

On Dictatorship, Literature and the Coming Revolution: Regime and Novels in Iraq 1995-2003

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The last years of the Saddam regime in Iraq are often described as the disintegration of the very powerful state as the result of the cumulative impact of wars and sanctions. Yet in one field, literature, the Saddam regime maintained a firmer grip during its last years. This article describes the regime's politics with regard to literature and literary production, concentrating on the novel, in the period between 1995–2003. The article explains why the regime targeted the literary field before its doom and why it focused on the novel. Examining the Iraqi regime and its “eccentricity” during this period illuminates the control of the totalitarian Ba’ath dictatorship, and sheds a new light on the belated emergence of literary reaction, silently hatching during that period, in the form of a new literary generation that would revolutionize Iraqi cultural life after 2003. This revolution is often called *Deba’athification* and only its political and bureaucratic aspects are given attention. This article is, thus, about the cultural background of *deba’athification*.

Keywords:

Iraq; literature; totalitarianism; cultural revolution

INTRODUCTION

The last years of the Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq are often described as the disintegration of a very strong and monolithic state as the result of the cumulative impact of wars and sanctions. Yet in one field, literature, the Saddam regime maintained a firmer grip during its last years. This article describes the regime's politics with regards to literature and literary production, concentrating on the novel, in the period between 1995–2003. By 1995, most of Iraq's prominent writers left the country and started publishing anti-regime novels abroad. I explain why the regime targeted the literary field before its demise and why it focused on the novel. Examining the Iraqi regime and its eccentricity during this period illuminates the function of a totalitarian dictatorship, and the Ba'athi one in particular, in a new way and also sheds a new light on the belated emergence of literary reaction, silently hatching during that period, in the form of a new literary generation that would revolutionize Iraqi cultural life after 2003. This revolution is often called *de-Ba'athification* and only its political and bureaucratic aspects are given attention. This article draws attention to the cultural context of de-Ba'athification as an important aspect for understanding its larger effects.

Whether Iraq was a totalitarian dictatorship during the period under study is an issue that is still debated among academics (see for example, Rohde 2010; Sassoon 2012). In my view, totalitarianism is always an aspiration to control all aspects of human life (in this case literature) by the use of repression, whether violent or soft. As such, it is never complete, always leaving some limited autonomous spaces that are not considered dangerous to the survival of the regime. Totalitarianism is never monolithic, but it still is a distinct form of political regime. This article places the autonomous spaces in literature within a totalitarian framework. Further, the article contributes to the understanding of totalitarian dictatorship in Iraq during the 1990s, a period in which the regime seemed to be compensating for its weakening by tightening the grip on the literary circles. As such, the analysis adds value to the general study of totalitarian dictatorships by focusing on the neglected subject of eccentricities of the dictator and how they shape life under his regime. If ever approached by scholars, this subject was treated from the psychological point of view, focusing on the ruler. In this study, the eccentricities of the ruler are considered an integral part of the system, affecting the lives of censors, critiques, party officials, publishers, poets and writers.

Although the main subject of the article is the meeting between a political system and the production of literature, it should be noted that the Iraqi novel received very little academic attention. The only book on the Iraqi novel in English is Fabio

Caiani and Catherine Cobham's (2013), *The Iraqi Novel: Key Writers, Key Texts*. This book is not focused on the 1990s and is more interested in the style and literary value of key texts than in the context of their publication or the discourse they produce. More relevant to this study is Salām 'Abud's (2002) *Thaqāfat al-Unf fi al-Iraq (The Culture of Violence in Iraq)*. 'Abud, an Iraqi writer, poet and critic who lives in Sweden, presents a loaded and rather one-dimensional picture of the production of literature in Iraq during the 1990s, ignoring occasional dissident and independent voices. He also claims there was no clear difference between literature written in exile and literature written in Iraq at the time, which is a claim that needs to be supported by more evidence. Keeping in mind that 'Abud's book was published before 2003, the author could not have anticipated or analyzed the post-2003 literary revolution. The author, however, fails to observe the trends in Iraq preceding the fall of the regime, which created the revolution. In his view, all those who remained in Iraq and published have had to be collaborators of the regime. This article shows that this is not necessarily the case, and thus, provides a more nuanced picture of literary life in Iraq than 'Abud's book.

