced to the Western values and culture. Nevertheless all authors present important issues for women and their struggles in the Eastern/Western

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22 Both of her main characters are young Iraqi girls. In a Sky So Close, the narrator commences the novel as a child, and in Ghāyīb she is a teenage girl.
societies. They also present a great perspective in terms of how they navigate through and at times compromise between the two hybrid identities, namely in dealing with being both Iraqi from a conservative Arab culture living in a more liberal European and Western culture which provides them a window of freedom to choose their lives. This is not the case however for the younger Iraqi females who grew up in Iraqi households. They do not have the same freedom as older Iraqi women who live alone in Western society such as the characters of Iqbal in Zangana’s work and Nahlā in Ghālī’s work. Both Nahlā and Iqbal do not have the pressure of family and parents to have to answer to so they are more free in the Western society more so than al-Nadāwī’s characters. The struggle with the hybrid identity and the rejection of the Western by many Iraqis is also found in al-Nadāwī’s novel Taḥt samā’ Kūbihāgin.

Huda begins narrating her life story in the second chapter, telling of her life as a girl born in Copenhagen by Iraqi parents who fled Iraqi through the mountains from the North until they ended up in Denmark. They had left a son named Emad in Iraq. Emad, Huda’s brother, remains in Iraq until his twenties, when he agrees to leave his medical studies there to join his family in Copenhagen. Huda discusses her identity as a girl of Iraqi origin brought up in Copenhagen. Her parents did not commit to teaching her Arabic, yet her name is as common as any other name found in the Arab world. Her affiliation to her national origins is thus superficial. Her personality, her mindset, and her education, she believes, create a weird make-up, which she describes as deformed and incomplete. She does not know who to blame for it – whether it is her upbringing, her personality, or her different environment.
Her confused identity is reflected in the chronology of labels, “Huda Mohammed, Iraqi from Denmark... or Danish from Iraq, I do not know the right chronology” (Nadāwī, 2010, p. 24). An interesting feature of al-Nadāwī’s novel is her direct dialogue with the reader in the second person as if she is arguing with them or speaking to them directly through a conversation. The second person is presumed to be the Arab reader as she also tries to describe Denmark to them. She critiques the Arabs for neglecting Copenhagen as a major city and focusing on Paris or London. No one even knows the queen of Denmark, she argues, they know nothing about Denmark except its cheese. This is an especially interesting feature of the novel because she is speaking to the Eastern Arab audience and not to the West. She is presenting her city and Denmark to them and not presenting an Eastern city such as Baghdad to the reader, that latter of which is a feature found in works by other Iraqi writers such as Luṭfīyah al-Dulaymī, ‘Älīya Țālīb, or other writers where their work laments Baghdad, and their descriptions and their memories are based on the Iraq city and not on a European one, even by those in exile.

Huda’s first childhood crush was on a Danish boy name Klaus, and this is perhaps her first racist encounter leading her to feel the racial and cultural differences she possesses. Huda’s dark features such as her black hair and black eyes caused him to push her away. He would tell her, “[m]y grandma tells me not to marry black girls.” “But I am not black,” she says. “You have black hair,” (Nadāwī, 2010, p. 28) he replies as he runs to play with the girls that have lighter hair like him. This reveals her struggles to fit in not only culturally, but her looks also prevent her from assimilating. This time her traditions
and culture are not the only factors at hand, but rather the acceptance from the natives who see her as different and exotic.

Furthermore, Huda has fond memories of her visit to Syria when her parents took her there in the summer but they were not able to go to see Iraq, and Syria was the closest they could get to their place of origin. After her visit to the mystical land of the East at a young age, she felt her life had changed from that point on. The memory of Damascus, its Umayyad mosque, and Ḥamdiyyah market remained with her even when she walked in the streets of Denmark. She recalled the streets of Damascus as its memory remained in her heart. Her positive image of the country allowed her to embrace the East more willfully.

Her description of her brother, Emad, is quite interesting. Through him, she sees the difference between being brought up in Iraq and Denmark. He is her brother, who is twenty years old and lived all his life in Iraq with her grandparents, and after their death, he had to come to Copenhagen to live with his family. Huda sees him for the first time when she is 10 years old. He is not fond of her; neither is she of him, as he yells at her and treats her with disrespect. He scolds her for speaking Danish, because he cannot understand her, he commands her to get him things and do things for him as if she is his maid. He yells at her for being too loud and curses her for being born. Huda wonders if she had been brought up like him if her parents lived in Iraq, would they have been like him, as he was different in his manner than they are. Is al-Nadāwī here trying to describe the Iraqi man and who was brought up there as compared to the ones in Copenhagen?

She clearly sees the differences and the clashes in cultures are many. Huda does not accept and detests the patriarchal society he has come from. She wonders if he was
brought up with them if he would also be this way, she highlights the importance of place of upbringing and childhood in a person. “If my parents hesitated in their decision to immigrate I would have myself have been completely different than who I am now. If they had not left Emad all those years, he would not have come to us a refined Iraqi man. Compressed in his mind are different ways of thinking from the ones my mother would have brought him up with” (Nadāwī, 2010, p. 41).

Rāfid, the translator Huda contacted to translate her novel into Arabic, is one of the main characters, and an atypical character to other novels of exile by Iraqi women. He appears to be a normal character, and not a soldier, one that provides a male perspective and from an Iraqi man. He becomes curious about Huda and the women’s issues she writes about; however he notices that she does not speak Arabic as she writes to him and discloses that it is not a familiar language to her.

Rāfid, reveals through the first person narration, grew up among an exclusively male household consisting of six brothers. They were six males in an inappropriate place and time, where women did not favor giving birth to male in fear of them being brought up to be killed in the many ways available to them. His mom went to al-Qazimiya to pray that she could have a girl, because it is better peace of mind to have a girl rather than a boy in a turbulent place like Iraq. The politics of Iraq are revealed through Rāfid and the disclosure of the difficult and oppressive situation by the Ṣaddām regime to those who oppose him and the eventual demise of the people under that regime, who happen to be mainly men (Nadāwī, 2010, p. 48).
This peace of mind, he continues, is not written for Iraqi women, and it was not written for his mother, because she was a genuine Iraqi woman. His brothers were executed, one when he was eighteen year of age, he says, because he became old enough to be dangerous and be killed. And another brother was also killed before he left for Europe to avoid the same fate (Nadāwī, 2010, p. 49).

In the same vein as al-Nadāwī inclusion of Rāfid’s account of his brothers, Suhayla Salman, an Iraqi writer, wrote in a collection of stories about Iraq. In one of the stories in Al-iliqa’ (The Meeting) entitled Mashhad (a Shī’ah pilgrimage site and holy city locate in Iran), she writes of a similar frustration about giving birth to male children. The women accompanying her pray for the pregnant women on a visit into enemy territory for the pilgrimage, that she gives birth to a girl and not a boy. Even the pregnant women herself is anxious to not give birth to a boy, in fear of losing him to the violent war in Iraq. Ironically she had met the patriotic quota of giving birth to five boys, hence making her a “patriotic mother”; she is now duty free to give birth to a girl (Cooke, 1996, p. 244). This is depicting the unfortunate reality of Iraqis and the increased death toll of the Iraqi men through the war(s) or through imprisonment. It is also an affirmation of the increased number of widows in Iraq and the plethora of women left without men.

Huda describes her childhood as normal, even after she had discovered she was a foreigner in the land she lived in and that the original people in that land were the offspring of Vikings. This normality continued until an Iraqi family moved in to be their neighbors. Their neighbors were among the Iraqis who were deported to Iran by the Şaddām regime during the seventies with the accusation that they hold Iranian ancestry.
They lived for years in refugee camps there, and despite their Iraqi language, their composure, and their actions, she notices a Persian attribute to them. They spoke Iraqi with Persian words. She notices this hybridity in their identity, and their homes had both the Iraqi gentleness and the Persian comfort.

Huda’s mother, Nadia, begins to visit her new neighbor, Umm Hasan, and as they spend time eating, talking, and reading Quran, her mother begins slowly to cover her hair until she began to wear the hijab. The reaction of the family was different as they were not very religious and no one prayed except for her mother on occasion and discreetly. Their father was weary, the girls were happy, but Emad thought of it as a natural progression and that sooner or later she would have to put it on as the Iraqi tradition calls for older women to cover their hair. Their home did not have the appearance of a religious house and lacked any religious symbols around the house, but after the neighbor suggested they should put some in their home to protect them from evil, Nadia put one in the house.

Huda’s father and mother are liberal, as they were brought up in the seventies generation, a time she mentions was known as the “time of opulence.” Her father did not belong to any of the main political parties in Iraq, neither religious, Ba’athist, nor communist.

My father was not affiliated with any political party from among the many parties that adopted the liberal thinking he possessed. He escaped the obligations of religion, and tradition and customs and disbelieved in it. He told us for this reason
he did not accept to be a member of any party. Some of them tried to recruit him, like the communist party and the Ba’ath party. My father vehemently rejected it because his main principle in life is that he does not have a principle. For he did not escape from being a slave of God only to find himself drowned in the slavery of ‘Aflaq’ or ‘Marx’ (Nadāwī, 2010, p. 59)

After meeting Fatima, the new Iraqi neighbor’s kid, who is her age, Huda describes her with disgust. She describes her light complexion as pale, cold, and boring. She views her as being stupid and calls her that. An incident that occurs that particularly disturbs Huda is when she was with two Danish girls outside and Fatima intrudes without being able to speak Danish. Fatima gets called by her father to come in and he scolds her for standing with the Danish girls whose mother is bathing outside, and as she responds, she pulls Huda with them to the back yard. Huda describes this incident of identity clash in a very powerful way. Fatima’s father rudely asks Huda to leave the house, which terribly insults her, but she remains silent. As she fights tears at the door, she overhears the father scolding his daughter not only for being with the Danish girls but for standing with Huda as well. This is when he insults her family, as the dialogue goes:

-How could you stand with those girls?
-I was standing with Huda, I didn’t stand with them.
-I meant Huda as well… from now on I do not allow you to play with her.
-But she is Iraqi.
-She is a vice (trouble) from among the Danish girls, her family as well, a drunken father, a loser of a sister, and a lewd brother. I’ll break my arm if he was not a Ba’athist (an Arabic phrase similar to “I bet my life”).

The mother interrupts:

-Did you not see how she stood talking with the foolish Danish girls, while that nude lady lying there... her family does not (know how to) bring up kids, they just have children and leave their children to the Danish to bring them up for them. Instead of putting any effort to doing it themselves.

She becomes silent for a little then continues to say.

-They do not resemble us in anything, they are not like us.

(Nadāwī, 2010, pp. 73-74)

Huda, crying after what she has heard, had found herself rejected twice by the time she was twelve, first by Klaus because of her hair, as he did not accept her as Danish, so the Danish rejected her first, and now her affiliation and identity as an Iraqi has also been questioned. When Iraqis rejected her as well, she found herself wondering who she was and who will accept her to be affiliated with them. This is a very complicated and common case – an identity complex – as the hybridity some people possess and feeling in the in-between space, one finds oneself in a blurred space, stuck not being able to shift completely one way or the other.

This feeling is rather common among immigrant children who find themselves having to navigate from one culture to another, not knowing where they should fit it or to
which culture or nation they should belong. Each culture or nation can either accept them or reject them; often times, it is not a choice in this hybrid identity – it becomes compulsory for a person to follow one culture or tradition. In the case of the new Iraqi family and their daughter, it is mandated that she remains loyal to one culture while living in another, and this in itself produces its own troubles and identity conflict that mandates her to not assimilate, as if living in a frozen state not being able to develop natural but according to an abstract culture and identity. Huda complains “[t]hat nation that is covered with wars does not know me, and I did not know it... and this delicate and leisured one does not accept me and does want to acknowledge me, even though I have know no other place throughout my existence” (Nadāwī, 2010, p. 99). At this instance Huda feels rejection and does not know where to position herself. She feels like a foreigner in the place she is living in (Denmark) meanwhile the place she is supposed to belong to (Iraq) she does not really belong to it as she does not know it. Her Iraqi identity is a figure of her imagination more so than it is a reality. While at the same time the space she is living on is supposed to be treated as such just a space and everything else about it rejected.

Huda admits that this polarity in her identity and the anxiety of being loyal to one identity over another leads her to contemplate suicide at the age of fourteen. As she explains, “death is the only thing that every human agrees on”. She describes how one gets chastised and spit upon if not loyal to one culture. As she blatantly explains it,
As you take on the courage to prefer one of them over the other, is when the world splits into two halves: one of them spits on your face for your lack of devotion, and the other calls for the same thing...for your lack of devotion to it. It is not favorable to combine between the two identities... it is loathed to add to your origin in the first place, and it is loathed to break your exile with a splash of warm water such as your difference... do not allow the Iraqis to make you a laughing-stock... and do not allow your exile to widen as you desert all of Europe holding on to your Eastern roots. (Nadāwī, 2010, p. 99)

She presents a strong picture of the schisms between the two identities she has to maneuver with. Neither of them accepting that she embraces one over the other; this leads a fourteen year old to find consolation in the thought of escaping the two in a morbid way. In the same instance, she describes it in a “Scandinavian way”, implying that it is common there to escape through death or suicide. She does not go through with it, but the situation that drives her to this point is enough for concern. It is a depiction of the conflict one has with these hybrid identities that in the end it is enough cause for the person to lose oneself while trying so hard to find an identity that both societies can accept.

Huda wonders how she can live far away from the mentality of exile when she was brought up in it. Knowing she is a minority, she complains that she does not know how it feels to be a member of a majority. Her she discusses the subculture she lives inside or overshadowed by a bigger culture. The Iraqi community in Denmark, as she
explains it, chooses one of two paths: either a liberal one led by communists or a conservative one led by an Islamists. Moderation among the Iraqi community is nearly nonexistent.

Her family was not loyal to one movement, but she describes her mom as one who follows the dominant trend of the time. In the seventies, when society was more liberal and open, she followed that trend. And when, in the late nineties and early two thousands, the new wave of Iraqis coming to Denmark added to the numbers of exiles, the trend leaned towards a more religious one. Whatever the more popular trend was, her mother accepted and followed (Nadāwī, 2010, p. 91). Huda however, blames those who are passive, who follow behind the dominate ones, such as the other members of her family.

Huda’s mother wants her daughters to fit into the Iraqi identity, and she is successful. She hears from the Iraqi women who encouraged her that her daughter needs to wear the hijab if she wants to get married. Although her mother didn’t cave in to their talk and her daughter Nakheel was able to marry without the hijab, she did, however, ask her to wear it, and her nineteen year-old daughter obeyed without hesitation. The pressure Huda’s mother feels from the Iraqi women in society also effects Huda, and when one of the ladies asks about Huda’s age, she responds she is fourteen years of age, the women with one eyebrow lifted as she describes her asks:

-I isn’t it time for her to wear the hijab like the rest of the girls?
-My mother responded:
-Isn’t she young?
- The woman smiled with her eyebrow lifted and released several times:
- Our daughters wear the hijab from nine years of age, and Huda has passed this age five years ago. (Nadāwī, 2010, p. 95)

From then onward, Huda’s explains that her life was flipped upside down, she no longer can swim, because she is not allowed to wear a swimming suit (although she was allowed before), and her mother slowly requests that her school not to let her shower with the girls, and to eat special food, until everyone in her school begins to notice her changes and her difference.

These differences began to make her feel inhibited in front of students at her school. She did not want to wear the hijab, but due to her passive personality and to avoid confrontation, she gave in and began to wear it to school. She admits wearing the hijab is like devastation for her as her peers begin to look at her differently than before she wore the hijab. She begins to be more passive. The hijab takes over her personality and makes her more introverted and withdraw into herself, a sign that she also sees herself as different. She explains this in a most appropriate way: “I wore my difference on top of my head and I preferred to distance myself and hide; And the torment of my uniqueness had consumed a great deal of my personality” (Nadāwī, 2010, p. 98).

She did feel discrimination and she was called names. She mentions one incident when Klaus's younger brother calls her names and asks her why she wears the thing on her head, mocking her, and throwing snow at her. She stops him, but he tells her that this is not a desert and there is need for her to wear that thing.
She also mentions incidents when drug addicts and drunk Danish men mock her and call her names and tell her to go back home to her country; this disturbs her, as she does not know any country other than the one she is currently in. She feels degraded and humiliated and her pride is wounded.

A very important aspect of Huda’s writing is how she describes the pain of exile, even though she was not an exile herself – she was born in Denmark – yet she feels like she is an outsider, in exile, as if she had just arrived from Iraq. She eloquently describes the anxiety of this experience and exile:

If only I was in a homeland that was mine, I impose my own rules and I punish all those who accuse me of being different. I will be the master of it for it will be my nation…and I decide…and I rule…and all of you there whose difference I am not akin to, this of which you reveal; go far away from me. But I am not as such. I am the one who spent my life craving a warm homeland; I crave a new life to live in it in my own nation. (Nadāwī, 2010, p. 98)

Al-Nadāwī brings to light important issues facing the Arab communities living in Exile, and the way they view certain aspects. For instance, through Rāfid, it is revealed how Arab and Iraqi men think of Iraqi girls in Western countries. He explains, “[e]xile has offered me a few choices, those girl we raised in foreign lands are not appropriate for us men who were cultured [polished] as Iraqis, just as Huda appropriately described her brother” (Nadāwī, 2010, p. 85). These issues and opinions facing the exiled communities
in the West are what al-Nadāwī presents in her novel, both in the way Iraqi men think and through their world view as well as the world view of Iraqi girls living in diaspora.

These are the double standards put forth towards the Iraqi girls living abroad and the judgmental mentality they have towards the girls whom they fear have adopted Western ideas and lifestyles. First, it is revealed through her new Iraqi neighbors, and then through Iraqi men who hold such views of Iraqi girls in the West, that many of them prefer to return back to their native lands in order to get the polished or refined Iraqi girl in order to please or submit to the refined Iraqi man.” Rāfid marries an Iraqi girl from Denmark, and despite her great efforts to please him as an Iraqi women, he still feels she lacked the real authentic Iraqi tender skin that a woman possesses from back home. He wonders could he fall into such a trap? – First marrying a girl who is raised in Denmark, and now he is interested in Huda – who is so similar to his wife. They both have the Danish-Iraqi accent and their way of life to him is different than the authentic Iraqi girls of Baghdad he was keen on.