The primary source of data here is repeated interviews that were carried out with ten Iraqi writers, scholars and intellectuals who lived in Iraq during the period under study and most of them still live and write in Iraq today. These interviews illuminate the context when reading the novels that are dealt with here. This article is based on the reading of dozens of novels written and published in Iraq at the time as well as the reading of unpublished manuscripts, written in Iraq at the time and published after 2003. I used novels written by all of Iraq's well known writers who remained in Iraq, as well as novels by novice writers. Some of the novels were written as part of the *80 novels project* initiated by Saddam. The only guiding principle in choosing the reading was their description as novel (*riwāya*) and their availability out of Iraq. As many writers left Iraq before 2003, there is a fairly limited number of novels that fit the established criteria. Given the amplitude of the reading and the testimonies of writers I interviewed by mail, who lived in Iraq during that period, I believe that the article reflects the state of Iraq-based Iraqi novels at that time. It also defines the limits of the literary discourse. Iraqi novels written and published by exile writers are not part of the research since, as I show later, they had a rather different discourse that was not possible in Iraq under Saddam. The method used is one of literary analysis of the content and form of a number of novels, which is then put in the political context. A special attention is given to the process of publication. In terms of discipline, the article is primarily historical, analyzing a process and describing the conditions for its unfolding. This process is not linear and follows the line of extreme

repression and the reaction to it.

This article is about the attempt of a dictatorial regime to maintain hegemony in its hands despite the growing difficulties of the 1990s and the first years of the twenty-first century. Antonio Gramsci is the theoretician most associated with this term. Gramsci understands hegemony to be more than just ideology and domination but “intellectual and moral leadership” (Gramsci 1971, 57–58). However, hegemony is not only about acceptance of a worldview, it is also placing boundaries on thought processes and minimizing counter-hegemonic ideologies. To do that the regime mobilizes “organic intellectuals” to craft the hegemonic discourse and counter alternative voices. As I would later show, Gramsci’s thesis only partially fits the Iraqi scene. Another theoretician I refer to is the Iraqi critic Salām ‘Abud. The latter skillfully portrays how the Ba’ath regime terrorized Iraqi intellectuals into cooperating with it and how they were used to produce and instill a “culture of violence” (*thaqāfat al-‘unf*) (‘Abud 2002). This was particularly true about the 1980s. In the 1990s, with slightly different challenges, the regime was trying to repeat those patterns, with a measure of success. This research will try to give a more nuanced view of the relation between the regime and literary circles during the period and will also present a process which engendered the change in Iraqi prose after 2003.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: IRAQ OF THE 1990S

The 1990s were the inter-war years, set between the Gulf war and the Shi’ite and Kurdish rebellions in 1991 and the American invasion of 2003. The uprising in 1991, severe international sanctions, the no-fly zones in the North and South of the country and the occasional air raids, seriously weakened the regime. The Iraqi state, having reached the zenith of its power in the 1980s, faced a serious crisis of authority. The Kurdish north was now beyond the control of Baghdad which barely maintained control over the Shi’ite south. Corruption became a serious problem, sometimes fueled by the sanctions regime. Economic deterioration, as a result of sanctions and hyperinflation, produced the first mass emigration from Iraq, affecting particularly the middle class (Davis 2005; Marr 2012, 254–255; Tripp 2010).

The top leadership, Saddam Hussein, his family and clan and the rest of the political leadership, was more nepotistic than ever before. A sign of the time is that the president and his family sank into the depths of moral and material corruption, alienating more and more people. The oil embargo created a cash crisis that affected the loyalty of the security services and the Ba’ath Party was unable to control the countryside leading the regime to delegate authority to sub-state actors such as tribes to fill the gap. Lacking ideological stimulations of its own, the regime

resorted to encouraging a return to Islam through “al-Ḥamlā al-Imāniyya” (The Faith Campaign) to confront the mounting despair. Though the economic situation finally stabilized with the acceptance of the “Oil for Food” arrangement in 1996, these trends continued throughout the period preceding the fall of the regime. In terms of the process of state formation that started in the 1920, the 1990s were a period of state deformation and the modest beginnings of decentralization (Abdullah 2006; Baran 2004; Marr 2012; Tripp 2010).

A LITERARY VACUUM

By 1995, almost all of Iraq’s most prominent novelists had left the country: Fu’ad al-Takarli moved to Tunisia; ‘Abd al-Raḥman Majīd al-Rubai’i was already there. ‘Abd al-Sattār Nasir left for Jordan; Jassim al-Rasīf to the US. In most cases, their reasons for leaving were linked to the economic plight of the middle class. Writers were also affected by the narrowing of freedom of expression as well as the impact of repression. Some of those writers, especially Nasir, started writing audaciously against the regime, shortly after leaving Iraq.