Similar to Rāfid is her brother Emad, in their typical Iraqi man mentality, however unlike Rāfid, Emad is living with a Danish women named Helda. Huda discovers that when she is doing his laundry, and when she confronts her mother, her mother tries to cover it up and to protect him. Huda sees the double standards and how her mom encourages him to engage in such behavior, while the rules are set differently for her. Her friend Zaina also begins a relationship with her brother while she is aware he is in a relationship and is living with a Danish girl. Zaina brushes it off as if it is normal and says that Helda has no chance compared to her.
Zaina explains that Helda is an old lady who cannot find a man, so Emad is there for her to support him and to keep her company. She degrades her to such a point that Huda is astonished once she sees Helda’s picture in her apartment and her beauty is revealed. Helda, according to Huda, has no problem finding a man, and “[i]f she really could not find a man to desire her other than Emad, I would have thought all women have been inflicted with blindness” (Nadāwī, 2010, p. 249). Huda gets another shock when Reḍā, her Persian-Iraqi neighbor that she cannot stand, tells her of how Emad is renting out his apartment and using his girlfriend’s money to spend and to support him. Dispapointed, she wonders how her brother can he call himself a man if he does such a thing? Here Huda sees many contradictions in her Iraqi identity, and some she does not like.

Huda confronts her brother when she visits the house he lives in with his girlfriend, as she wonders if Zaina meets him there. She asks him that question bluntly, and he scolds her for asking such a question:

“You are as small as a shoe.”

She replies boldly, and wonders how much younger Zaina is.

“Since you allow the girl you are in a relationship with to be in my age group, then you should permit me to speak.”

He stood up and screamed with his eyes bulging.

“I warned my mother several times that the Danish schools have spoiled your upbringing.”
“Do you mean Nakheel and I?”

“She was saved in the right moment, but you…”

[Huda] screamed with condemnation, without believing what she was saying, [she] could not believe she yelled:

“Why don’t you like us, what did we do wrong... if we were like Zaina you would have been more pleased?” (Nadāwī, 2010, p. 251)

Emad holds her and responds to her that he only allowed her to speak in such a tone to him as an older brother because she was brought up in Denmark, as he says,

“I thank God that I was left behind [in Iraq] so as not to be brought up soft without any value such as you. Be sure that my blood is Iraqi boiling enough to break your head from your body, if you speak to me in such a tone one more time.”

[Huda] raised [her] head in defiance, with [her] nose high up to the sky.

“This hot Iraqi blood of yours, this that boils, allowed you to live with a woman that pays for you” (Nadāwī, 2010, p. 252)

This bold reaction and the way Huda stood up for herself against her brother reveals the extent of rejection she has to a misogynistic form of thinking. He, as a male, is allowed to do as he pleases, yet she is judged for doing nothing. This is the part of the Iraqi mentality and identity she critiques and rejects. Although she is not rejecting the whole
Iraqi way of thinking, since her mannerism and her way of acting and even her way of dress are all linked to an Iraqi identity that she embraces. However, she rejects this particular double standard mentality. Oddly though, the person she falls in love with (Rāfid) is an Iraqi man who, like her brother, had an upbringing in Iraq.

Furthermore, Huda is faced with an important realization when Reḍā takes her out at night for her birthday to see the city center on a Saturday. She is surprised by a world hidden to her. The realization of the presence of a night life with night clubs and bars came as a revelation to her. She sees Iraqi men she had seen praying, and now to her disappointment she sees their duplicity as now she knows where they go. She is disillusioned seeing them and she judges them and critiques how after the night prayers in the Ḥussayniyāt they are in the streets of the city. Another aspect she is surprised by is how much she does not fit in there. She feels everything about her is wrong in the center of the city, because she feels unwelcomed there. She thinks to herself:

I ask myself how, will my judgment be? For I am free of sin, and free of deeds... I pray and I fast, and I wear the hijab because my mother asked me to, and although my religion is only considered a mere identity that draws my features and on it I place my grip onto my roots. With time I began to practice it spontaneously and unconsciously, it stripped away my spirit that which could have been a last sanctuary. (Nadāwī, 2010, p. 320)
Her powerful reaction and reflection of her life dawned upon her when she saw this other life from which she was sheltered, as if she was disappointed by what she was missing living this sheltered life and identity. Although Huda was passive in her life, she did not demand to change that life; she accepted it like a good Iraqi girl would without rebellion. While she was there, she feared someone from her community would see her, so she was as discrete as possible, in fear that someone would see her and judge her.

Huda reveals a great deal of issues Arab girls deal with in Western societies and the way they deal and negotiate with their identities and space, passively yet unwillingly going along the dictates of this society, so as not to be labeled as rebellious. But the society and identity they give loyalty to places them in a difficult role in the society than they actually hold, such as in Denmark or any country in the West, and the loyalty they have for their rooted identity strips them from their loyalty and embracing of the society they actually live in. The normality of their society with their abnormality of their rooted identity puts them at an insubordinate state in the western society they live in.

The rooted identity that immigrants possess is the identity they bring forth from their places of origin, the places they grew up in or were born in. In some cases, this rooted identity is passed to the first generation of children who are born in an immigrant society. The émigré identity is the identity acquired in the place of exile, or in the foreign country that is now considered a temporary home. The émigré identity is the identity the immigrants reject and try to fight off although it begins to increasingly take its place the more one assimilates into the émigré society.
The two concepts rival one another, as it is perceived that the more one is loyal to one identity, the less one is loyal to the other, and therefore the person is in a constant tug-of-war, fighting one identity over the other, neither of which seems to be pleased. In the case of the younger generation that is forced to deal with this identity complex, the enforcer of the rooted identity is usually the home and the family. It becomes the representative sight for the homeland these immigrant children have not seen. This perceived homeland is invented and enforced by the parents and the immigrant society living in the diaspora. The enforcer of the émigré identity is the mainstream society that these immigrants have to interact with on a daily basis; therefore, the enforcers are the institutions in that society in which they live. The rooted identity enforces the subculture, while the émigré identity enforces the main culture.

Within this rooted identity, there is another gender-related layer. The rooted identity often times differentiates between male/female identity, between what is permitted and forbidden and the boundaries placed as they relate to the gender and “gendered complex.” Because most of these rooted identities originate from certain geographical borders, these geographical borders or places tend to have a distinction between what is enforced on females and what is enforced on males. Therefore, this layer of gendered identity, where what is obliged and asked for from a female émigré is not requested or required from a male émigré. This double standard arises from this original rooted culture, which makes a distinction between the two gendered roles. This increases the identity complex of the female who is negotiating both identities and chastised at greater level than her male counterparts would be as she abandons that rooted identity.
This can be explained through the perceived notion that women are the guards of culture, and therefore this enforced rooted identity is at a greater level.

As is it is seen through al-Nadāwī’s novels and Zangana and Ghālī’s novels, one can see the difference and the freedom these women had in negotiating these identities, and since in the latter novels, the writers were of older age and independent from their families, they do not have the enforcer of this identity, which is usually the home space as it relates to the family. Yet these older Iraqi women find it easier to assimilate into the émigré identity and to the institutions offered to them. We see this with the relationships they freely have with the western men without any serious concerns to their rooted culture, contrary to Huda in al-Nadāwī’s novel, because Huda does have that enforcer: it is her mother, through her home, as well as her immediate circle of her own rooted society, that constrains her from adapting or embracing the émigré society. Huda finds she is an outsider to the very place in which she was born and raised, as she is forced, without giving resistance, to be complicit to her rooted identity and culture.

This gendered complex is also reflected in al-Nadāwī’s protagonist, Huda, who wishes she was a man and actually plays the role of the male by approaching Rāfīd and concocting a plan to get his attention (and eventually she was able to get him to fall in love with her just as she wanted). Here, she puts the power role of choosing the mate to the female Huda, and not Rāfīd, as she controlled when to see him, when to talk to him and when he found out about her identity. Through her clever plan she was able to abandon the typical relationship roles traditional embedded in the Iraqi culture which is this rooted identity she is constantly negotiating.
Al-Nadāwī’s *Taḥt samā’ Kūbinḥāgin* is an eloquently written narrative, with a well developed plot and characters. Her creative style of writing and her ability to present the important issues related to Iraqis in exile have earned her a place among the more seasoned Iraqi women writers. She was also shortlisted for several awards for her novel, and rightly so. Her novel is an important contribution which has shed light on some identity complexes among the exiled Iraqi communities in the West. Such issue will be more significant and will remain at the forefront for those who are refugees and in exile away from their homeland. This is due to the increasing number of Iraqi communities in the West. With increased population and more immigrant children raised in Western nations, issue al-Nadāwī’ raises about identity will become more significant to process and understand.

While Iraqis living in diaspora face their own problems and tribulations, Iraqis back home confront more tangible vices that have to do with day to day survival. Iraqis who remain in Iraq feel they are sacrificing a life of comfort to remain in their homeland and thus they posses more loyalty and steadfastness than those who decided to leave Iraq. Meanwhile Iraqis in exile perceive themselves in diaspora. Their diaspora is a sacrifice as they are far from their homeland in which they have been uprooted from. We will look at the narratives of Iraqi women who narrate the war in Iraq and the various themes and issues they focus on in the following chapter. Perhaps in the end a comparison between the two experiences may explicate the different dilemmas and situations Iraqis confront at home and in exile.
Chapter 5: The National Narrative of War

This Chapter will discuss the implication of war on Iraqi women and the circumstances they find themselves in. Iraqi women while they are writing their war story and their experiences of war, they write the experiences of women their tribulations from the affects of war, and the losses. The narratives reveal the sad tale of loneliness and pain of Iraqi women affected by the event of their nation. At times the narratives may sound hopeless, and nostalgic to a past they can no longer retrieve. They find themselves with nothing to hold on to except their memories. Certain realities in Iraqi life such as the plethora of Iraqi widows in society upon the loss of loved ones; or waiting for the return of loved ones become part of the Iraqi national discourse. Therefore, the chaos and pains of war and the themes in the narratives Iraqi women include, become part of the Iraqi national narrative.

War and its Narratives

The Iraqi war experience has taken many facets throughout Iraq’s tumultuous history. Consequently the attributes of their wars are momentous to that nation. The experience of Iraqis differs from the experience of those who have witnessed other wars in the world and in the region itself. On these grounds, how the war story is written is
based on the individual and certain local conditions. During the late 20th century, the wars fought have been more specific to the individual nation; civilian participation in the war made the lines more blurred between them and combatants (Cooke, 1996).

In her book *Women and the War Story*, Miriam Cooke provides the rare analysis of the works of Iraqi writers and the literature they produced during the wars. She begins with the works produced during the Iran-Iraq war, labeling some of them as propaganda literature. She did, however, spot a few dissident works; among the ones mentioned are Luṭfīyah al-Dulaymī ‘Ālīya Ṭālīb, and Ibtisām ‘Abd Allah’s works. Although she is skeptical over the state sponsored novels she reads, she says “[w]e must not accuse all writers of opportunism and therefore of dubious aesthetic merit merely because of literary and artistic patronage. Where would that leave Mozart and Michelangelo?” (Cooke, 1996, p. 263). Cooke is correct to mention this because art is judged on its quality and content and not on whether we agree with their political perspective or not, and just as state propagated literature maybe of badly written quality so can dissident writings. The great war novel is judged upon how well the reader can engage with the novel and how well the story is narrated. A postmodernist reading of those works will leave this judgment open to interpretation and based on the perspective of the audience reading the novel. What works can one disregard on the basis of their state sponsorship or political background and which one can one avow for their dissidence? And why should that be our basis? Cooke discusses both but yet she seems to have been more engaged with the dissident writings while disavowing the others by referring to them as propaganda literature.
Cooke however reveals the literary critics that came about during the Iran-Iraq war accusing them of more propaganda than the writings, “indeed the criticism, probably more than the fiction itself, became an exercise in proving patriotism and unquestioning support of the war” (Cooke, 1996, p. 235). This bares some truths as one critic she mentions, Khudayyir ‘Abd al-Amīr, describes Iraqi war as literature bringing the Iraqi literature to its maturity:

‘The war inflamed the writers’ imagination and provided them with rich material that, combining with artistic vision, produced a writing whose ground was the reality of inspiration and whose structure was formed by the deeds of the fighters at the fronts…. War literature in Iraq became a phenomenon that attracted the attention of Arab leaders and critics. They referred to it a rich substance that produced a literary movement…. The more battles raged and the victories multiplied, the surer and mature became the fiction to the extent that could stand alongside international war fiction’ (Cooke, 1996, p. 237) (orig quote Mājid 1988).

Cooke also questions the ethical dilemma of exposing literature of dissent and the danger it would pose on the writers who were not in exile but living under the state apparatus, which at the time was a serious repercussion to the writer because during that period the Ba’thist regime was very much intact in Iraq and state censorship and monitoring was at a high. Her reasoning for continuing ahead and utilizing texts by authors still living in
Iraq was rational, for several reasons for one, it is her own reading of the texts, this does not mean this is exactly what the authors meant, but this brings the point of the usage and meaning of the Aesopian language. “Lev Loseff defines Aesopian language as ‘a special literary system, one whose structure allows interaction between the author and reader at the same time that it conceals inadmissible content from the censor’” (Terian, 2012, p. 76). Aesopian language and its symbolism may have be able to elude the censors but this can also lead to multiple meanings and interpretations because they are not directly worded, a language hidden to the outsider but yet holds significant meaning to those who can understand the implicit discourse used.

Although the use of such language has been traced to the times of antiquities, the term was coined by the “Russian satirist M.E. Saltykov Shchedrin in his Letters to Auntie (1881-1882), in order to designate a ‘figurative language of slavery’, an ‘ability to speak between the lines at a time when literature was in a state of bondage’” (Terian, 2012). The Aesopian Language rose to prominence by Lenin to elude the censorship of the tsarist Russia as it clearly defined and its progression in the political and intellectual circles is explained:

It has since represented one of the most efficient forms of resistance of the intellectuals against censorship – particularly under totalitarian regimes. Lenin’s hope, declared on several occasions, was that the triumph of communism should end this ‘accursed’ language; however, historical experience proved unerringly the opposite. Not only did the installation of the communist regime lead to a
proliferation and an unprecedented diversification of Aesopian language in Russia, but this practice was to spread swiftly to the other East/Central European countries entering the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence after 1945. This has been frequently emphasized by the various theoretical land applied studies dedicated to Aesopian language, mainly during the two decades following the collapse of the communism in Europe. (Terian, 2012, p. 76)

Using Aesopian language in the context of Iraqi literature appears plausible as there are many among the Iraqi writers who critical to the regime were also members of the Iraqi communist party, hence this term and its usage in their writing many not have been ignored in their writings.

Among the few Iraqi women who wrote about the war at the time of the Iran-Iraq War is Luṭfiyah al-Dulaymī in her book, *Budhūr alnasr* (Seeds of Fire), 1988. Cooke questions whether this novel, which was among the books the Ba’thist regime supported, was really propaganda to demonstrate support for the war.

Might this state-sponsored book about an artist who uses her art against those who pay her be a work against the state? Loseff writes of the Aesopean writer which I believe al-Dulaymī to be—that she ‘alludes to information rather a body of information, which is already known to the reader by experience, rumor, or other channels as foreign radio broadcasts’ she turns this information into a story she can readily defend as pure fiction, knowing full well that ‘art and literature are
A very important point that Cooke reveals through Foulkes’s quote is the ability to present works of fiction one can utilize to reveal dissent and disapproval of the ideas being propagated yet subtly disguising it as a work of creative art. This is another instance when fiction can provide the writer freedom and flexibility in her writing by claiming disassociation from nonfiction. Some of the representative writers discussed focus on art in their narratives and they utilize such techniques as metaphors to war and its destruction. Art becomes a means to express regret and disapproval to what is occurring as a result of it as we it will be revealed in some of the narratives represented here.

In this literature written the Iran–Iraq war, al-Dulaymī also presents the points of view on the war of both men and women. However, the conventional spaces of the gendered-dichotomized roles of war are also evident in the place assigned to them in her novel; with the man at the war front while the women were in Baghdad – it was not on the centered war front during the Iraq-Iran war (Cooke, 1996).

Other Iraqi women who wrote about the theme of war and were included in the state literature are ‘Ālīya Ṭālib’s Almumirrāt (Corridors), a collection of short stories Ṭālib writes about the war and combat, and her protagonists are usually men. Ṭālib also connects the war front with the home front in her other works, Alikhdīrār (Greening), and
*Al-‘inaq al-madi* (The Luminous Embrace). The story’s message, according to Cooke, is that the violence of war is perpetuated when the mother in the narration insists that the boy turns into his father’s image who returns back from battle as a dead corpse and this vicious circle will turn their son’s into the same fate: death. Layla Karīm ‘Amran, another writer she mentions, wrote *Sam’ al-Faw min jādīd* (The Sky of Faw Again), she also employs the male protagonists, but the protagonist, who was a soldier, attempts to help a bleeding Iranian soldier who dies of his wounds, and both men end up dead, not necessarily for any good outcome (Cooke, 1996, p. 241). The depiction of the Iranian soldier, who is supposed to be the enemy combatant, in such a manner reveals a humanistic side of the Iraqi soldier, which is perhaps a reflection of the involuntary nature of the war and the combat. Interestingly some of these writers continued to write to this day about the war themes with perhaps more freedom to discuss the events of their nation which in turn developed into the main narratives of their nation.

Iraqi women did not fully participate in the battle front of the previous Iraq wars they fought throughout the duration of conflict, the Iraq-Iran war, or the Persian Gulf War, although there were around 40,000 Iraqi women enrolled in the popular militia force in 1982 (Cooke, 1996, p. 252). During the Iran-Iraq war Iraqi women were expected to fully support the war and some women were enlisted in the army and also sold their jewelry to support the war. During the war Iraqi women were expected to bare more children for the war.

During the Iran-Iraq war, Iraqi women’s freedom was restricted due to the war as Cooke describes “women found many of their freedoms curtailed. For example, laws
were promulgated. They were told that it was their patriotic duty to have five children for
the war; in 1986 ‘birth control devices disappeared from the market; even condoms were
declared illegal’” (Cooke, 1996, p. 221). Similarly this was the case in Iran as well; birth
rates increased for the very same reason to produce males in order to go off to fight the
war. In al-Nadāwī’s novel, Rāfid’s mother was anxious against having any more male
sons, because she did not want to lose them to war, imprisonment, or execution. Cooke at
the time and when the Ṣaddām regime was at its strongest; questions why Iraqi women
would support the war and for what reason. She confided in the fiction of Iraqi women to
try to reveal the answers, now we may have a better understanding of the war, but the
fiction of Iraqi women does aid in answering such questions. Women who did support the
Iran-Iraq war could have done so as a patriotic duty to their country and many Iraqis do
have a strong nationalist fervor, so it is to no surprise that they might support a war that
they feel it is critical for the nation to win.

Miriam Cooke discusses a work by an Iraqi woman written about the Persian Gulf
war in 1990, Ibtisām ‘Abd Allah’s Work Maṭar Aswād... Maṭar Ahmar (Black Rain...Red
Rain, 1994). The novel is about the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the U.S bombardment of
Iraq written from the standpoint of an Iraqi woman living though the war in Baghdad. In
this novel, ‘Abd Allah is concerned with the effect war had on men and their masculinity.
This war was more powerful. Acknowledging the different type of war that is being
fought now and the extreme damage that may be caused by the sophisticated weaponry,
their attackers, and the U.S government had, and she mentions the bombs dropped in Iraq
were far more than what was dropped in Hiroshima during WWII (Cooke, 1996, pp. 265-
This narrative is comparable to the other narratives discussed in this study. The Iraqi writers describe the wars as if they are documenting the events that took place. Iraqi women reveal a concern towards their nation and towards the Iraqi men, in which I call the maternal instinct. It is as if they have a role and responsibility in nurturing and protect their nation and their people.

The latest 2003 invasion which led to the toppling of the regime saw different kinds of women’s participation in the battle as a few Iraq women participated in militant action with the rise of various armed militia groups that recruited women:

In September 2008 a fifteen-year-old Iraqi girl, who had apparently been drugged, turned herself in to village police – explaining that female family members had fitted her with a vest of explosives and directed her to a schoolyard where she was to await further instructions. In 2007 eight female suicide bombers were documented in Iraq. In 2009 authorities arrested SAmīra Ahmed, known as Umm al-Muminīn (Mother of Believers), who was suspected of recruiting more than eighty female suicide bombers, and on February 13, 2009, forty people were reported killed in one bombing incident. (Shirazi, 2010, p. 3)

The dangerous turning point for Iraqi women is when they were no longer on the periphery struggling to survive the wars and sanctions in Iraq, mourning the dead prisoner or soldier, or waiting for the missing among them. Now the Iraqi woman’s body becomes an embodiment of violence. Iraqi women became active participants of the war
weather voluntarily or involuntarily, the soldier, the battlefront, were no longer places
women can imagine, they became the spaces women experienced and survived, in a
chaotic ground that no longer distinguished between battlefront or home.

Even though previous to the 2003 Iraqi women did not actively participate in the
fighting and the battlefield, they were not however free from imprisonment, tortures, or
executions due to their participation in dissident parties (among them were members of
the Iraqi Communist Party) or activism against the regime. For this reason many Iraqis,
Iraqi women including writers have been forced into exile, such as Iqbāl al-Qazwīnī,
Haifa Zangana, Hadiyah Ḥusayn, and Dunā Ghāli to mention a few.

Women in War and Absent Men

Traditional roles of women were also challenged as a result of the war conflict in
Iraq. The patriarchal structures of society were no longer firmly intact due to the chaotic
nature of war, which disturbs such structures. In relation to Iraqi women these typical
traditional structures of family were redrawn placing the woman in charge of these new
social structures. Men’s involvement was at a minimal due to their prolonged absences,
whether it is at the war front, imprisoned or dead. Did these new structures give women
more freedom in society? A widowed Iraqi women or a woman that has a missing
husband finds herself trapped /imprisoned into another structure formulated by cultural
boundaries. The cultural boundaries often times put forth by the women themselves
preventing them from continuing on with their lives as the fate of their men is still
unknown. The mystery of the missing men imprisons these women who are connected to these men and forces them into a similar fate of the unknown. These cultural pressures are due to anomalous stories re-narrated by other women. Iraqi wives who when they choose to go on and remarry only to find their men back into their lives. So is this essentialized view correct of Iraqi women in society? Throughout the novels many Iraqi women chose different paths but the main protagonists were the women who chose not to continue on to move forward with their lives. The facts on the ground are staggering; no one can deny the number of widows that have emerged from the destructive events in Iraq and its effect on Iraqi society. The widow becomes a symbol and a feature of Iraqi women living alone an isolated life, hence this whole theme of loneliness, depression, isolation is present in the narratives we read.

Similarly one identifies equivalent occurrences in other contexts such as in the West during WWI, the family structure was affected during WWI and members of it suffered the most when several relatives in one family were killed during the war. The normal family experience was no longer existent making it the family structure weaker (Poole, 1991, p. 83).

Comparatively the family structure becomes nearly extinct for Iraqi women, as members of family disappear or die off. Iraqi women no longer have families to hold on to which is an additional contributor to their loneliness and seclusion. This drives some protagonists at certain points on the verge of madness; hallucinating imaginary lovers, and in dreams, speaking with dead family members, such as in the case of ʿUsayn’s
protagonist in *Bint al-Khān* (The Daughter of the Khan Neighborhood, 2001), and also in her other novel *Nisāʾ al-ʿatābāt* (Women of the Threshold, 2011).

In *Absent Umm Ghāyib* continued her life waiting for her husband living life through his memory. In Ḥadīyah Ḥusayn’s *Nisāʾ al-ʿatābāt* (Women of the Threshold, 2011), ʿAmal’s mother lived her life in sorrow waiting for the husband to return even dreaming about the day she can wear her wedding dress upon his return. These choices these women make are their choices or are they expectations positioned by society? The society they live in can impose a general norm for how women should behave in the absence of their husbands. Perhaps these women want to convey this image of the loyal wife that never gives up her missing husband even if she has to live without a man for the rest of her life. This idealized form of loyalty, is not however found in Kulīzār Anwar’s *ʿAjlat al-nār* (Wheel of Fire) as the Iraqi soldier wakes up from a coma he finds his wife had moved on and remarried although he was no longer missing. This illustrates her selfishness for not waiting in fear of losing her childbearing years passing quickly. Ironically this wife is not able to procreate with the new husband she chooses. Here the Iraqi soldier feels the disappointment in his former wife’s impatience and disloyalty.

Furthermore the widow becomes a symbol in Iraqi literature and not exclusively in Iraqi women’s fiction. The Iraqi poet Ḥassān al-Nassār writes a poem collection with the title *The Widow* in which he writes of the Iraqi widow’s sacrifices and pains:

> For every bullet fired,
> A widow of fire is born
And armless orphans
We strap them with school rucksacks
They read about towns whose borders are drawn in guns
And write fear along some shuddering lines
In their shadow hide the homeland. (Khādim, 2010, p. 143)

Here the Iraqi widow is a representation of not just Iraqi women but Iraqi suffering, for the violence not only kills but creates widows and orphans. A nation becomes plagued with such involuntary roles.

Similarly Haifa Zangana writes about the war and Iraqi history in her book City of Widows which presents an image of a city full of husbandless women and deceased men leaving their widows behind. The image of the Iraqi widow becomes a reality and not just and images produced just as many of the themes Iraqi women write about in their fiction novels, they are in fact a reflection of the lived reality of the Iraqi people.

The absences of men and the role of the widowed woman is evident in some of the representatives works I discuss. Hadīyah Ḥusayn is among the many who epitomize this reality of Iraqi women. It is however important to point out that these characters of Iraqi women are independent from men. Not only because they are widows, but also because they were single or are waiting for their men to return from war. This is best revealed in Ḥusayn’s Bint al-Khān (Daughter of the Khan Neighborhood, 2001).
Art and State Propaganda

From the inception of the Iran-Iraq war, one observes a development of literature and art promoted by the State, in this case by the Ṣaddām Ḥusseīn’s regime. The literature produced supported the regime and justified the war, glorifying the soldiers and the battlefields. Similarly this occurred in Iran as well, where art was aligned with the State against Iraq (their enemy at the time). They in turn propagated and documented the war through film images.

Nuhā al-Rāḍī, an artist herself, includes a whole section in her book Yawmīyāt Baghdaḍīyah, (Baghdad Diaries) called “Embargo Art”, “I will call this exhibition ‘Embargo Art’. All the sculptures, whole families of people made of stone and car parts-busted exhausts and silencers…. The heads are painted stones and come off easily, a recognition of the reality that is present-day Iraq?” (al-Rāḍī, 2003, p. 108). Mehta describes al-Rāḍī’s art as humorous and full of irony. Al-Rāḍī calls her art ‘Creature of Mass Destruction’ – Destroyer for short’. Mehta writes: “Using humor and artistic recreations as a subterfuge for political dissent, the artist demonstrates the necessity of creating such works for peace to destabilize the hegemony of warmongers” (Mehta, 2006, p. 224).

Roxanna Varzi, in her anthropological study on Iran’s war images, Warring Souls describes how imagery of the Iran-Iraq war had been manipulated to present certain images that become as ‘explosive as a grenade’ (Varzi, 2006, p. 24). The state controls and exploits perception, domestically as well as internationally. In Iran, as Varzi explains,
the State controlled the images that the world had of Iran, and the same for the inside of Iran of the war. Alam al-mithal, or the archetype images, are created by the image of Khomeini and his gaze which looks straight towards the person. This becomes the ideology of subordination to a leader.

Iraq and Ṣaddām Ḣusseīn also created his own images through his building of monuments. Kan’ān Makiya describes one such monument the Victory Arch in his book Cruelty and Silence, in 1988 to celebrate the Iraqi victory of the Iran-Iraq war. This monument was created in Baghdad fifty-four-feet high, it was meant to be ‘one of the largest works in the world’ (Makiya, 1993, p. 208). Ṣaddām Ḣusseīn became an artist by actually participating in the development of the monument as it is described:

The two swords cross to form apex of the arch at a point roughly 130 feet above ground. Each forearm and fist, with the steel frame onto which it is fixed, weighs 40 tons. Each sword, made of stainless steel, weighs 24 tons. This steel invitation card says was made by melting down the actual weapons of Iraqi “martyrs”. War debris in the shape of 5,000 real Iranian helmets, taken from the battlefield, are gathered up in two nets (2,500 helmets per net). These inflated bags get torn asunder at the base, scattering the helmets on the ground around the two points at which the arms emerge from the earth. To look at the helmets in the knowledge that their scratches, dents, and bullet holes are real, the human heads might well have exploded inside them, is as breathtaking as the knowledge that these are not
just anybody’s arms but replicas of the president’s own, down to every last little bump and squiggle. (Makiya, 1993, p. 209)

In both cases images and art are utilized to present a symbolic representation of the war from the perspective of the government in order to show the glories and the strength of the nation and its great victories. Here in the Victory Arch, the representation of the glories and spoils of war through the real helmets of dead Iranian soldiers, 2,500 (Makiya, 2004), reflects the violence of war justified by the victories of the nation.

In such depictions the war dehumanizes the dead soldiers and turns them into a fallen weak enemy that has perished. The helmets become a symbol of the dead soldiers as Makiya explains, where they “might as well have been human skulls from the point of view of the intention” (Makiya, 2004, p. 54). What Makiya is trying to convey is this form of Art to him is “vulgar” just as he describes that section about this particular art in his book, most helmet had bullet wounds the intention of the helmets were to be read further than just helmets but they are to symbolize the human skulls of dead Iranian soldiers.

Furthermore, Iraqi women writers also use art in their novels to express their experiences of war. They however used art differently than the way the state did to represent the war, one main difference is that these women do not glorify battles or victories of war but instead they write or express the real lived experience of war. Nuhā al-Rāḍī and Batūl Khuḍayrī both use art as a means to describe or explain the war(s) in Iraq. Nuhā al-Rāḍī, an artist herself, includes a whole section in her book called *Embargo*.
Art, “I will call this exhibition ‘Embargo Art’. All the sculptures, whole families of
people made of stone and car parts-busted exhausts and silencers…. The heads are
painted stones and come off easily, a recognition of the reality that is present-day Iraq?”
(al-Rādī, 2003, p. 108). Brenda Mehta describes al-Rādī’s art as humorous and full of
irony. Al-Rādī calls her art ‘Creature of Mass Destruction’-Destroyer for short’. Mehta
writes: “[u]sing humor and artistic re-creations as a subterfuge for political dissent, the
artist demonstrates the necessity of creating such works for peace to destabilize the
hegemony of warmongers” (Mehta, 2006, p. 224). Here the use of sculptures by al-Rādī
is to express the effects of war on the daily lives of Iraqis, especially after the embargo
that was put on Iraq after the first Persian Gulf War.

In Khuḍayrī’s *A Sky so Close*, Salīm, the sculpture artist’s criticism of the war is
expressed though his art. The narrator’s first encounter with Salīm was when Madame,
her dance instructor introduces her to him. The narrator describes the different art pieces
he had in his gallery: “a life-size sculpture of a newborn baby. His umbilical cord extends
from his abdomen to a placenta in the shape of a combat helmet. The second sculpture is
of a woman breastfeeding her baby. A pair of Khaki helmets protrude from her chest wall
where her breasts should be” (Khudayri, 2001, p. 144).

The combat helmet appears to be the symbol of the war and its effect on everyone
in society. Even women and children have to participate in this war: “[o]ne of the pieces
is a large combat helmet that has become a cradle for a baby with no facial features…
two copper doves are nailed to the wall by their wings with rusty pins” (Khudayri, 2001,
p. 145). A baby’s cradle becoming a combat helmet can be read as the nurturer for the
baby, and if this helmet is read as war then the nurture of the new generation has become war. If the dove is read as a symbol of peace, then peace has been held hostage by pinning its wings with the rusty pins. Mehta’s comments on al-Rāḍī’s Embargo art applies here, where she states that “[t]he ability to make a political statement artistically without resorting to dogma and ideological violence reveals the artist’s skill in making an effective visual protest of the existing geopolitical status quo” (Mehta, 2006, p. 223). This holds true for Khudayrī’s character, Salīm, as well. It is interesting to compare the different depictions of the war helmet in its symbolic representation and interpretation of the war. In one instance, the violent depiction of the helmet of the fallen soldiers in the Victory Arch monument, and in another depiction, a baby in the helmet turns it into a cradle. This reveals the innocence that has been imposed onto this helmet, as the representation of a helmet as art reveals the affect war has on the daily lives of Iraqis.

Nuhā Al-Rāḍī, Yawmiyāt Baghdādiyah A Diary of Iraq Under Sanctions

Presented as an illustration of the similarities between reality and fiction, Nuhā Al Radi’s Yawmiyāt Baghdādiyah (Baghdād Diaries), for example, is written in a form of a diary documenting her experiences from 1991 until 2002. This time period spans the Persian Gulf War and through the sanctions that followed. This work highlights and compares the similarities between the fictional works of the Iraqi women writers as it relates to war and exile and to that of their nonfiction work which discloses the realism they utilize in their writings. Although she comes from a wealthy Iraqi family, it reveals
the difficulty of how life became under the sanctions for Iraqis from all walks of life.

Brenda Mehta describes al-Rādī’s work as “represent[ing] the last will and testament of an Iraqi woman torn between her love for a beloved country, the ambivalence of exile in Beirut, and her opposition to the diplomatic impunity of the U.S led coalition forces” (Mehta, 2006 p. 221).

Al-Rādī’s creative non-fictional writing is able to capture the collective struggle of the Iraqi people through her own experience and those of the people around her. She writes:

This morning, the forty-second day, the war stopped. They kept us all night long, just in case we had a couple of gasps left in us. It was the worst night of bombing of the whole war relentless-nobody slept a wink. The noise was indescribable.

We shook, rattled, and rolled. (al-Rādī, 2003, p. 47)

Reading through these writings by Iraqi women; one is able to see the weaving between the personal and the political, and the private and collective. Brenda Mehta gives us an example of how these women writers demonstrate the complexity of their worlds through this medium that allows for the assimilation between the public and private. She explains of al-Rādī’s narrative that:

private concerns receive public articulation in the form of uncensored political commentary, social critic, politically inspired paintings and sculpture, and
culturally devised strategies of survival...The creative uncensoring of the self amid the state-controlled propaganda machine and the biased Western coverage of events in Iraq affirms the efficacy of popular literature and artistic creativity...By actualizing the horrors of war on paper, *Baghdād Diaries* provides an alternative gender based peace narrative that displaces the centrality of the media-machinated chronicles of conquest and self-proclaimed liberation. (Mehta, 2007, p. 211)

Affected by the embargo that was put on Iraq after the war in 1991, al-Rāḍī writes about her friend: “[t]wenty-one members of her family have left, only eight remain in Baghdad. Her daughters said that a lot of kids have stopped going to school, the parents can’t afford to buy exercise books and pencils” (al-Rāḍī, 2003, p. 66). Al-Rāḍī uses humor and irony in the daily description of her life in Iraq, a tool Khudayri uses as well in her novel *Ghāyib* when she also discusses life under the sanctions.

Like Haifa Zangana, whose work is incorporated in this study, Nuha al-Rāḍī explicitly states that her concern is the situation of Iraqis. Al-Rāḍī divides her daily diaries into four parts: ‘Hotel Paradiso’ is the testimony of the 1991 invasion, where she opens up her house to her relatives. The next chapter, ‘Embargo’, documents her life under the sanction in Iraq; the chapter ‘Exile’ reveals her experiences in Lebanon, while the last chapter, ‘Identity’, focuses on the pre-2003 war.

Al-Rāḍī writes similarly about her friends’ experiences in dealing with the 1991 war sanctions on Iraq, noting “I can’t afford my hair dye, she said, ‘so I’m using vinegar.’ Her mother apparently now puts eggplant skin on her hair! Assia is now washing her hair
with Tide, she can’t afford shampoo” (al-Rāḍī, 2003, p. 95). This reveals the change of lifestyle that was forced upon all aspects of society in Iraq. Lack of material goods made life inconvenient to Iraqis who had the means but made it even more difficult for those who are already struggling, a topic other Iraqi novelists discuss in their novels, such as Batūl Khuḍayrī’s Ghāyiib (Absent).

Al-Rāḍī writes about the UNICEF report about the UN Embargo: “Six thousand children die every month in Iraq…. The embargo has killed more people than any mass destruction weapon. This is all done under the eyes and the conscious of the world. Where are the human rights the UN stands for? (al-Rāḍī, 2003, p. 166). These figures that al-Rāḍī mentions are also found in the fiction of Iraqi women. This is another example of the overlap between the fiction Iraqi women produce and the diaries and autobiographies they write.