A literary vacuum was created with the departure of these writers. Few prominent authors remained in Iraq. Muḥammad Khudayyir and Mahdi ‘Issa al-Sakr continued to live and write in Basra, which, during the 1990s, emerged as a rival literary center to Baghdad. Salām ‘Abud (2002) detects a measure of independence in their novels. In Khudayyir’s masterpiece *Basrayatha*, first published in Damascus in 1996, the narrator is an observer to the realities of war-torn Basra, avoiding a moral stance but reporting on what he observes (Khudayyir 2007). These two writers, together with Aḥmad Khalaf in Baghdad, were no more than remnants of previous literary generations. Their writing during the period is symbolic and poetic. Thus they stayed on the safe side of relations with the regime (Hadi 2011, 123). Whenever they felt threatened, they would also submit to the regime (Khalaf 1990 and 1991).

In addition, some of the writers most associated with the Ba’thist propaganda of the 1980s were still around, wishing to fill the literary vacuum and willing, as ever, to serve the regime. The likes of ‘Abd al-Khalīq al-Rikābi and Ḥasab al-Shaykh Ja’far and others were searching for subjects for their novels and always on the lookout for signs of favorite themes from the regime. Against that background, other minor writers made their debut. In Iraq, writing a novel represents an upgrade in the literary career of a writer. Starting novelists usually lacked any trace of a literary gift and were typical party apparatchiks. Such is Muḥammad Mazīd, who wrote two novels during the period. Mazīd was a Ba’th Party member from Baghdad (Mazīd 2002). Similarly, Ibrāhīm ‘Abd al-Razzāq was a translator in the Ministry of

Information, with a short list of publications, who contributed two novels to the government campaign ('Abd al-Razzāq 2002). Not surprisingly, the general trend was that Ba'thi writers from the "Generation of the 1980s," would try to take over the vacancies left by those who left. This generation was the first generation of Iraqi writers to glorify the Saddam Hussein regime during the 1980s: the years of the Iran-Iraq War and Saddam's personality cult. Alongside the veterans, the list of novels published by the state at the time also included some new names (Al-Sharq al-Awsat, July 4, 2002).

THE MOTIVATION OF THE REGIME

David Baran showed that the Iraqi regime was seriously weakened during the 1990s and not as terrorizing as it had been previously (Baran 2004). In many fields "the barrier of fear," solid in the 1980s and brought down momentarily by the Intifada of 1991, has not been completely restored. This was not the case in literature. For writers, the Saddam regime became even more dangerous. At least two writers were killed during the 1990s for what they wrote: 'Aziz al-Sayyid Jassim and Hasan Mutlaq (al-Mussawi 2006, 144–146). Many more were routinely arrested and tortured. Why then did the regime decide to fasten its hold on literature?

I would suggest several possible explanations: the Ba'th party came to power in 1968 with very few intellectuals in its ranks. During the 1970s, it forced intellectuals to serve it. Those who refused were either killed or forced to flee the country. Many others succumbed and served the regime. While many are considered to have surrendered to the regime out of terror, they remained loyal to it throughout the 1980s nonetheless. For the Ba'th regime, intellectuals were an important tool to transmit its message far and wide. In the 1980s, there could be no personality cult or glorification of war without their contribution. By the second half of the 1970s, the regime won absolute control over the literary world and its production. This achievement was in danger during the 1990s due to emigration of writers. Some of them, notably 'Abd al-Sattār Nasir, were forced to cooperate with the regime in the 1970s. The fact that Nasir, and others, started attacking the regime in their novels was probably an insult to Saddam, who may have thought that he had a share in their success and felt betrayed. This may have prompted the regime to regain absolute control.

The regime was under the impression that literature can be controlled easily. In most cases there was no need for the use of repressive measures, an invitation to a talk with an official of the ministry of information (a censor or party apparatchik) was enough to streamline the writers. Salām 'Abud describes the experience of fellow Iraqi intellectuals who had to affirm their loyalty to the regime by

praising the Iran-Iraq war in their poems and tried hard to convince the editors to publish it or else those writers would be in troubles ('Abud 2002, 24-25). There was also, especially during the 1990s, much use of soft sanctions and remunerations that affected the writers: promotions, jobs, prizes, payments that enhanced their egos and alleviated the economic hardships (Baran 2004). Poets and writers were receiving financial remunerations from the regime at the end of every month. They were divided to three categories, apparently according to their loyalty to the regime. Poets of the first category were paid 200,000 dinars (around 160 dollars) and those of the third category got 100,000 dinars (around 70 dollars). Writers of the first category got 150,000 dinars (around 120 dollars) and those of the third category only got 50,000 dinar (around 30 dollars) s. Poets were more appreciated than writers because they were paid for writing and reading poetry in praise of Saddam and the regime in public events. Having an almost complete monopoly on the publishing houses in Iraq facilitated the regime's task.