While at a shop, al-Rāḍī sees a sparrow without a tail. She asks, how could it fly? The man answers her, “Don’t worry, the whole population of Iraq is in that same position and they are surviving. The bird will survive too; it will not have a good guidance sense, it will have difficulty with balancing, in turning right or left, but it will survive” (al-Rāḍī, 2003, p. 129). This is a testimony of the will of the Iraqi people and the survival skills they have endured throughout the wars, the embargo, and the Şaddām regime. Just as the birds find a way to survive, several Iraqi women have found ways to survive and these are revealed through the discourse and themes chosen by Iraqi women novelists.

Al-Rāḍī just as in the case of other Iraqi writers focuses on recounting the lives of other people all the time and not so much on herself, an example of the sub-narratives
within the main narrative framework. This presents the idea of the maternal instinct and the lack of thinking of oneself but of the whole group. The concern of the whole nation and the people is weighed above the concern of the self. Their rhetoric is based on a national narrative and not merely on a personal level. The feeling of sorrow for self is constantly overturned by the easily accessible look into the misfortunes of others. The approach of writing was to show how many problems exist now and how close to home these problems are without involving self. This work also reveals how the self-ego refuses to admit troubles because that will shatter its reflection of self-worth that is gauged with control over self and outcomes, perhaps this is why it is easier to focus on other people’s lives or misfortunes. This is not a phenomenon utilized exclusively in al-Rāḍī’s work but it is a pattern visible in most of the Iraqi women who write about the war in their country.

**Hadiyah Ḥusayn’s Bint Al-Khān, Madness of Loss**

Ḥusayn’s novel *Bint al-Khān* (Daughter of the Khan Neighborhood, 2001) commences when the narrator, Mahāsin, becomes the only living daughter after her sister ʿAmal dies at an early age. Mahāsin begins to tell her mother’s story while her mother is sick and in her death bed. Mahāsin highlights the hardships her mother goes through in her life. Her mother also confesses to her some of her stories shortly before she dies, such
as how she was taken from her mother at an early age from the Ahwāz region in Iran after her father dies. Maḥāsin’s mother is sent to live with her uncle and his wife in Iraq. The narrator remembers her mother and father’s relationship and the hardships her mother endured in her life and as a wife and how she tolerated her husband having feelings for a female neighbor. Maḥāsin does not antagonize the father but rather she sides with him as he was the one more affectionate and closer to her than the mother.

After her mother’s death, Maḥāsin ends up alone as the novel turns somber. The only thing for her is left to hold onto is an old box full of pictures of her old relatives that her mother left her. The box becomes a symbol consolation and a connection to the past to Maḥāsin who is left alone with no relatives in the world. She attempts to bring some of the pictures to life by imagining stories and marriage with some of the people in the pictures. Her nostalgia of the past is linked to her mother’s past and her mother’s stories of lost husbands and family as Maḥāsin herself could not live such a life.

The novel shifts from Maḥāsin’s present life and her past to the memories of her family that she clings on to. Maḥāsin’s loneliness leaves her obsessing over the dead. Dreaming of them to the point where their souls haunt her. The deep connection to those

Iraq attempted to annex Khūzestān and Ahvaz in 1980, resulting in the Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988). Ahvaz was close to the front lines and suffered badly during the war. Iraq had pressed its claims to Khūzestān in part because many of the inhabitants of the area spoke Arabic rather than Persian, the dominant language in Iran. Iraq had hoped to exacerbate ethnic tensions and win over popular support for the invaders. Most accounts say that the Iranian Arab inhabitants resisted the Iraqis rather than welcome them as liberators. However, some Iranian Arabs claim that as a minority they face discrimination from the central government; they agitate for the right to preserve their cultural and linguistic distinction and more provincial autonomy.
who are dead explains the amount of death the Iraqi people have witnessed. For Maḥāsin those who remain alive have no close relations anymore. Her only connections are with the ghosts of her deceased family. This illustrates the amount of death Iraqis have witnessed in which everyone in Iraq had lost a loved one or a family member. Death becomes a reality and part of their daily life.

As Maḥāsin is having coffee with her friend Umm Ranā, the discussion turns into the speculation of war. Maḥāsin dismisses it, saying it is only a quick battle on the borders; but when she hears the troops are preparing for any deployment she becomes nervous, as Khalid whom she senses is interested in her is in the air force. She foreshadows her life as she speculates:

The coming days will tell my new tales. And I found myself addicted to listening to the news like everyone else… the patriotic songs immersed us with fear and confusion of what is to come until the war became a rainbow on our doors that revealed disaster… and when it occurred no one was surprised for we were already filled with its distorted logic… this was on September twenty second of 1980. (Ḩusayn, 2001, p. 69)

This is a momentous example of how the wrath of war that ravaged their nation unfathomably affected the personal lives of Iraqi women and changed it.

Maḥāsin is blessed as much as she is cursed for she is alone, she did not have to worry about a husband, a son or a brother to wait for on the front however she lived it
through the wives and mothers around her. Her loneliness was what causes her fear and nightmares. Ḫusayn describes the loneliness Maḥāsin lives through as if she is dead, her only connections were to the spirits and pictures of the dead. As she writes “Loneliness is a world of horror no one knows it except those who live its nightmare” (Ḫusayn, 2001, p. 70).

In addition to the loneliness, Maḥāsin lives with the sound of the rockets hitting the homes, terrorizing the people and killing those whose luck ran out as the rockets hit their buildings:

The war enters its sixth month and no sign that it will end, bad news reaches the homes of people without embellishments… the press release does not mention such news: a sheikh at a mosque dies of a heart attack two hours after he hears of the death of his son (martyred). In a residential neighborhood a young women commits suicide after hearing of the death of her fiancé… she went to the roof and locks herself up and pours gasoline on herself and before she lit the light she through the key away so that she does not change her mind and asks for help. (Ḫusayn, 2001, p. 72)

She continues to describe the increasing number of fallen soldiers, their numbers surpassing the press releases posted by the government. She defiantly questions the war “who is driven to war except for the children of the poor?” (Ḫusayn, 2001, p. 72). She describes the increasing number of causalities of war and the increasingly diminishing
indication the war will end anytime soon as it extended from weeks to years. This is an important implication and critique of the war and about those that are most affected by it in the society which are the helpless poor masses.

In a similar manner as other novelists writing about the war in Iraq, Ḥusayn also discusses the increasing hardships on the daily livelihood of Iraqis during this war. With the increase in prices and commodities, everything becomes rationed and many goods disappear from the markets. “To question when the war will end burns the lips and bleeds the heart… we got acclimatized to the war as it acclimated to our sorrows” (Ḥusayn, 2001, p. 73). As news of more and more soldiers die on the battlefield, stories of how they die became part of everyday life.

Here the protagonist, Maḥāsin expresses her dissatisfaction with the Iran- Iraq war and the difficult repercussions it had on the people. She describes war in such a harsh manner, “[t]he war is like a whore that played her part well, she took the years of our lives and incinerated it; it sucked us and stripped from us our dreams without our knowledge” (Ḥusayn, 2001, p. 73).

The pain of war is reflected from the voice of the protagonist and in the approach she takes in describing the events and the stories of people affected by this war. She is not as concerned of her suffering as much as she is about the suffering of ordinary Iraqi people who all have been negatively affected by the war. This is an example of how Iraqi women taken on this war narrative that becomes their national narrative.

In an illustration of how the war has affected the ordinary lives of Iraqi women, Maḥāsin’s loneliness is put to a momentary halt once she meets with Khalid. He returns
from the war and he quickly asks her to marry him. Approving his gesture she waits for him anxiously until he returns from the war. She constantly questions when the war will end as she wonders, “[i]t is true that the opportunity of a lifetime came more belated than supposed, yet at least it came, it came at a time of war… and war has its rules… should I trust the rules of war?” (Husayn, 2001, p. 89).

Maḥāsin’s insecurities about the war unveils the inability of the Iraqi people to have any control over their own lives at times of war; for it has the power to change and to dictate the lives of those who live through the conditions of war. This is also a foreshadowing of what is to come as her unpredictable fate with Khalid awaits his return from the war. As she awaits the end of the war, she describes it as a forgotten war, and although it is forgotten to the rest of the world, they are still living through it (Husayn, 2001, p. 90).

**The Sub-narratives, Tales of War**

In an example of a sub-narrative within the narrative Iraqi women writers include stories of random Iraqis who have been through tribulations as a consequence of the war as well as the oppression from the regime. Oftentimes when they are narrating these tribulations the oppressive nature and the brutality of the regime out ways the brutality of the actual war Iraqis were living through. With no signs of the war ending and the battles getting fiercer, Maḥāsin describes the fate of a soldier whose wife gets attacked by policemen who attempt to rape while the soldier was fighting for his country on the
borders. Once the soldier returns from the war front during his break he finds out he burns his military uniform in front of his door steps and he swore he will never return to fight in the war yelling “I am defending the honor of the nation and our police want to rape my honor” (Husayn, 2001, p. 92). The soldier gets executed two month later based on the state of war laws. The soldier was warned to leave the country before they find him, yet he decides to remain with his pregnant wife in his house, but he is surrounded by the police and is taken away.

Husayn reveals in her discourse the betrayal an Iraqi soldier is faced with while he was sacrificing himself for the honor of the nation. Not only do the leaders of the nation fail their citizens when they fail to protect the soldier’s honor, but they were the perpetrators of the violence against his honor. This allows the reader to ponder the betrayal the nation inflicts on the people protecting it most. This also presents another characteristic of war, which is the chaotic nature of it and the lack of enforced law, which leads to the increased vulnerabilities of women. Women in times of war are more likely to be assaulted and raped, something that Iraqi women most certainly faced during the reign of the regime and even more after it collapsed and law and order diminished in Iraq. On another note important to point out is that the husband stood beside his wife and fought for her honor, when members of his nation failed him.

Husayn’s description of the war midway through the novel becomes more explicit and her criticism against the fighting is unambiguous. It is worthwhile to note that she begins writing the novel in Baghdad but concludes it in 'Ammān, where she would have had a little more freedom to write her thoughts on the war more unambiguously. In an
interview she reveals she was watched by Iraqi authorities for her writing and was blacklisted forcing her to connect with colleagues inside Iraqi in secret. Writing from exile in 'Ammān, with the fall of the regime in 2003, Ḥusayn was able to reconnect with colleagues and was able to engage more freely in conversation with writers in Iraq and to exchange ideas about the state of Iraq (Mukhlafi, 2013). Ḥusayn also discloses the freedom she gained in writing while she was in exile and away from the censorship and subjugation of the regime. “A positive result from [exile] is I became liberated and I began to write about the previous wars that I lived through, and the percussive oppression and the militarization of daily life, and the disappearance of young men in the regimes secret prisons, and the crimes that the world has no knowledge of, or acknowledge and has not passed by it except briefly. I wrote without fear, while the regime was at its mightiest despotism, with eyes and surveillance in neighboring nations” (Mukhlafi, 2013).

Sadly in a predictable tale of loss for Iraqi women, Khalid, Maḥāsin’s fiancée never returns, when his plane crashes and he disappears. She describes how one has fallen into the hands of the enemy while another he dies, and Khalid vanishes. “Nothing is left to remember him by except the sorrows of his mother, father and his sister.” (Ḥusayn, 2001, p. 93). Any hope for her to be with someone is also vanished with that of her missing fiancé.

She describes the fear that lives in a people’s hearts whether it is the fear of losing a loved one or from an exploding rocket, or the place that protects them. She says after years of war we have:
acquired fear from everything and death has consumed the vocabulary of our lives in its various shapes until its story became exhausted... it lost its glamour and its destruction… no but however a few found in death, a savior, a release, and guiding to a gate to another life in which the death of the body is not dissolved in it unless another soul is reborn and is fulfilled with the release of its enslavement… the years of war were prolonged and we lost the feeling for life’s joys. (Ḥusayn, 2001, p. 92)

War takes away the young Iraqi men forced to be soldiers in war, leaving many without men. Ḥusayn disclose in her novels the turbulent situation of Iraqis and Iraqi men with their disappearances and demise whether in war or in secret prisons.

In an attempt to dispel her loneliness, Maḥāsin becomes very close to Umm Ranā’s daughter, wanting her to be her own daughter. Yet when the father is also killed in the war and Umm Ranā moves away, Maḥāsin is heartbroken and alone once again. Although she is not directly affected by the war, but everyone around her is affected and henceforth she is as well. Her friend, Umm Ranā, tells he how lucky she is for not having a husband or someone fighting in the war, and to be in constant fear of a policeman telling her that her husband is dead, and all you want to dead is rip your souls our over the wooden coffin that has pieces of burned meat and bones. And on the day that Maḥāsin is preparing to buy a nice dress for Ranā, who always asks about her father, Umm Ranā receives the news that he has committed suicide and was not a martyr in the war. For this
reason, Umm Ranā cannot get a pension from the army as he has killed himself. Although she was doubtful that her husband would do that, she recalls his despair in last letter, where he confesses that he can no longer handle the fighting, and that he prays to God that it ends or he gets killed in it before he kills himself (Ḥusayn, 2001, p. 141). War is about masculinity, and many men feel they cannot live up to its standards, so they kill themselves or are killed. This is also a testament to women’s strengths, surviving rape and fighting and the deaths of their loved ones, even as they’re trying to keep their families together.

In a sign of her going mad from loneliness and desperation, Maḥāsin begins to fall in love with a dead person in the picture as she lives a love story with him (Ḥusayn, 2001, p. 145). Ḥusayn utilizes the same fantasy she uses with ‘Amal in Nissāʾ al-ʿatabāt, she too feels the loneliness and begins to take on an imaginary lover. This reveals the heartrending and fraught state of Iraqi women left without men or any tangible relationships to subsist through. Maḥāsin begins to be on the verge of madness, and close to a nervous breakdown. Maḥāsin is living in the past when the future appears so dim. She recalls the Khan of al-hajj Moḥsin neighborhood, which Maḥāsin had certain fondness towards, and which was bulldozed thirty years ago. She appears to be nostalgic to the people and of a time when people of the Khan had a sense of hope and optimism.

Maḥāsin’s mother’s box becomes a comfort to her, the only consolation to her loneliness. Yet she wonders if these pictures of the dead know what’s to become of the box if she dies, and who will put her in the box. As a single woman, with no member of her family she lacks historical continuity. Those dead people she thinks will not regret
being dead once they realize that death has become freedom and has taken the feeling and the soul of the people after the war has taken everyone from men, children, and loved ones. “I no longer find leisure in the dead portraits…. The dead whom are still alive have become more than the dead that departed, and the dead in the front lines have become enter our homes through the television screen, their stories are fresh and hurtful, their graves have become witness to a life no longer can one be in harmony with” (ハウスィン, 2001, p. 120).

Iraqi women who wait for their loved ones to come home to get married usually never make it back home, but Salwan returns home to tell the story of his experience as a soldier. Hereハウスィン presents a full account of a soldier in the front lines of war. He tries to save a soldier by carrying him while he hears the bombs dropping, when he finds out the man is dead he lets him go looking for a safe place for him when a voice calls him “stop you coward” he replied I am not a coward but I lost my way. The soldier takes him in and accuses him of attempting to escape. They did not believe his account and took him to trial where he was sentenced to be executed. In one room he recounts he saw dead bodies, but he does not know if they were killed in battle or killed by their own people. It appears that some soldiers helped him escape but it was not clear how he was able to make it home before he finished his story he went into shock was sent into the hospital where he died. Umm Khalid (the mother of Maḥāsin’s dead fiancé) tries to comfort the solider Salwan’s mother told her, “if tears bring back our sons we would have cried blood. Be thankful your son died in your arms and remember the day they came to me
with an empty coffin… if only a piece of him came back, even a thumb to put out my fire in my heart” (ハウスイン, 2001, p. 169).

Near the end of the story,ハウスイン’s description of the pains of the soldiers becomes stronger as her criticisms become bolder. Lamenting the sorrows and the miseries of her nation, she describes the country as set on fire without anyone questioning it. She describes what has become of Iraq as it has become a big box with unseen nails, perhaps here she is describing it metaphorically as a big. She is distraught and nostalgic for the days of love and hope which no longer exist. Memories are destroyed and nothing is left even family portraits are torn to pieces and burnt as a result of the destruction and violence of war. Mothers and fathers die of pain and heartache over the deaths of loved onesハウスイン here reveal the way her Iraqi protagonist in the novel has coped with the miseries that afflicted her and everyone around her. Another feature shared with her counterparts in narrating the sad tale of what has become as their national narrative (ハウスイン, 2001, p. 175).

ハウスイン brings a women centered perspective to the Iran-Iraq war that Iraqis endured. It reveals their pains, their losses, sorrows and frustrations. In a fictional story, one conceives a picture of how life was for them during that time. When the war in Iraq is discussed through more mainstream mediums these voices, these feelings are never revealed. It is in such novels that one can identify with a character whose life may resemble that of real people who have lived through those tumultuous times.ハウスイン brings into the conversation struggles that may have been disregarded from an Iraqi woman’s standpoint. It brings to life the human aspect of the situation distancing it from
the news stories that in itself is a distance from the pains and struggles of the people who lived through this war. She makes constant references to the lost hopes they once had with ‘Abd al-Karīm Qāsim, as compared to their current situation, as their lives deteriorated from hope to the despair of war and death. She exposes a people dragged into a war they had no say in, and had no freedom to escape from. She reveals stories of soldiers who get chastised and accused of deserting their faith, and their execution. Loyalty for one’s county is questioned when one questions the legitimacy of a war they do not understand. They defended their country yet their country betrayed them.

The last few pages of her novel give voice to the pains of Iraqi women and Iraqis who lost all their sons to the war. She wonders how one’s memory can forget the raining of rockets and the stuffed bodies hiding in shelters searching for safety, or the pictures of hungry children looking for food in garbage containers. And when the second war—the Persian Gulf War, begins, she asks “A thousand times the question emerges in the minds of the tormented and lost soldiers: was the second war necessary?” (Husayn, 2001, p. 176). Her description of the situation the war machines the bodies of soldiers torn to pieces with their heads severed from their bodies and bodies unrecognized who had no chance in the face of the modern machines. Her depiction of the horrors is very vivid.

In a recollection of the lived experience of war she recalls, “I’m able to forget that night of terror the first day of the second war.” She refers to the Persian Gulf War as the second war, she does not name it but her description of this war clearly shows that it was a lot more devastating on civilians whereas the previous one was fought on the border. The people running toward the shelters, children screaming, even the soldiers were
shaken from the sounds of the rockets. “They will stop within a few days, who said that? Did we not fight for eight years? This is another war…war of atomic weapons and smart bombs you stupid one” (Ḥusayn, 2001, p. 178).

“I think it was the longest night of our history of war, after that the big box closed on us, its cover was hunger and aridness, its surface hot painful skewers” (178). I shake in the corner of the shelter I try to comprehend the disaster and I could not.” (Ḥusayn, 2001, p. 178). The second war was more terrorizing than the war she had described previously. They spent the night in the shelters in fear only to wake up the next day to see her house was hit. In this war, Maḥāsin’s box of her dead family portraits that treasured is destroyed. She begins calling out for her family members for people to save them. Maḥāsin screams she goes through a nervous breakdown searching through the rubbles for her family portraits. Chaos ensues as she sees everyone in panic. Now it’s not about anger but about loss, a loss of history, madness and a series of uncontrollable unfortunate events. The whole novels tone is somber and full of melancholy.

‘Āliya Ṭālib’s Qiyāmat Baghdaḍ Chronicling the Violence

Another novel that recounts the details of the war and its effect on Iraqis is ‘Āliya Ṭālib’s Qiyāmat Baghdaḍ. (The Annihilation of Baghdad), published in 2008. It mainly related the most recent invasion of Baghdad in 2003 and its violence. She also briefly relates the problems and brutality Iraqis encountered during Šaddām’s rule as well as during their previous wars, The Persian Gulf war and the Iran-Iraq war, through various
sub-narrative stories of Iraqis. Ta’lib writes the novel from within Baghdad explaining in minute details the events of the 2003 invasion of Baghdad by the United States and the chaos that ensued after. It is another disconcerting novel about the Iraq war(s), as it attempts to present to the reader with the experience of living in a war zone and the hardships people have to endure.

What makes this novel significant is that it is showcases people’s experiences in sub narratives without following or supporting any particular leadership or ideology, as compared to other novelists that clearly or implicitly focus criticism on the regime; though she still documents the atrocities they inflicted on their people. Al-Rāḍī’s diaries share similarities with this novel; however al-Rāḍī’s diaries were only written about the Persian Gulf War and the sanction afterwards, whereas Qiyāmat Baghdaḍ focuses mainly on the most recent war in Iraq in 2003 and what follows it. The novel lacks a real plot it mainly chronicles the events of the war in Iraq. The main character is a female journalist with her family but there are no real interesting protagonists except for the personalities she mentions in her sub-narratives. She uses these miniscule characters merely to tell their tale of pain and atrocities and their experiences.

The novel, Qiyāmat Baghdaḍ (The Annihilation of Baghdad, 2008), begins with the narrator’s discussion of March twentieth, 2003, when the war on Iraq officially began. The central protagonist is a writer, journalist, and a mother who is married to a man named Salmān. This deviates from many Iraqi novels, where the women are usually single or living alone. However, like many of the Iraqi women in the novels, she is a professional and independent, despite being married with a family. And as the war starts,
she leaves with her children to Diyālī in Ba’qūba, to a town called Sarajak, where her family can be safer far from the invasion in Baghdad.

The story begins as the war starts and the sound of bombs are dropping. They were trying to leave the city, though her husband stays behind. Her children, whose names she mentions as Ḫaydar, Tamār, Ḥarāʾ, Ḥarīr, do not play a significant role in the novel and neither does her husband; rather, the focus is on an event following the invasion and several Iraqis whose lives were affected by it. It also tackles the changes in society and the people’s behaviors and practices towards their country. She questions the patriotism and loyalties of some Iraqis who joined different groups and sects and participates in the division and chaos of the city and the nation. Ṭālib describes the fear and terror they felt when the bombs were falling on the city, destroying the city and spreading death and hatred (Ṭālib, 2008, p. 11).

During their escape from Baghdad, they see decrepit Iraqi tanks and confused soldiers and the people in their cars supporting them and sending them their prayers. She observes the worn-out tanks that should have be retired after they had witnessed “immature wars with others,” such as after the long years of war with Iran. Here, the situation of the soldiers who worked for the military is described with sympathy, as she refers to how they had very small salaries, and they would ask for the money it cost to travel to their posts. The humiliation is that the soldiers have to beg for their allowance so they can pay for their trip to their posts and for their military uniforms, and they were responsible for their own food. On the other hand, wealthier corrupt officers take the salaries of the exploited soldiers. She explains that those officers were the first to escape
from the battle field, leaving the soldiers without any direction or commands. And as the soldiers defend Baghdad, families like hers escape it, not knowing where the journey will take them.

She returns to this critique as she engages in dialogue with a relative, Rahman, who was a lieutenant in the government. When she asked him, “[w]hy are you here? Are you not a lieutenant?” He replies that ‘the Americans occupied the post that I was in charge of, and If I did not speak English they would have killed my troops,” she replied to him sarcastically and regretfully, “and was it a woman in the American army that spoke to you?” She regretted her comment because months later he was killed by a militia punishing him because he was in the army, and he leaves behind, as she relates, a wife that loves him dearly and young children. “Big dreams he was trying to fulfill for the future [and] it was ended by a vile bullets blasting in his chest” (Ṭālib, 2008, p. 15).

At that time she recalls he responded to her “Do you blame me for staying alive?” (Ṭālib, 2008, p. 15). Here we see another viewpoint of the war, and it is not directed against the Iraqi regime, but criticizes the chaos that followed with the formation of militias and the absence of the rule of law and accountability. Within days of the fall of the regime, storage factories full of new cars and electronics were stolen and sold for a cheap price in neighboring countries, as all of Iraq was pillaged. “They steal all of Iraq in its entirety with the help of the parties, groups, and organizations that stole the nation in broad daylight, without a blink of an eye. The thieves became activists and victims of the former regime. And now they are fighting over powerful positions after they had taken
the part of their true struggle in pillaging the property of the nation little by little” (Ţālib, 2008, p. 16).

Ţālib recounts diminutive details such as a bridge that was built in 1946 in Baghdad which was blown up on April 11, 2007. She mentions this in the novel as if it is a historical account of events. She is restless upon hearing the news about the bombing of Baghdad, and although she is safe in a different town, she wanted to be in Baghdad. Her daughter crying over Baghdad asks her mother “[h]ow can we leave it like that to face enemies coming, and we do not defend it. We do not stop their march towards it, how do you want me to sleep when Baghdad is surrounded with darkness and monsters, alone in the hands of enemies that have no mercy?” (Ţālib, 2008, p. 31). The mother contemplates how she can explain to her young daughter that civilians cannot defend it but it’s the job of the military; it is the traitors of the country, she believes, who allowed the occupation of Iraq to occur. This belief is something not common in other novels by Iraqi women. As she continues to ask herself how she can explain to her daughter that “there are those who allowed themselves to seek refuge with the occupier in order to remove the previous regime,” (Ţālib, 2008, p. 32), it is clear she is opposed to those who supported this betrayal among Iraqis. However, she also accepts that the regime was oppressive, denying citizens their rights in their nation. Here Ţālib brings in a different perspective than what is usually found in other narratives by Iraqi women. The majority of the novels discussed were written by Iraqi writers who supported or belonged to dissident groups against the regime. They were in turn either censured or exiled because of their stance against the Ṣaddām regime. For this reason they are more critical about the regime and
less critical about the 2003 invasion that toppled the regime. However, this does not mean all the political dissident writers supported the invasion or it was popular among them. Haifa Zangana for instance is highly critical of the invasion and the affects it had on the country as revealed in her book, *City of Widows*.

As Ėlib continues to narrate the invasion of Iraq of 2003, she remembers when the Americans invaded in the nineties and how she cried like her daughter cries presently over the invasion. She cried over the destruction of the city and in fear of reverting it back to the 1920’s back when the British colonized Iraq. When she told her mother that they entered Iraq, her mother beat herself and screamed in fear of what would happen to her other son who was also in the army. Then she wondered how their military begins a new war when it had only been a year since they got out of a war with Iran which lasted eight years and which was a horrible genocide to all the young men who were martyred then.

The narrator also discloses she has a dead brother called Bāsim. Her brother was an Engineer, but he died out of poverty after his landlord pressured him to leave the house. As she explains, he was living “like all Iraqis deprived from the assets of a rich country, he was supposed to protect his children and take care of them. Not to leave them deprived of many things, and primarily that they have a right to their nation and its wealth. Not to see the wealth and privilege constrained in the hands of the few who had the blessings of the ruling regime” (Ţālib, 2008, p. 24). Ėlib is clear in her rhetoric and in her critique of the unbalanced way Iraqis were living; similarly Hadīyah Ḥusayn discloses the Iraqi people’s deprivation. Ḥusayn however, is more nostalgic to Qāsim’s
regime and the days when the he has planned to set-up certain programs for different facet of Iraqi society.

She relates the continued suffering of Bāsim’s daughter whom also suffers another loss after her husband of ten months, Ḥaydar, is kidnapped, tortured, killed, and buried. Ḥaydar’s body was found with traces of torture, and the family buried him without telling his wife because she was in the last months of her pregnancy, and they feared she would lose the child upon seeing his mangled body. When he dies, she does not get to see him prior to his burial, she notes that he leaves a son behind (Ṭālib, 2008, p. 26).

She clarifies the problem of sectarianism and the violence that kills him, as it did many young, innocent men. It had also made many women widows. She blames the sectarianism that plagued the country. Everyone was suspicious of each other with an increase in the number of kidnappings and killings. People had to leave their homes if they were in a Sunnī or Shī’ah area (Ṭālib, 2008, pp. 161-169). She also continues: “[m]any women became widowed due to the sectarian violence that took the lives of many young men. They were not guilty of anything except for their names which was a justification to get them killed; after they tasted the pain of an assortment of tortures and parts of their bodies cut off before they inhaled their last breath” (Ṭālib, 2008, p. 26).

Ṭālib moreover continues to relate the miseries and hardships of Iraqis through her sub-narratives; which are miniature stories of random Iraqis suffering and affected by the Iraq war and the regime. She narrates other stories of sons of relatives who went missing during Ṣaddām’s time and at present after many years their families are finding out the fate of those men. She mentions one relative that went missing in 1991 was
executed a month after being convicted of a crime. His crime was passing out rations to families of people who participated during the *intifāda al-Shaḥbāyah*. The traumatized family spent over eleven years and all their money trying to find out information about their son, bribing security workers to afford him better treatment.

Another relative was abducted in 1982 because someone informed on him that he had belonged to the Dawah party; because he was too shy to reject their solicitations, he was executed within the first week of his arrest. Their bodies were not found (Ṭālib, 2008, pp. 122-123). Ṭālib here attempts to disclose as many tales of Iraqi victims as she could. None of the people she mentions are real characters in the novels but they are stories of Iraqis she felt it is important to relate and disclose their experiences their pains and their tragedies. This reveals another example of the Iraqi writers’ maternal extinct and their concern to bring awareness to their nation. The victims of these atrocities are both men and women. Men similar to other novelists are viewed as victims of government atrocities as well as from outside aggressions.

As Ṭālib’s character narrates in detail the events that occurred when the Americans reached the Republican Palace and the leaders disappeared, she asks herself how the leaders can bring their people to this destruction and then disappear:

Yes, Baghdad is being bombed in strange violent way, as if the rivalry had nothing to do with the regime, and in its fall, for freeing Iraqis from a dictatorship, and if this was the real reason, reality revealed clear contradictions. Why are the civilian infrastructures being hit and the castles, and museums, ministries, markets
and the monuments of the civilization, even the trees, and parks and meaningless places? The game is larger than destroying the regime and the portrait is covered with a number of worn out propaganda that was used on the experiences of nations as instruments for their own goals. (Ṭālib, 2008, p. 41)

She provides a good perspective of the quotidian situation of the war, their stress, their worries and their pains. She was worried about her husband in Baghdad and his safety there with no news about him.

As she admits that the previous regime became fragile to the point that it could not be protected, although the people wanted to be spared the indignity of invasion and occupation (Ṭālib, 2008, p. 55). She describes the day Ṣaddām’s statue came down, on April 9, 2003, and that she could not believe it when she saw the American flag up. She says “Did it hurt my pride – what I see now flying high in front of my eyes? To tell me America fulfilled its dream and put its flag inside a country once upon a time humiliates it, and even if it was a serious error, it will not be forgiven no matter how long it takes” (Ṭālib, 2008, p. 44). She laughs and wonders if thirty five years did end or if it is a dream – she contemplates what will happen next (A. Talib, 2008).

She wonders how the situations have changed within a short period of time, now that she sees, on the same street, an American tank rather than an Iraqi tank. Now they have to drive by waving a white cloth – a symbol of surrender. Those who belonged to the Ba’athist party found themselves in a difficult situation; in fact, when chaos ensued and their newspaper began to get looted, armed men questioned whether they were Ba’athist or not and to what parties they belonged. When she was asked, she responded,
“I am independent, my friend was previously communist, the other one, yes, he is Ba’athist, and my colleague – I don’t know her position, but we are all journalists and we do not belong to any political parties. He responded to me sarcastically: and are there any journalists who are not Ba’athist?” (A. Talib, 2008, p. 65). She was disturbed because now there were people questioning her as if she were guilty. She thinks to herself, our crime is that we stayed in Iraq, because we did not have the same opportunities to escape like those who were “spokespersons” for the regime. She also noticed that the man’s hatred towards the regime made him think of them as enemies and not members of the same nation who all suffered from the same oppressive regime that took their freedoms. She responds to him, “[m]any of us suffered from both fates, and we had relatives and family that were executed, but we concealed our secrets from each other in fear of the leader” (Ṭālib, 2008, p. 66). She realized that now the power has skewed in favor of those who in the past were distant from it.

Furthermore, the protagonist in the novel continues to go to work and does not give up on the newspaper. She believes that it is possible to take back their nation through love and shared concerns and not through personal gains. She defiantly gives a tour of the newspaper to the Americans as a signal that she is not afraid of them and that they are not an enemy either. Interestingly, the majority of the people she worked with were women who wanted to republish their newspaper as she illustrates “our determination to resist grew bigger and bigger every day, and I led the women that I did not know had this amount of energy/power that surpassed the men that previously managed the newspaper in the past, and who (now) preferred to work with other political
groups that spread enormously throughout the country” (A. Talib, 2008, p. 67). We observe here a case of the feminist impulse in the text as Ṭalib’s protagonist takes on a leadership role. This reveals the proactive will of the Iraqi women. This also features their strength and perseverance and. She depicts Iraqi women as assertive not just stay passive but rather they worked diligently to fix and resolve issues men were no longer capable of doing as she relates in her novel. Talib also illustrates the sense of nationalism her protagonist had towards her nation.

Furthermore, the main protagonist in the novel noticed people’s loyalties changing daily. She is concerned that people are following their own self-interests and not the country’s. She, on the other hand, works very hard and is determined to try to play a positive role in saving it. Yet, despite all her will to defend the newspaper and the family who lived off of its wages, she questioned her inner power: “if a regime with all of its power and its tyranny was not able to protect Iraq, will I be able to return what is being looted by myself? (A. Talib, 2008, p. 71).

She felt betrayed by acquaintances and colleagues who stood by her but then when their true realties were revealed, they began to attack her as she discovered that they did not stand by her for the sake of the nation and nationalism. What she fought so hard for, to protect the national newspaper, one of her colleagues succeeds in helping to destroy it and to steal the resources of the newspaper. According to her, by standing against her, he helped in the destruction of another of Iraq’s assets in the same way the other assets were lost. Here it is clear that she felt disappointed by the lack of loyalty and nationalism people had towards Iraq. She worked hard to keep the country’s newspaper
going but yet she did not find this enthusiasm by other Iraqis as their loyalties shifted away from the core national and split into sectarian groups and militias.

She chronicles in details the events and the violence that took place in Baghdad, from theft, bombings, people around her dying and losing her colleagues, and children in her family killed by the chaos; the spread of sectarianism and lack of law and order blanketed the city. Dead bodies lying in the streets and threats given that if anyone picks them up, they will be killed (Ţālib, 2008, p. 116), families afraid of picking up their dead relatives in fear of being jailed and interrogated by the Americans if they were accused of terrorism. People started paying people to give them the bodies discretely through the back doors. People were also killed for walking outside because the Americans feared the civilians were going to attack them (Ţālib, 2008).

She remembers the sons of relatives who went missing during Şaddām’s time and finally now their families are finding out their fate. One relative that went missing in 1991 was executed a month after his crime, which was passing out rations to families of people who participated during the intifāda entitled al-Sha’biyyah. The family’s shock was tremendous because for over eleven years they spent all their money trying to find out information about their son and giving money to security workers so he can eat well and be treated better. Another relative was taken in 1982 because an informant told the government that he belonged to the Dawah party, his crime being that he did not say no to their solicitations because he was too shy to decline, and he was executed within the first week of his arrest. Their bodies were not to be found (Ţālib, 2008, pp. 122-123). This reveals the sacrifices of Iraqi women since the 1980s when the first of numerous
wars began, and a great number of women were left widowed. By the end of the novel, everything became unbearable for her. She decides to sell everything she owned in Iraq and leaves with her family, but in the end, something compelled her to return before she reached the Iraqi border.
Chapter 6: Passive Voices, Passive Existence, Reacting To the Realities of War through the Eyes of Iraqi Novelists

In this chapter we will review representative literary work narrating the experience of war by several Iraqi women writers. The effects of war on the style and approach taken by novelists to get their points across and the effects it has on the sentiment towards the issues they raise. Focusing namely on the works by Batūl Khuḍayrī, and Hadīyah Ḥusayn.

Batūl Khuḍayrī’s Ghāyib the Quotidian Life of War

Batūl Khuḍayrī’s 2004 novel, Ghāyib, (Absent), opens with the story of an infant girl, Dalāl, whose parents die in a car accident when she is four months old. She survives and is raised by her aunt and her husband who cannot have children. The novel is about living through the sanctions and the hardships; it tells of life under the bombs, where even the rain, a symbol of cleansing from the sky, turned black and smelled like burnt car oil.

It is Dalāl's aunt who remembers the Iran-Iraq war of eight years. Before they could celebrate its ending, another war has started, and they are being bombed while living under the sanctions. She takes note of the damage done to the environment from
the bombings and the leaking of gas and ammonia into the river. The novel discloses the daily life of Iraqis under the sanctions while telling a pleasant tale of an average Iraqi family. One can get an illustration of the harmony that was present in the ordinary lives of Iraqis, and its transformation due to the circumstances of the sanctions and the oppressive measures put by the regime (Khuḍayrī, 2009).