Probably influenced by Russia under Stalin (al-Khalil 1989), Saddam Hussein attributed great importance to literature and the novel to transmit his message to the population and also for the purposes of propaganda outside Iraq. In the 1980s, state sponsored literature glorifying the Iran-Iraq war (Adab al-Harb) was distributed freely to soldiers on the frontlines. In the 1990s, the regime possibly wanted to duplicate the literary campaign of the previous decade, only this time, the novels were also for consumption by the Arab public abroad, who was eager to follow Iraqi official line on the sanctions and expressed a much needed solidarity with Iraq. In his February 2000 meeting with the writers, Saddam even suggested that the state would support the publication of Iraqi novels by publishers outside Iraq. At least two books written as part of the campaign, by authors who were leading novelists, were indeed published by prestigious Arab publishers outside Iraq (al-Sharq al-Awsat July 4, 2002) This was already the era of electronic media and internet and the regime was exaggerating the influence of the novel, as a tool for shaping views, both in Iraq and abroad.

The last explanation concerns the personal caprice that Saddam Hussein nourished at that time. In political systems in which decision are mostly taken by the ruler in person, the dictator's caprices and eccentricities may play an important role and may also shift the regime's attention accordingly.¹ During

1 This is irrational, but happens in many authoritarian and dictatorial regimes. One is reminded of Hitler's interest in art and architecture when Germany was in war, of Stalin's interest in literature; or more contemporary examples: the military Junta in Myanmar (Burma) and its belief in astrology and Kim Jong Il of North Korea with his interest in (western) movies.

this period, Saddam Hussein decided to write novels. He wrote (or dictated) three novels before the fall of his regime and another was published after his death. All the novels were published anonymously with the designation: “a novel by its author” (Riwāya li Katibiha). Why Hussein decided to start writing novels is out of the scope of this article. However, this eccentricity contributes to our understanding of the relationship between regime and literature in several ways. It shows how much attention Saddam Hussein himself had given to literature in general and the novel in particular. When he spoke to the writers in February 2000, he did not speak only as a president and a politician, but he also spoke as a “writer” giving other writers “professional advice.” So immersed was Saddam in the act of writing that, according to his translator, on the eve of the American invasion in February-March 2003, he was obsessed with the distribution of his fourth novel and ordered the workers of the presidential bureau to take care of that (Abdul Majid 2003, 131-133). Though his translator claims that Saddam Hussein wrote all his novels by himself (Ibid, 134), he was probably in need of professional writers to serve as “shadow writers,” stylistic editors and the like. Finally, Saddam’s novels are written in a very blunt style. In them, one finds violent xenophobia, sectarianism and even anti-Semitism, that, to a certain extent, subverted the main stream in Iraqi literature. Thus, “Al-Qala’ al-Hasīna” (The Strong Castle) has a Kurdish female protagonist, Shatreen. Upon the death of her Arab and Ba’thi husband, the Kurdish woman insists on parceling the common domicile, the castle. Her scheme is eventually rejected and the writer refers to the contested part of the castle, namely Kurdistan, as the “Lavatory” (al-Marāfiq al-Sihīyya) (‘Abud 2008, 149-150) Evidently, Saddam was setting a line to be followed.

THE PROCESS OF PUBLISHING

The process of publishing books was almost under complete government monopoly. The main channel was the ministry of information. The two main publishing houses in Iraq were departments of the ministry. These were Dar al-Shu’un al-Thaqafiya al-‘amma (House of General Cultural Affairs) and the older Dar al-Huriyya (House of Freedom). Apparently, there was no difference between the two as Iraqi writers failed to differentiate clearly between these two publishing houses (Davis 2005). In the shadow of these monopolistic publishers, there were little known and much smaller publishers, such as Dar al-Mansur, Dar al-Ma’arif and Dar al-Qabas, which were privately owned and not larger than bookstores. According to my interlocutors, all Iraqi writers, regardless of the publishers, had to submit the manuscript by themselves to the censor and only after his approval could they pass the text to the pub-

lisher. This monolithic apparatus was very effective in streamlining the writers without using anything more than soft sanctions.

In addition, Iraq of that period was almost totally cut off from a world becoming more and more global. All the communication lines, including the internet, were controlled by the state. It was nearly impossible and rather dangerous to maintain an independent contact with the outside world. In the Soviet Union and East Europe “Samizdat” literature proliferated and helped prepare the ground for political change. This literature was officially banned in those countries but exiles found ways of smuggling it in, where it enjoyed wide popularity. No similar “Samizdat” literature existed in Iraq, and whatever Iraqi exile writers published in exile, remained there. Somehow, Iraq-based writers managed to publish novels in other Arab countries, mainly Lebanon and Syria. In some cases, as earlier suggested, this was probably due also to the connivance of the regime (al-Jumhuriyya, February 23, 2000). Whatever the case, these novels never reached Iraq. Merely the fear, that the contents be known to the regime made the writers extremely apprehensive and cautious. Consequently, these books are not subversive and may even have served the regime.

SADDAM MEETS THE WRITERS, FEBRUARY 2000

A number of Iraqi writers recounted this story in the course of our conversations. In February 2000, Saddam Hussein invited a number of the novelists, short story writers, writers for children books and script writers to a meeting in his bureau. A glance in the Iraqi newspapers of the time shows that Saddam held meetings with all kinds of professionals to discuss coping with the embargo. But the meeting with the writers was more significant as Saddam was making his literary debut after the event. This was not disclosed to the writers during the meeting. The general subject of discussion was how to write in a manner that would represent Iraq to the world. The headline to one of the articles covering the meeting in the main newspaper quoted Saddam Hussein, showing the importance attributed to literature by the Iraqi president: “written culture survives longer and has a deeper impact than documents which interest the few” (al-Jumhuriyya, February 23, 2000). In the article, Hussein was described praising the literature written during the 1980s on the Iran-Iraq War and asking for a similar effort to portray what he considered to be yet another war against Iraq. He asked the writers to write more about the plight of ordinary people suffering from the sanctions, yet without pitying them, preserving their dignity. Finally, he promised the writers, but only those with some notoriety, to help with the publication of their works abroad (Ibid.).

In the same meeting, Hussein also issued an

admonition: “some young [writers] think that they become more important just because they oppose. Life is not like this.” We may not know exactly who was targeted and whether this was said to admonish the writers. Taha Ḥāmid al-Shabīb, Iraq’s only dissident writer at the time, who refused to attend the meeting, insists that Saddam targeted him alone and that he was not arrested simply because Saddam did not want to make him a “national hero.” For those who attended, this was one more affirmation of the “red lines” that should not be traversed.

Typical to Saddam Hussein, the writers were invited without knowing the reason for the meeting. As the invitees were asked to cancel prior engagements they might have had, it must have been a terrorizing experience to show up uninformed of the meeting’s purpose. Saddam Hussein perfectly understood that and opened by saying “you probably don’t know what to say because you did not know in advance what I want from you.” Then, one of the most loyal Ba’thist writer, the Palestinian Nawāf Abu-l-Hija, rose to speak about patriotism and set the tone for the others. As the meeting continued, the atmosphere calmed and one of the speakers even complained that “drama in Iraq suffers a lot from censorship and it is not possible to mention by name a lawyer or a physician who had done wrong” (al-Jumhuriyya, February 23, 2000). This was the limit of the allocated space for complaint to which Saddam replied that only he has the privilege to tell the writers what is wrong or right. One can almost hear the sigh of relief from the attendants when the meeting was finished. Why was the meeting convened? My acquaintance with the novels published in Iraq before the meeting does not suggest any rise of subversive literature that could have prompted such a meeting. It is more likely that this was a disciplinary meeting to streamline the writers and mobilize them for a campaign. On the margins of the meeting, Hussein might have found a writer to supervise his own writing. The disciplining was also meant to prevent dissemination of opposition literature from abroad. The meeting was immediately translated by the writers and officials into a project: The Eighty Novels Project (Mashru‘ al-Thamanīn Riwāya), over 50 of them were published by April 2003. By April 2001, the press secretary to Saddam Hussein advised him that the writers who met the president “have begun to write the works they were tasked with” (Sassoon 2012, 69).