Dalāl is struck with illness when she was young, and loses the ability to move the muscles in one part of her face and lips. She was hoping to return to Turkey where a doctor said he will treat her once she reaches her teens, however due to the war it was now difficult to travel for Iraqis. The difficulty of traveling and her family’s preoccupation with their own daily life further complicates Dalāl’s bodily disability. The waiting for Dalāl’s treatment and for the betterment of the Iraqi people in general had been prolonged, as she questions: “For over twenty years, war after war, a blockade imposed on twenty two million people among them people from our building. At the same time flying to the north and south is restricted, traveling is prohibited, there is a frightening increase in extreme wealth, degrading poverty, economic downturn, and a collapse in the social classes. Unemployment that goes beyond rational, all of this has occurred because we own the second largest oil reserves after Saudi Arabia?” (Khuḍayrī, 2009, p. 20).

New crimes began to arise due to the economic difficulties from sanctions, as the novel mentions the new business of stolen car parts. Under the sanctions cars were more prone to be stolen, and people found it difficult to protect their own cars from thieves. As Dalāl point out, the thieves had preferences for Japanese and American cars and they
took them apart and sold them in the market. Everything was counterfeit; from toothpaste to building materials. Buildings collapsed because of the expense of obtaining such materials. This is an illustration of how daily life changed under the sanctions and how Iraqis began to adapt to the hardships in trying to make it through the economic difficulties.

This illustration is clearer to the reader, as Dalāl explains this bizarre story of a girl she after she gets poisoned because of a gecko that entered a feminine pad after the store owner had begun selling the pads separately. The gecko entered the girl and she got sick. The owner goes to jail and the girl calls for compensation. The way Khuḍayri chooses to present such stories in a light-hearted and sarcastic way allows the reader to see how this has become part of their normal quotidian life. These awkward stories no longer shocked Iraqis, but became a sort of dark humor and part of their routine.

An old lady, Umm Māzin joins the building, with her plastic containers. Dalāl assumes she is a trader in plastics, however this innocent sarcasm reveals the naivety of Dalāl. Umm Māzin proves to be quiet a character in the novel that breathes some life to the residential building. She is a soothsayer whom women come to for magical herbal potions and to read their fortunes. Umm Māzin plays a significant role in the lives of these women as she becomes their psychologist in times of personal tribulations. As the ladies sit in a circle, a woman says, “Umm ‘Alī they vanished, who vanished Umm ‘Alī? More than four hundred people, men women and children, who died in the ‘Amriyah shelter when it was bombed at 4:30 am at night, the people vanished from the laser bomb and its heat that was over one thousand degrees” (Khuḍayrī, 2009, p. 38). The enclosure
of events such as this in the novels is rather common in the Iraqi war narratives. This is a feature Iraqi novelists employee and include within their narratives as a form of documenting the atrocities and the pains they lived through. They include real events and tragedies that took place in Iraq during the war, which become intertwined and part of the fictive story they are telling. The war narrative becomes the national narrative they want to tell and document and preserve.

In the novel, remarks about the sanctions and the war are common. As Abu Ghāyib begins to complain of how it has destroyed his country and cost it billions of dollars, his wife reciprocates, “I do not understand why they bombed the mosques, the schools, the houses of the special needs people, and the civilian shelters. How are they related to their targets?” He replies with an explanation of the rising costs in the country, the statistics state that only fifteen from every one hundred people can afford to buy food from the market with the current prices (Khuḍayrī, 2009, p. 109).

He continues to explain all the damages that have resulted from the sanctions, among them is the prohibition of yarn and threads, and even the fabrics to cover the dead have been forbidden. Khuḍayrī subsequently attempts to slip information into the dialogue about the numbers of those who were affected by the sanctions, such as when she meets Sa’ad the Barber who recently moved into the neighborhood and building. He tells about the children’s’ depression due to their loss of their relatives and friends from the bombings. The numbers of those who died under the age of fifteen has increased five times than before the Persian Gulf War.
The daily lives of the characters in the novels become a part of Dalāl’s life. The economic hardships the family faces under sanctions force Abu Ghāyib to purchase a bee hive to become a bee keeper as a source of income. This was from the money he had saved for Dalāl’s surgery; now it has become their source of income. Abu Ghāyib had always wanted to become an artist but could not because of a lack of encouragement. Meanwhile, Umm Māzin believes she has powers and only does good to end evil spells. She however does not do spells to harm people. Umm Māzin’s house becomes a private women’s space; she even had a sign saying no males or boys above fourteen years of age allowed. Dalāl’s aunt continues to visit despite her husband’s objections, while he still treats the paintings he collects as if they were his children.

Another major character that lived in Dalāl’s building is her friend, Elhām, who works in the hospital, and thus is able to give voice to the tragedies she sees there. Her work makes her wonder if this war is in fact against women and children, because the hospitals were full of them. She says we have surpassed Sudan in child mortality. The country is destroyed. Elhām laments how children are playing with remains of bombs and getting exposed to dangerous uranium from Basra to Karbalā to Baghdad. She returns the toy Dalāl donated to a child in the hospital informing her that he had died.

Elhām is from a French mother who left her when she was just six months old with her Iraqi father to return to her country. Elhām develops a bruise on her breast and thinks it is cancer. She curses her French mother who she envisages is sitting at some café in Paris drinking a cup of hot chocolate at the moment she is suffering because she had abandoned her and left to go back to her country. Elhām compares herself to the
statue of Shahrazad on the streets of Baghdad, as the Shahrazad statue is solid from the outside like the bronze it is made out of but empty on the inside (Khuḍayrī, 2009, p. 98). But yet she says Shahrazad is lucky because she had a man (Shahrayar, the statue next to her) and Elhām did not. This is another example of the many characters of Iraqi women alone without men; their loneliness is revealed through their frustrations and living through hardships alone. Elhām’s character reflects a pessimistic view of the Iraqis and the hardships due to her own experiences but also due to her work at the hospital. Dalāl visits Abu Sammy, an old man in their building. He continues to keeps a diary that his deceased wife used to write in. Abu Sammy himself was a photographer, but has since lost his eyesight.

The residents of the building have made themselves resourceful under the hardships. Among the novels written by Iraqi women about the war and exile, Ghāyib is amid the few where one senses a feeling of community among everyone in the novel. It is a reflection of the comradery that was present in Iraqi society. They appear to be living their lives ordinarily and coping with it as they lend each other a hand, such as Elhām living on the second floor providing the necessary medicines not found in the pharmacies, Abu Sammy the magazines and newspapers, Umm Ghāyib sending her sewing customers to Umm Māzin and Umm Māzin sending her customers to Sa’ad, and Abu Ghāyib being the honey supplier. The residents of this building in the middle of the sanctions develop their own process and system through this sense of community. This is distinctively found in this narrative but rarely narrated in the new novels related to these themes in Iraqi women’s writings. The narratives are usually tilted towards a feeling of isolation.
and loneliness amidst the absence of men. While here we see men and their own challenges living in this Iraqi society during the sanction that had been imposed after the Persian Gulf War. Pointedly, Ghāyib means absent in Arabic and the uncle’s name is also absent which is a foreshadowing and an allegory of absence.

This same sense of community was also felt during Elhām’s surgery when each of them helped her in their own way and stood by her, Umm Māzin giving her a mixed potion, Sa’ad a wig, and Umm Ghāyib made her a fake breast. The lightheartedness in the novel is revealed here when the Elhām gives Dalāl the handmade breast made out of stitching and fabrics the aunt makes for her after her surgery, yet Elhām returns it to add a nipple to it. Elhām unfortunately becomes one of the symbols of betrayal in the novel when she is eventually jailed, accused of gruesomely selling body parts to the local butcher to mix it with lamb and beef.

Khuḍayri develops the characters in a witty manner, presenting the reader a perspective on different personalities who lived their lives and went about their daily living situations, and how they interacted with each other as a normal Arab community usually does, such as the gossip that is present in the women’s spaces exclusive in Umm Mazen’s house of fortune telling as well as Sa’ad’s hair salon with his own space with access for both women and men. The story continues on to reveal to the reader more of the unanticipated events from these ordinary people living their quotidian lives.

As the novel progresses, Dalāl meets Ādel, a friend that visits Sa’ad the hairstylist. Ādel eventually gets closer to Dalāl and seduces her into a physical relationship with him. Slowly things begin to change for the worse and the friendship and
the sense of community begins to deteriorate and gets dismantled in the building. Umm Māzin is arrested for magic and sorcery and is forced to leave the building and the area. Meanwhile, the bees her uncle was preoccupied with begin to act more violently. Dalāl notices there is a closed area near the club and some strange activity taking place. She convinces Sa’ad to go with her to see the place, and as they embark on this dangerous adventure she sees dead corpses and recognizes some neighbors who were killed in recent bombings. After Abu Ghāyib hears of this gruesome news, he fears his bees have been feasting on the blood of these corpses and therefore he needs to get rid of them and find a new income. In order to maintain an income, he decides to send his collection of paintings outside of the country to sell in Jordan. Selling artwork outside of Iraq is considered selling Iraqi artifacts, which is a crime. Abu Ghāyib concocts a secret plan to collect the art from his house and send it across the borders. Just after the artwork is sent, ʿĀdel raids their house with several policemen and takes away Abu Ghāyib.

With Dalāl’s astonishment and shock over her uncle’s arrest and by ʿĀdel himself, with whom she had a relationship, and trusted, she confronts Sa’ad, the hairstylist. Sa’ad discloses to Dalāl the plan for him to collect information on Umm Māzin and to report any suspicious activities. She discovers he is responsible for turning in Elhām and Umm Mazen, as well as her uncle. He tries to plea with her to take compensation and to justify his actions due to the economic hardships the hairstylist is facing, especially (as he mentions) with the increase in the conservative trend of veiling. Oddly ʿĀdel, whose real name he reveals as Jamāl, works for the government to protect society from deviation or those who destroy the morals of society. ʿĀdel also used to provide Sa’ad with customers.
who slept with him in return for information. Sa’ad’s nickname is revealed as “Farooha”, one who pleases people. ‘Ādel punishes those who continue in their deviance by putting their hands in the drawer and closing it on them leading to broken fingers (Khuḍayrī, 2009). Here the novel reveals the indication of brutal torture by the regime and the betrayal of normal people in Iraqi society due to their desperate financial situations.

Dalāl then irately questions Sa’ad, “[a]nd why didn’t he reprimand you as well?” She realizes he is responsible for destroying the tranquility and stability in the lives of the people in the building. Sa’ad feels remorseful but blames his actions on the state of the country as he says, “[L]isten, for the past thirty years people have been fleeing; the Communists left the country, and many Sh’ia families left, and the intellectuals and scientists emigrated and the Kurds became independent. It is even said that the number of women has surpassed fifty percent of the population as a result of the wars we fought, so what shall you do my sister?” (Khuḍayrī, 2009).

Dalāl’s relationship with ‘Ādel, the government security, bears an uncanny resemblance to the betrayal of Zahra in her relationship with the sniper in Ḥanān’s al-Shaykh’s novel about the Lebanese civil war. The only difference is that ‘Ādel (Jamāl) did not kill Dalāl, but yet destroyed everyone around her that she cared for. This betrayal from someone, a character she is physically involved with, shows the malice of some people, in particular men, during war, with disregard to those they hurt along the way. The physical relationship is meaningless to the men and only demeans the women who fall under their wrath. The physical relationship and betrayal by such men represents the
quintessence of violence. The body becomes the symbol of violence towards a nation raped and betrayed by those closest to it.

The novel ends with a lonely, isolated life for Dalāl and her aunt whose life is no longer the same without her missing husband. Abu Ghāyib never returns, suffering the same fate as many other Iraqi men have in the past and ever since the war(s) began there. As everyone in the building has been incarcerated or has died, the only ones left remaining are Dalāl and her aunt. A recurring theme in almost all novels where the women are left alone, secluded with their men absent, hence the name Ghāyib (absent), becomes the representation for the fate of many Iraqi men in particular, but all Iraqis as well. Her aunt begins to draw clouds since her husband’s disappearance. Dalāl begins to work to support the family. The novel draws to an end with an optimistic tone, when Dalāl begins to teach the illiterate paper boy that comes to their building how to read and write.

_Ghāyib (Absent)_ is a well written novel, with amply developed characters. Khudayri succeeds in narrating a story of ordinary people of Iraq who try to survive through the sanctions after the war, and yet they could not avoid the wrath that had inflicted their country. Not only did they have to endure the economic hardships imposed by outsiders, but also they endured the brutal treatment by the Iraqi regime and the informants who also harmed them. It reveals the double edged sword they had to live with in terms of evading poverty and finding a means to live as well as to avoid mishaps with the government which seemed impossible to avoid.
This novel is another representation of the approach Iraqi women employ to narrate the war and sanction in their novels. They represent the quotidian life of war and the manner in which they cope with it as it becomes a part of their lives. Khudayri adds to the narrative by including the betrayal and lack of trust that takes shape among the people who appear to be loyal to the regime and have no problem in harming the ordinary Iraqi citizen. It is an example of how human relationships are formulated. The term ‘survival of the fittest’ becomes a truth when survival becomes nearly unattainable with the harshness and cruelness of life under war and sanction, in addition to the lack of freedom from the government and an outside aggressor. Ghayıb is another example of the Iraqi war narrative that embodies the story of ordinary Iraqi people. Like her contemporaries, Khudayri employs the sub-narratives, but in a more creative manner that looks less artificial and forced into the novel. As she develops each character throughout her novel, they all end up contributing to the whole narrative in an equal manner. Consequently it develops a cohesive, creative piece of fiction filled with individual tales of lived lives affected by war.

Hadiyah Ḥusayn’s ‘Amal “Hope”, in Fī al-ṭariq ilayhim, Nissā’ al-‘atābāt.

Hadiyah Ḥusayn has written several books since her departure from her home country in 1999, all of which address the many wars Iraq has endured throughout the years. In a recent interview, Ḥusayn explains that her physical distance from her country makes her feel closer to it (Mukhlafi, 2013). This explains why all her novels are based in
Iraq and her characters are Iraqi. Still, despite her commitment to her country, she confesses that her diasporic life has had a negative influence on her writing because she did not live through the last war in 2003 and the violence that enveloped the country. For this reason, this last war was absent from her writings and was not the main focus of her novels as the past wars were (Mukhlafi, 2013). This refers back to the question of who is authorized to write about the war if they are not present to narrate a firsthand account. Nevertheless, Ḥusayn provides a significant image of what it was like to live in Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war as well as the exile that many Iraqis were forced to endure in neighboring countries. She explains about her distance from Iraq, noting that “a country is not only a geographical location, it is memory that we carry within us wherever we go” (Jābir, 2011).

In her novel published in 2004, Fī al-tārīq ilayhim, (The Road to Them), Ḥusayn opens her novel with a little girl named ʿAmal, narrating her and her family’s life. The girl reveals her birthdate as August 4th, 1956; yet the surprising element comes when she reveals that she has passed away. She narrates that “I am no longer among the living, and previously I was not fortunate enough to enter school and receive an education such as you, because death has taken me before I achieved this wish… and now I return after my death from more than 40 years ago to narrate to you what has occurred, or some of what happened... isn't it just for the dead to have the right to have their word?” (Ḥusayn, 2004, p. 5). Despite ʿAmal’s early death, she remains close to her family, as she follows them through their lives as if she was living among them. ʿAmal describes her death and her burial as she notes “my soul did not leave the place except for my body that has been
seized from life” (Ḥusayn, 2004, p. 10). One can see the attachment to the place although physically they are not there; as such, this can be a reference to exile.

ʿAmal describes her grave and the loneliness she feels there. She returns to her family’s home, hearing and witnessing her family though they cannot see her. ʿAmal’s mother, however, feels her presence through a dream she has of her standing at the door when she first appears at the house. ʿAmal describes her feelings of nostalgia to her sister Sophia and her friends. She describes in details the transformation of her body rotting in the grave as time is at a standstill. “My body began to slowly dissolve; my stomach was the first to decay. My skin cracked and melted and everything that was soft followed. My eyes began to harden and my lips hung limply, then broke off” (Ḥusayn, 2004, p. 16). Ḥusayn describes the process in which ʿAmal witnesses her own body beginning to decay as a metaphor for other physical and spiritual deaths in Iraq. It also hints at the body and its significance as compared to the soul.

Her attempt to keep the dead alive in spirit is something Luṭfīyah al-Dulaymī also utilizes in her book Hadīqat Hayāh (Hayāt’s Garden). One begins to see the link the two authors are trying to put between the dead and the living. What is the significance, and does it differ for a person to be dead or alive? These characters died, yet they saw and witnessed the events and lives of their families as if they were still with them. As time went by, her family stopped visiting her grave, her mother being the last to stop. She questions why her family forgot about her, and feels loneliness and isolation without the comfort of her family, and her mother especially. To shed light as to why Ḥusayn bases her whole novel on a dead character named ʿAmal, she discloses, “As for the novel Fī al-
tarīq ilayhim (The Road to Them), I had felt in one moment in time that the living were no longer able to articulate their words, because the regime neither respected the living nor the dead, and because freedom is what is absent from the living in our Arab nations. I confided in the dead who were free from the whips of the torturers” (al-Hayyja’, 2010).

Ḥusayn’s novel refers to ʿAbd al-Karīm Qāsim, the leader who seized power through a coup d’état from the Iraqi Monarchy in 1958. ʿAmal mentions her father’s fondness of the leader and the special care he took of his portraits. She writes, “I tried many times to see the face of this leader that loves the poor” (Ḥusayn, 2004, p. 24). She describes the time she saw him fighting the crowd, and when he noticed her, she was ecstatic. She reflects how his death affected not only her family but everyone in Iraq, as she makes references to the entire country’s mood. ʿAmal notices the empty streets, where everything is shutdown. Men in the streets hold guns, and military vehicles pass in a rush. She sees her father smoking heavily, and her mother wearing black, as if a member of the family has passed away.

ʿAmal learns the reason for this national sorrow from two men on the street discussing the incident and the violence the ensued. It is there that she learns of the coup d’état and the killing of the beloved leader. Qāsim was killed on February 9, 1963, and just as Ḥusayn mentions in her novel, he did pass laws to help the poor by building residential houses for them. He attempted to increase the middle class through the distribution of farm land to the public and the seizure of most of Iraqi land from British controlled petroleum company. There is a certain nostalgia for Qāsim because he was known for being incorruptible and for passing laws that benefited women, such as
banning polygamy and limiting he age of marriage to 18 years and older. He also attempted to give equal inheritance laws. His mixed origin – from a father who had Kurdish and Arab Sunnī Muslim roots and a Shī’ah mother – also add to this sense of nostalgia for a figure who embodies Iraq’s multiplicity.

ʿAmal, too, was touched by the news of the leader’s death. “My soul wept without any tears, something fell from it something salty and stinging, burning, and drowning in grief, suffered through the sorrowful homes and the streets observed with weapons” (Ḥusayn, 2004, p. 28). Later in the novel, the girl ʿAmal sees the spirit of a man who tells her that he is Qāsim. With this description, one sees the strong sentiment and emotion towards the event of his death.

The leader, he nodded his head and said for many long years my soul was circling around the Tigris, they had thrown my corpse in that river. I fell on the dirt as the leader knelt, and I asked, what kind of wicked idea that they throw your corpse to the river... why did they not bury it? He responded as he looked towards the foam the river throws between the rocks. They initially buried me in a distant area on the outskirts of Baghdad. Several people from among those who admire me discovered that and so they took out the corpse to bury it in another place until the time comes to honor me, however one of the guards in the area had seen what they had done and he wanted to please those involved in the coup so he informed the security. Those evildoers took my corpse, tied it to a big metal object, and threw it in the Tigris River... ever since that time soul got lost searching for my body. (Ḥusayn, 2004, p. 66)
It is clear in Ḥusayn’s novel that there is a certain fondness for the leader, Qāsim, and a distaste of the regime that followed after through their coup d'état.

‘Amal becomes friends with a young boy named Ferās who died of drowning, unlike ‘Amal who died of sickness. Ferās died when a friend who pushed him into the water and left him to drown. Ḥusayn gives life to the dead characters in this story, showing that physical well-being is not as significant as the soul itself and the spirit. ‘Amal feels emotions, pain, and yearning to be with her family. Ferās wants to seek revenge for his murder by going into his friend’s dreams and turning them into nightmares until he admits his role in his death (Ḥusayn, 2004, p. 35). When ‘Amal’s father dies, she also meets him but he is worried because he is suffering for a sin he committed as a teenager. Unlike ‘Amal, he is judged – many aspects of the afterlife the author includes refers to the Islamic beliefs of judging the soul for sins committed while living (Ḥusayn, 2004, p. 55).

War begins midway through the novel after ‘Amal’s encounter with Qāsim’s spirit, as if it was a foreshadowing of the atrocities yet to come. The following chapter opens with ‘Amal’s description of the war: “[o]ur graves shook violently, then the skies were overtaken by planes with horrifying sounds” (Ḥusayn, 2004, p. 67). In reference to the Iran/Iraq war of 1980, she describes how even the dead feel its horrors underneath the earth. As the dead ask what is going on, she hears an angelic voice saying, “Satan hit the heads of the living, he deceived them and now they ignited a war that will inflame the country, the people, and nature” (Ḥusayn, 2004, p. 68).
The lives of the children she knew who have now grown-up are transformed by the war. Her sister Sophia’s husband joins the fighting and disappears while she is pregnant with their child. The child that is born is named ‘Amal after her sister who died so young (Ḥusayn, 2004, p. 69). ‘Amal mentions Gāzi and ‘Awātif, the kids she knew during her childhood, who both became rich from the war. Gāzi began to take higher positions in the army until he began to appear with the president.

People are a game of time, they divide it as they please, a second, a minute, a day a month, a year, a decade, a century… they celebrate their birthdays cheerful even though their ages are cut short in life… and people are a game of time in my country, a year the war began, a year celebrating fierce battles, a year of negotiations, a day of homage, a day of bravery… a day of the great victory in which the only victor is evil. (Ḥusayn, 2004, p. 72)

She finds out her mother died in Mecca. Her niece ‘Amal grows up as her mother struggles to raise her without a father. ‘Amal eventually decides to marry an older man in the army, and her mom dies because of her decisions.

In a continuation to the novel about the dead girl ‘Amal in Fī al-ṭarīq ilayhim (The Road to Them), Ḥusayn writes another novel focusing on the niece ‘Amal from the next generation and what has followed in war and destruction in Iraq. The novel starts with ‘Amal, the niece of the original ‘Amal in “On the Road to Them”. The author Hadīyah Ḫusayn clarifies that she is not the same young ‘Amal in the novel Fī al-ṭarīq
*ilayhim* (*The Road to Them*), but she is the niece (Jābir, 2011). She wanted to continue the story of ‘Amal and hence she made her the main protagonist of her other novel, *Nissā’ al- ‘atābāt* (*Women on the Threshold*). Living an isolated luxurious life in Iraq, ‘Amal finds herself after the downfall of the regime alone without a husband. Her husband sends her off to ‘Ammān with her maid Jammār. The situation gets worse in Iraq, but ‘Amal is unsure as to what is going on. Their house was near the presidential palace and the war was about to begin.

Her husband is an officer in the republican guard in the Iraqi army. His name is Jabār Mansour and is thirty years older than ‘Amal. She chose to marry him in order to leave a life of poverty with little means to a life of luxury and plenty. Her mother did not agree with her marriage, and as mentioned above, she died in vain disapproving of it. ‘Amal justifies her marriage to him not because she was a bad daughter or a person but she was perhaps searching for a man that fills the gap of a father figure she did not have or she did not see in the men her age. She admits that she distanced herself from men her age because they could not provide her with the security and stability she longed for. The men her age did not have the means to have the money and riches she longed for after a life of deprivation. Furthermore, the fate of men in her generation are known, as they are recruited to be soldiers with little other opportunities (Husayn, 2004).

In the novel, ‘Amal mentions her family’s past and her aunt ‘Amal that had passed away, haunting them with her spirit. Her mother Safiyyah lost her husband during the Iran-Iraq war and spent her life in sorrow over him. It is clear this is a continuation of the novel *Fī al-ṣaḥāl ilayhim* (*The Road to Them*) as it explains how ‘Amal’s spirit stayed
with them after she had died at an early age. 'Amal remembers her mother’s friends who also lost the men in their lives and their constant gossip about it, something she could not bear to hear anymore.

'Amal tries to explain herself in this novel as if she is trying to fix the image the narrator of the last novel had of her, as she justifies her actions and complains of how she was depicted, as a selfish person without the opportunity for her to defend herself and to talk about her life in the mansion. As she explains, the previous narrator of the story does not know of her life with her husband. She explains her previous life story as if she read it in the novel *Fī al-ṭarīq ilayhim* (*The Road to Them*) herself, and she describes it as full of sadness, sorrows, and depression (Husayn, 2004).

She married without a wedding but entered the world of riches when she entered the mansion with two guards in it. She felt a new world and life different than the one she previously had with her mother. 'Amal describes how she switched her life from that of the crowd in the alleys and on the front steps to the quietness of the mansion. She wonders if this is a house of a Republican Guard, then what do the houses of the presidential palace look like? Here Hadīyah Ḥusayn provides a perspective to the world of the rich who belonged to the Iraqi regime without resorting to any political criticism. She just writes a story of a girl who attempts to change her life for the better by trying to enter this world through the marriage despite him being 30 years her senior. It is perhaps the easiest way for a girl to change the story of her life.

'Amal the niece instead finds herself isolated from the world living in a comfortable prison, as her husband prevented her socializing with other party members or
attending any of the party occasions. The hairstylist and other services she needed came to her house without her having to leave it. Zangana in her novel writes about members of the Ba’ath party and she admits how hard it was to write this character because she did not have the same familiarity to their world. Hadīyah Ḥusayn perhaps encountered similar difficulties for this reason details of the interactions with the party members, and their life were left out; however, Zangana was braver and more explicit in her description in her novel of the character “Mājda”.

ʿAmal does not release herself from loneliness; in fact, her loneliness continues in isolation and her life does not improve, but she had to handle the consequences of her choices. She tried to escape from her roots and her fate yet she only found a more difficult one. The very life she struggled to escape from slowly began to creep up on her when her husband failed to show up when she was in ʿAmmān with her helper Jammār. Although she felt a sense of freedom and independence in ʿAmmān as she discovers the area and goes out in the streets, she also lost that protection and security she once had with her husband’s house and money.

She remembers the Iran-Iraq war when she was a child and the fear in her mother’s eyes which instills in her fears before she heard the fall of the rockets. In 1991 the poor became poorer and people began to fear their own walls. Her mother returned with less than she did before when she went to the market. In a sarcastic manner just as Batūl Khuḍayri describes in her novel, “Absent”, even the chicken became extinct during that time. Everything became scarce. With her father missing for 6 years, her and her mother struggled as she thought about dropping out of high school. Her mother would
repeat to her a popular Arabic proverb, “according to the length of your cover you extend your legs”; ‘Amal wonders why the cover can’t be long enough for her to extend her legs to however far she wanted. She considered these proverbs for the poor to accept the state they are in. ‘Amal wonders why anyone will blame her for wanting to sleep on covers made out of feathers much bigger than the covers her mother and her friends had. She wanted to be away from those women who lamented over the missing men in their lives for reasons beyond their control.

In the novel Nissā’ al-ʿatābāt, Ḥusayn includes the dialogue she had with her mother from the old novel in Fī al-ṭarīq ilayhim (The Road to Them). ‘Amal recalls the conversation with her mother as she tells her that her new husband is as old as her father and that he is an officer in the military. Her mother told her that “in the military they are either torturers or victims, and I do not think the one that holds these fake stars on his shoulders is a victim” (Ḥusayn, 2011, p. 10).

The novel uses flashback to her memories with her mother and the times of her past when she was in Baghdad to the time when she was in ’Ammān and living with her maid Jammār. She recalls the events that led to where she was, although the novel begins with her on her way back to Baghdad from ’Ammān. It is a first person narration and she explains some events that occurred in the last novel in Fī al-ṭarīq ilayhim (The Road to Them) in this novel as well.

As the days passed and she did not hear of any word of her military husband, her money became scarce and she had no other means to support herself financially. She began to get closer to Jammār as they needed each other for support. Jammār narrates her
story to ‘Amal and how she ended up alone with no family in Baghdad. She no longer felt Jammār was working for her as she could no longer pay her, and the line between her as her maid began to disappear. Ḥusayn explains the symbolism of the name Jammār and the figurative significance it has in the novel. Other than the fact that it is a popular name in southern Iraq, it also denotes the hardships these women endured in Iraq and in exile. “Jammār” is the pulp of the palm tree, and the palm tree symbolizes Iraq for its numerous palm trees (Jābir, 2011).

Jammār comments on the war and protests against the U.S invasion of Iraq, as they are watching the events unfold through the television set just as many Iraqis living away from their homeland did. She questions the effectiveness of the protests, as she recalls it did nothing to dispel them. The leaders do as they please and the poor civilians pay the price. ‘Amal asks Jammār if she had lost anyone from the wars, and Jammār responds to her and reveals that she does not have family for her to lose anyone. Everyone that died during the war is like her son and her daughter; it was a war that had no purpose from the beginning. As she continues to reflect upon her view, she says “I do not know much about politics but I know that Kuwait was an Arab and Muslim country, and our leader always repeated that we were brothers, so how can he invade them? We had hastily entered into a war that burned everything living and nonliving, wasn’t an eight year war in Iran enough?” (Ḥusayn, 2011, p. 14). ‘Amal does not want to respond to her or get into politics, but her fear is revealed as she says this is a different war, and what will come of it will be far worse than what has passed in previous wars.

317
ʿAmal describes the war that began and that which she was afraid of: “It arrived that of which terrifies the hearts, and the spirit, and instills fears in the mothers and fathers, and threatens (us) with pain, and death. It came to spray its poison, its fury and its clouds spread like the devil in the skies came as a violent crazy wind, frivolously. The third war came, it covered the sky between the fires, and stole from me the last thread of hope, that I did not have from him except the title” (Ḥusayn, 2011, p. 15). ʿAmal is describing the last war and the invasion by the U.S forces in 2003. She expresses the fear she had and the sorrows of what is to come and what will become of them, since for herself her only hope was her husband and a member of the regime that will soon collapse.

ʿAmal began to find comfort in Jammār just as if she was her mother. They became equal, with the exception of calling ʿAmal “sayyīdatī” (my Madame). As she explains, “[w]e are now equal. For the first time we place the food between us to eat from the two plates” (Ḥusayn, 2011, p. 18). The nation was falling apart and the tragedy that ensued affected both the poor and the rich of the nations; therefore, they are both equal in misery.

ʿAmal also begins to question the role of her husband. Was he as her mother said – a torturer? And then who was his victim? She wonders if he is fighting to protect his country now or fighting to protect his leader. She wonders what has become of him, if he will use his soldiers to gain more medals or if he pushes them to their deaths. ʿAmal does not imagine him to be a ruthless person, yet at the same time she has no idea what is
happening with him and in the battles. The only accounts we get are what she hears on the news.

Shock and fear from the first few days of war began to settle, and then ʿAmal began to record the causalities of the war:

- Bombing of al-qazimiyyah.
- Fifteen member of one family killed in hillah.
- The Red Crescent describes the battles as horrific.
- In Umm Qasir there are striking battles.
- Al-Basra reads the Fatiha to fifty of its people.
- The pentagon confirms the surrender of battalion fifteen and Iraq denies it.
- Loud protests in Arab capitals.
- Special operations of U.S soldiers on the borders. (Ḥusayn, 2011, p. 16)

ʿAmal continues to record throughout the novels the events that unfolded in Iraq during the war, a strategy seen in other characters by Iraqi novelist in their stories about the wars in Iraq, where they list certain events that happened in Iraq, such as Batūl Khudayri, ʿĀliya Ṭālib, and others who write about the Iraqi wars in their novels. The perspective of Iraqi women about the war more commonly is not about the actual battles that were taking place in Iraq; in fact, most of the accounts and descriptions of the war are away from the battlefields. The few dialogues describing the battlefront are usually accounts by male soldiers in Kam badat al-samāʾ qarībah (A Sky So Close), where the soldier sends
letters of the battle and his discontent with the images of the dead bodies he witnesses taken home in coffins.

ʿAmal recalls in her memory the wars she had witnessed before when she was in Iraq and the last war, referring to it as the second war. She remembers when she and her mom were directed to go to the shelters she tried to take her books, but her mom advised her against it. ʿAmal wondered why then did her mom take the picture of her father with her. On their way to the shelter, she sees a woman with her dog; she asks her mom who is more important, the dog or the books? Her mother replies to her, “The dog of course, it is a living soul. If you are feeling are not moved towards an animal you cannot be merciful to a human (Ḥusayn, 2011, p. 19).” Her mother’s life stopped with the disappearance of her husband, ʿAmal’s father. Her mother’s life stopped the last day she saw her husband, then she stopped caring for herself. ʿAmal recalls her mother taking out her wedding dress and saying she will wear it the day he returns home and circling the streets of Baghdad on a horse. She wrote songs for him, and over the years with less hope she still wrote songs for him. This reveals the sad pain and sorrow Iraqi women felt with no knowledge of what has become of their men, a recurring theme found by other Iraqi novelist as well.

ʿAmal also recalls the last wars in Iraq she spent with her mother; the long lines of people waiting to get food, where there was no water, gas, or bread. The stores were closed, food was scarce, with a scene of a man looking in the trash with the cats for any remains of food he may find. Her mother’s friends asking what they will do with the dark colored flour the government gave them, wondering what was mixed with it.
It is black like our days, we don’t know what they grinded with it.

It could be dates or burned wood or anything to fill the stomachs of people

This is true, but can we do and to whom can we complain? Fattūma came to the scene and picked up the conversation: “Dear God, if we die by a rocket and relieve ourselves is better than this gloom” (Husayn, 2011, p. 20)

It is these conversations that ŦAmal perhaps wanted to escape from. From the pain and misery these women recalled and lived through. As she remembers Fattūma, her mother’s friend and her story, here we see yet another narration about the consequences of the wars on Iraqi women. Fattūma tells of her lost sons after the death of her husband; her first son died during the Iran-Iraq war in Basra, during the last year of the war her other son refused to participate in the national army after he had finished his military obligations. He wanted to continue his education, but two men from the intelligence raided their home and arrested him along with other men in the neighborhood. He disappeared for several months, and then Fattūma was informed to go pick up his body after he was executed. As Fattūma viewed three bodies to identify her son’s body, the officer tells her to sign and take him quickly, calling them traitors. Fattūma responds angrily to the officer, “My first son died in the war and I am the mother of a martyr.” He scolds heatedly, saying “And now you are the mother of the traitor, hurry, I do not need this trash.” Fattūma angrily scratches his face with her fingers and responds to him, “You are the trash and son of trash,” and then faints, waking up in a hospital. After they ask her to leave the hospital, she returns home to see it demolished with everything in it. With her son’s body nowhere
to be found, Fattūma moves from house to house until she found a simple shack to live in with insects. When ‘Amal ‘s mother asks how all this tragedy had ensued upon them, Fattūma responds: we all know where all of this has come from, but we have to bite our tongues (Ḥusayn, 2011).

‘Amal ‘s mother died out of pain and hurt that her daughter will marry Jabār, and ‘Amal wonders if she hadn’t would she have still lived. ‘Amal admits her heart had hardened and was so cold from the life she had that she did not cry over her mother such as Fattūma did and all the women of the neighborhood. She wonders why she did not have this remorse and why she didn’t feel sad over her death.

Jammār cannot stop worrying about what is happening in Iraq, and ‘Amal tells her sarcastically, “As if you have left a fortune in a bank.” Jammār replies, “Yes, I did leave a fortune, there a fortune in the account of the soul.” ‘Amal wonders why Jammār is so protective of her nation when it barely provided her with anything, and wonders where her satisfaction comes from while accepting so little as a maid in a mansion. ‘Amal brings up the question of homeland: “Isn’t a homeland what carries the person and not burdens them? It bestows security; it does not steal it from you. It gives life and love, and not give pain and anxiety.” She asks, “Then how can a homeland become so difficult that it turns into a grave, a prison, or a blood bath?” (Ḥusayn, 2011, p. 22). ‘Amal questions what has the nation and homeland given them, since it appears to cause nothing but pain and misery to its people yet one is still loyal to it.

Jammār blames the leader for taking them to this road, as she mentions in the novel: it is a series that began with the war in Kuwait which then refused to leave, putting
his people under a terrible situation. The most recent war is a continuation of it to finish it off. ᵃᴹᵃˡ tells her this has nothing to do with it, but Jammāʳ argues with her, telling her it is all related: “It is all one chain that had brought us to the place we are in right now, we lost more than a million martyrs in Iran, thousands of wounded and missing, and millions of widows, if the desert can speak it would tell world of those betray under its sands” (Ḥusayn, 2011, p. 29).

‘Amal recalls once opening the subject of politics with her husband. When she spoke of the leader, he told her not to preoccupy herself with such matters. There are people leading the ship. She responded with a sharp critique: in truth one person is leading the ship and it is about to sick. When she wanted to say more, her husband led her to another room and wrote on a paper cautioning her of speaking about politics, as there may be listening devices or cameras.

The war is very much a main theme in this novel as Jammāʳ also discusses with ‘Amal the results of the Kuwait war and what problems fell on the country after the bad choices the leader made. The U.S invaded and drove him out of Kuwait but they did not get rid of ᵃᵈᵃᵈᵃᵐ. Thus he restored his power and paved the way for him to execute thousands of Iraqis. Jammāʳ asks ‘Amal if she hated the leader, but ‘Amal did not give her an answer, choosing to remain neutral, although this was not convincing to Jammāʳ. ‘Amal remembers the hatred her mother had towards the regime, but ‘Amal herself was indifferent and told her everyone has their own reason for love and hate. This is perhaps a reflection of the Iraqi society which can be divided in their outlook on the regime, while many may despise it for reasons brought to light through a few examples mentioned in
the novel. Meanwhile, others may have benefited from it and hence did not want to resist it. ‘Amal chose her side by marrying Jabār, reaping the benefits that may come out of being on the side of the regime; this is perhaps why she chose to be indifferent or did not care one way or the other. However, this situation will soon change for her or she is seeing that change with the last war against Iraq.

‘Amal married Jabār in order to leave the life of poverty that she and her mother lived in. After marrying him she enjoyed this life for approximately three years. When she first married him she was fascinated with the jewelry and the rings she received; however, this did not last long, as after she had left for ‘Ammān and her money became scarce she was forced to sell her jewelry for a cheaper price, until she ended up the way she was before, poor. She began to see her life resembling the women of the front porches, a life she tried so hard to avoid.

In a strong distinction between men and women, Jammār tells ‘Amal that women are like an abandoned forest without a man, “Our memories are our medicine even if it only cures little of the pains we have.” Jammār also felt helpless after the death of her husband, like ‘Amal feels without her husband. “The man can also be the source of our pain, when we lose him life stops, but when he loses the woman his life continues with another woman. If my mother was killed alone in the accident, my dad would have remarried after a short period, and my mother would have been a mere memory, if she even comes to his mind. However, if my father was the one who had died, my mother would have spent her whole life mourning him.” As it turned out, both of Jammār’s parents died in a car accident together. Jammār also lost her husband but she herself
mourns him forever. She is revealing the difference between men and women in such a society where it does not accept a woman to move on as fast as a man could, although it is also a choice the women make in their lives, and they usual chose to be attached to the memory of their deceased or missing men. One man’s story was exceptional one and her mother used it as an excuse as to not be like that man’s wife. His name is Abbās al-Hayyām, who returned from imprisonment in Iran after fourteen years to find his wife had married his brother, so he lost his mind.

‘Amal feels a sense of hopelessness and depression, she feels lost in ‘Ammān away from Iraq and hearing the news of the war. She reaches a point where she wishes her soul can take her far away; she even feels comfort in death and becomes suicidal in her thoughts. She wanders around the streets of ‘Ammān looking at stranger’s faces. Wondering if they had known her they would pity her, and if they did, she is ready to throw herself off from one of ‘Ammān’s mountains. Or she imagines herself drinking poison while she is in a strange land. ‘Amal feels nostalgic for the time of her childhood with her mother and her humble home. At one time she tried so hard to leave and forget this life, but now she wishes she is back in her house with her father’s picture. She wonders about her childhood home, what has become of it and the mansion she lived in in Iraq.

‘Amal creates an imaginary lover she speaks to, but the war took him like it took many Iraqi men. She develops an imaginary relationship with this man, as she tries to replace her loneliness and isolation. She wonders how she married Jabār, who was older than her by so much. She also wonders about her mother, how she lost all her youth
waiting for a man never to return. Jammār, like her mother, lived off the memory of her husband. To ‘Amal, Jammār “created her fantasy and lived off of it. The difference between the two is that Jammār knew the fate of the man she loved and she was in comfort, whereas my mother died of her misery, not knowing what had happened to my father” (Husayn, 2011, p. 37).

Throughout the novel, ‘Amal remembers the stories of the women in her neighborhood and their hardships. She presents them in a subtle way, not as a documentary style, but telling each of their stories and the miseries the women had lived through. It became a sort of comfort in her memory to remember their stories and their gossip, such as the story of a woman found headless who was not from the neighborhood. The rumor went that women were killed as a warning to the men who were political dissidents, and their killing was a message sent to these men for their opposition. Here we see that women’s lives are but pawns for men, and even their deaths are only meant as footnotes for the lives of men themselves.

‘Amal herself finds herself in a crisis as her money ran out and she could no longer afford to live in a nice neighborhood in ʿAmmān, so she searched for a simple apartment in a different part of town. She continues to follow the news and to record them until the day of the fall of statue of Ṣaddām. She wonders how thirty-five years of rule can end in a matter of a few hours, and then chaos ensues. With looting and a lack of security, many ministries and houses were robbed and destroyed. The country no longer had a leader to lead it. Jammār and ‘Amal the next day prepare to return to Baghdad even though their safety was not guaranteed there. As they reached their homeland, Jammār no
longer feels sick. ‘Amal returns to see what is left of her home, until she imagines herself on the steps of her mother’s house wanting to tell her story to the women of the front porches (Ḥusayn, 2011).

*Nissā’ al-‘atábāt* (Women of the Threshold) is a novel about the hardships Iraqi women endured throughout the many long years of war since the onset of the Iran-Iraq war until the last war the deposed of the regime. It is a story about ‘Amal who was also a character in Hadīyah Ḥusayn’s novel *Fī al-ṭarīq ilayhim* (The Road to Them). The novel is another narration of the war and the loneliness and isolation the women endured throughout their years in Iraq.

Finally, to clarify and understand the backdrop of her discourse in her narratives and the reason for her discourse in her novels, Hadīyah Ḥusayn explains that it is because of the abundance of small details that overloaded in her mind amidst the massive events that afflicted her nation. These immense events of Iraq pushed her towards writing novels, a reason which prevented Zangana from continuing to write novels and to begin to write nonfiction. As Ḥusayn explains, her novel *Bint al-khān* was about an Iraqi family’s story “that spanned through three generations, the daughter, the mother, and the grandmother; and through it we uncover and discover a few fragments of what has transpired in Iraq though out the war” (al-Hayyja’, 2010).
Conclusion

The purpose of this dissertation was to contribute a critical literary analysis and a compilation of work from a group of contemporary Iraqi women writers. Their writings, set in the backdrop of war, became a voice not previously heard in the Arab public discourse. I presented the contributions of Iraqi women writers who so profoundly captured experiences of war and exile. The themes of war present in their novels embodied details, events, and truths that preserve history and memory. Narrating the tribulations of war allowed the writers to come to terms with their past and to reflect upon the situations that they lived through. It was after the inception of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980 that Iraqis first experienced a prolonged state of war. This was followed by the U.S.-led coalition of forces into Kuwait during the 1990-1991 Persian Gulf War, which then led to economic sanctions until the 2003 American invasion of Iraq. Iraqi women writers focused their narrative discourse amidst these unfortunate events. They wrote about the experience of war, political censorship, oppression, and exile. Whether writing in diaspora or in the homeland, Iraqi women articulated their nationalism through their representations of home in both the political and historical context. It should be noted that nation and society were major concerns for both male and female Arabic novelists. It is thus natural to conceptualize Iraqi women’s novels as being part of the literary discourse rather than being separate from it.
Additionally, Iraqi women wrote in a feminist vein when they conveyed their steadfast experience and survival through war and exile. They presented feminist impulses through the female characters that survived through the hardships they faced. The characters in their narratives represented the strength and resolve of Iraqi women. The survival of the women in isolation from men and their ultimate independence revealed the feminist discourse of the texts, whether it was meant to be explicit or implicit.

Contemporary Iraqi women writers naturally focused on the themes of war and exile that influenced their lives. Whether they were in exile or in war, their writing created a space of resistance regarding the regime, the war, and the injustices inflicted on the Iraqi people. The latest war was personal: an attempt to recover what remained of a country with a history of colonialism and three wars in as many decades. In political views expressed toward the former regime and in narrated experiences, these Iraqi women writers offered a complex worldview.

Representative works of the Iraqi women writers discussed in this study revealed how they situated their themes concerning the misfortune of their nation. They wrote a national narrative of war and exile using themes of victimhood, violence, exile, chaos, isolation, and nostalgia. There were also sub-narratives that disclosed hardships, patience and resilience. These all revealed the agency and power Iraqi women had and gained through their fiction narratives.

Iraqi women reflected on their personal and collective Iraqi experience in an approach that presented the personal lives of Iraqi women within the context of their
nation. These narratives did not exclusively discuss the personal lives of women but the lives of all Iraqis and the Iraqi experience amidst the chaotic nature of war and the instability it caused. They problematized and questioned their own national issues through their narrative discourse while at the same time preserving a certain commitment to their country and its people. They revealed this national concern through the various narratives presented in this study. They wrote about their longing for Iraq while in exile, but when they wrote about it they conveyed their memories of their past through the anguish of their nation. This problematized their own sense of consciousness as their concern for the nation was increased by their distance and their inability to reclaim its glory. This sense of nationalism was interrelated with the personal experiences of Iraqis and the conflict that arose within them, preventing them from maintaining the normality of their lives. Iraqi women represented their devotion towards their nation through a delicate balance between the concerns for the self and their nation. Consequently, depression, suicide, and counseling were all part of the complex life of Iraqis living in exile.

Iraqi women writers were engaged in exploring their life changes, the effects of war on them, and the displacement of exile from the land for which they yearn. Baghdad became a symbol of steadfastness and a hope for a better future. Iraq was continually seen as a different place than it had been a decade or two before. This is not a new theme; throughout history, the geographical territory which is now Iraq has been a place of political instability and change. Iraq has a rich history that Iraqis see as a source of pride and consolation for their current afflictions; hence, they refer to this history in their
narratives. This solace gave them hope and optimism that they will overcome these calamities in their modern history. Their rationale was that just as they had survived the wrath of the Mongols and the sacking of Baghdad in 1258, they too shall overcome these tribulations that recently afflicted their nation.

Iraq has a rich intellectual tradition these women writers were proud of. Iraqis were well read and highly educated. They were influenced by Arab literary trends in the region and contributed to the inception of new trends in what used to be the most important Arab literary genre: poetry. Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb and Nāzik al-Malā’ikah were two of the most important literary figures who contributed to a new movement in poetry. Both of these Iraqi poets contributed to the initiation of the free verse movement of poetry during the 1940’s. Among the important features of this movement was the freedom from the stringent rules of the traditional qaṣīda style that Arab poets were renowned for. Since then, the novel became popular, even replacing the major role poetry played in Arabic literature in some ways. More novels translated from different languages as well as a changing political environment contributed to the development and popularity of the novel genre in Arabic literature. It is essential to note that from its inception the Arabic novel was mainly didactic in nature, serving as an educational tool for society. The Arabic novel was also employed for political and historical subjects relevant to the region; hence, the contemporary Arabic novel came about to serve such purposes in Arab society, replacing poetry. The Arabic novel found recognition for Arab women writers who assumed the role of narrators while revealing personal issues and societal problems. The novel is a genre currently employed by both male and female
writers alike and Arab women contributed to the national political discourse when called for, just as their male counterparts did.

Iraqi women were part of a larger trend throughout the Arab world that saw Arab women writers emerging onto the Arab literary space. Yet Iraqi female authors were often disregarded in favor of Egyptian or Lebanese female authors. The plethora of Iraqi women writers that have emerged and the important themes they introduced constituted a significant contribution to the Arab narrative discourse. Therefore it is imperative to include them into the conversation of Arabic literature.

Through fiction, Iraqi women found ways to narrate the lives of their people and nation. Iraqi women’s fiction was a part of a national painting to which all intellectual Iraqis were contributing. Whether through fiction, blogs, documentary, poetry, or autobiography, they all wanted to tell the same story about the pain and atrocities of their nation. After the fall of the Ṣaddām regime, Iraqi writers were finding new ways through a plethora of narratives, disclosing the problematized circumstances they witnessed during those years. They were also narrating the newly created complexities Iraqis now faced in an attempt to put their nation back together.

Iraqi women related their narratives to impart the hardships of the collective Iraqi struggles. They employed similar methods to write about their nation and the manner in which Iraqis have survived through the wars and in exile. The stories about the Iraq war were about survival, patience, and steadfastness and predominantly consisted of narratives and sub-narratives about Iraqi women and their tribulations.
Iraqi women writers were essential to the dialogue on war and exile narratives. They brought an Iraqi female voice that had been otherwise marginalized. By illustrating their quotidian lives under sanctions and their resolve after the loss of family members, they revealed the independence and survival of Iraqi woman in light of their difficult circumstances. They wrote about loneliness due to the absence of their men from their lives as a result of being drafted into the wars. Their patience, torment, and loyalty to their husbands and fiancés as they waited for them were revealed through their narratives, such as in the case of ʿAmal ’s mother in Hadiyah Ḥusayn’s novel *Fī al-ṭarīq ilayhim* (The Road to Them). ʿAmal ’s mother waited for her missing husband to return all of her life until she died. This also illustrated the universal suffering of women in war conflicts, the losses they endured, and their resolve and survival through the irrepressible conditions of war.

Similarly, Iraqi women writers who wrote from exile related their narratives of coping with the past and the heartrending memories that they carried along with them. At times, memories of their homeland and political oppression consumed their lives to the point of hopelessness and despair. As a result of their political dissidence and the enduring wars, a growing number of Iraqis lived in diaspora and in the West. New generations of Iraqis were writing about new issues that concerned them fundamentally. They shifted their narratives away from national war narratives to personal identity crises and their hybrid identity. Ḥawrāʾ al-Nadāwī is an example of the emerging young Iraqi women who were writing about gendered complexities. I divided these hybrid identities into these categories: the *rooted/émigré complex*, which was comprised of these two
identities, and the émigré identity which was contiguous to the rooted identity. The rooted identity was what immigrants possessed when they came from their homeland; these were the places they were brought up in or in the land of their birth (or their parents’ birth). In most instances, this rooted identity was passed to the first generation of children who were born in an immigrant society. The émigré identity was the identity acquired in the place of exile, or in the foreign country now considered a “temporary” home.

Adult immigrants rejected and tried to resist the émigré identity, although it began to increasingly take its effect the more one assimilated into the émigré society. This was evident even in the Iraqi women who came to the West later in life. In Haifa Zangana’s novel, for instance, her female character Iqbāl assimilated to the British way of life, as did Nuhā in Dunā Ghālī’s narrative. The character Nuhā disavowed herself completely from her native Iraqi culture (her rooted identity). These examples of the protagonist in the novels were able to more readily negotiate their identities, more so than the younger Huda in al-Nadāwī’s novel because Huda had the influence of her parents who held on to the rooted identity despite her minimal knowledge of the homeland from whence they had imported their Iraqi traditions.

Furthermore, I presented the works of several important scholars that discussed and argued for theories of equality and justice for the certain subaltern groups otherwise marginalized in society. Recognizing important theorists such as Chandra Mohanty, Judith Butler, and Edward Said allows us to read these particular Iraqi texts within the conscious background of their studies. All of these forces collectively come together to
create and to problematize the context from which these women write from. These frameworks facilitate the unpacking of these texts and themes. This was also crucial to my study, as it focused the attention on the critical precedence and the prolonged misuse of information concerning certain members of society at the local and global level. Iraqi women writers attempted to contribute by clarifying misinformation about their lived experience as well as their conceptualization and analysis of events, including the dispelling of biases otherwise accepted and assumed to be correct.

These theorists problematized the relationship between East and West through the inequalities that were produced by Western norms. Each scholar utilized different frameworks to discuss the various struggles faced by colonized subjects. Mohanty and Said emphasize discursive colonization in defining the Other. By claiming the Other as incapable of ruling themselves or representing themselves, Western discourse instituted a form of hierarchical claim over them. Additionally, Judith Butler’s paper “Precarious Life” illustrated a discourse that went even further, reaching the point where it had obliterated and dehumanized the Other. This kind of discourse did not even acknowledge the Other as human anymore, and their lives were not considered lives at all. She argued that this derealization of the Other stripped a people from the right to be mourned and grieved because the Other is neither conceived to be dead or alive, hence removing them from the human framework. Once one has been erased, their existence is no longer acknowledged. Her concern was explicitly explained by her example on the lack of images we have of Iraqi children and civilians who were killed during the wars. Here there was a correlation between violence and omitted discourse: “[i]f 200,000 Iraqi
children were killed during the Gulf War and its aftermath, do we have an image, a frame for any of those lives, singly or collectively? Is there a story we might find about those deaths in the media? Are there names attached to these children?” (Butler, 2003, p. 34). A faceless victim is easier to accept that one with a human image. This was also reiterated in Stanley Milgram’s work on distance and obedience. Milgram found that people are more willing to inflict harm on individuals they cannot see or know, but if the case was reversed and they are close to the person, they are more likely to hesitate in carrying out such harm (Worthy, 2013).

One method to counteract such inequality in discourse and to present an image of Iraqis affected by the war was through the reading and understanding of Iraqi women’s texts. They were able to provide a diminutive framework where one can redraw the dehumanized image into a humanized one. Through these narratives, one can try to balance certain power structures and discursive colonization. In order to understand the complexities of Iraq, it is imperative to include the narratives of Iraqi women and to understand their experience and frame of mind. Iraqi women shared many similarities with each other and they narrated their Iraq war narratives in similar fashions, employing similar themes, styles, and subjects. Iraqi women writers had similar goals in mind, which was to present the tales and experiences of everyday Iraqis. The narratives they presented consisted of tales of hardships, loss, pain, death, loneliness, nostalgia, and exile.

To reiterate, the contribution of this study was to disclose and examine the war narratives of Iraqi women. This study brought Iraqi women writers into the forefront of
the conversation on the Arabic novel, particularly the themes that they emphasize. It traced the development of novels written by Iraqi women, with particular emphasis on war and exile. Those themes were significant to Iraqi women writers as they narrated and recollected the story of the Iraqi nation as experienced by its people. This study also aimed to provide insight into how Iraqi women writers dealt with the topic of war and exile and their effects on the people and nation. Iraqi women writers reflected upon their own lives and those of others in times of war. They provided life details through the sub-narratives relating to war and sanctions, and the effects and trauma of the war experience on the Iraqi consciousness both in Iraq and in exile. Thus they became a voice that had not been widely heard on behalf of themselves and their people.
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