THE EIGHTY NOVELS: CONTENTS AND WRITERS

The writers who participated in this state sponsored campaign belonged to several groups. The “Generation of the 1980s,” veterans of the glorification of the Iran-Iraq war such as: Lutfiyya al-Dulaymi, Warid Badr al-Salim, ‘Abd al-Khaliq al-Rikābi, Sa’d Muḥammad Raḥīm, trusted “organic intellectuals” who could bring the “zeal” of their previous service

(Gramsci 1972). There were also brand new names like ‘Abd al-Amir al-Majar, upgrading themselves with the publication of their first novel (al-Sharq al-Awsat, July 4, 2002). There were journalists in Ba’thi newspapers who were also political officers in the army like ‘Ali Khayun, senior workers of the ministry of information like Nasira al-Sa’dun, who started writing novels at that time and focused on the daily life under sanctions. Three Iraqi prominent writers were also mentioned: Muḥammad Khudayir, Mahdi ‘Issa al-Sakr and Aḥmad Khalaf. The sectarian issue was rather blurred and motivation to serve the regime crossed sectarian lines: using available information on the writers I identified a similar number of Sunnis and Shi’is. Therefore, answering Saddam’s call was not due to a sectarian affiliation. In general, most writers were either known or unknown members of the “Generation of the 1980s” who wished to fill the vacuum left by their colleagues who fled.

A sample of nine novels, which I could find, reveals the scope of subjects covered. In many books, especially by the more zealous Ba’thists, the general trend is a vulgar demonization of the “enemy”: the Shi’ite opposition (al-Jarāḥ 2000), the Kurdish rebels (Samara 2002), the Americans (al-Rikābi 2009), Iran and the Jews. Following Saddam’s advice in the meeting, some novels recount the experience of Iraqi prisoners of war in Iranian captivity. In one case, in *Madinat al-Dhiyāb* (City of Wolves) Adel al-Shwiya (1999) writes the testimony of a real prisoner and the novel embellishes the testimonial core with literary decorations. This plot served three purposes: to help the prisoners cope with the trauma and regain some honor, to demonize the Iranians and to concretize the subject of the love of the homeland, by people who were away from Iraq for such a long period (Zeidel 2008). In the meeting with authors mentioned above, Saddam Hussein reminded the writers that Iraq is still in a war: the war against Iraq did not stop with the ceasefire of 1991 but is being carried out by other means such as sanctions. However, the heroes of this war were not soldiers on the frontline, they ordinary Iraqi citizens. Therefore, in most of the novels, ordinary people are at the center of the narrative. The Shi’ite and Kurdish Intifadas of 1991 delivered a fatal blow to the Ba’th party and the Ba’thists. Therefore, some novels written by party members depict a Ba’thi hero (al-Jarāḥ 2000, Latif 2000, Samara 2002). These positive heroes live a happy life of model citizens and then, as part of party promotion, they are sent with their families to other regions where the pleasant routine is broken with the beginning of hostilities in 1991. The Ba’thist heroes fight, probably to dispel the view that they surrendered, yet in all cases these heroes are killed and there is no happy ending.

Concretization of the homeland is another recurring theme. Iraq is usually visualized in association

with the village, the orchard, the plantation and nature. In 'Abd al-Khaliq al-Rikābi's novel, *Atrās al-Aklām* (The Files of Speech) it is the palm grove and the father of the narrator imagines the homeland in the form of the grove (al-Rikabi 2009, 93). In *Bustān 'Abud* (Abud's Orchard) it is the orchard, which symbolizes the homeland. In *Al-Aa'ali* (The Highlands), it is the orchard that the martyr hero (who was an agronomist) planted and to which his son returns at the end (Latif 2000, 207). In *Ashjān al-Nakhīl* (The Sorrow of the Palm Tree), as the title suggests, it is once more the palm grove in Abu Khaseeb near Basra (Abd al-Razzāq 2002). This is a repetition of a recurrent theme from the 1980s. It also symbolized simplicity and a human attachment to the land and the soil as embodied by the *fellāh* (peasant). But this concretization was eventually far from being concrete and the dreamed homeland looked more like an unattainable dream. The orchard appears more in the context of the innocent past and does not fit well to the present or future. Thus, inadvertently, this state sponsored literature raises a subversive question that would bother writers after 2003: what is the homeland?

Following Saddam Hussien, this state-sponsored literature was sometimes vulgar and xenophobic. An example is Ibrahim 'Abd al-Razzāq's *Ashjān al-Nakhīl* (The Sorrow of the Palm Trees) published in 2002. Set in Abu Khaseeb near Basra in the 1930s and 1940s, the novel is about Marzuq, born to a poor family of peasants, who pursues his education in Basra and then in Baghdad and dreams of returning to Abu Khaseeb. His dream is shattered when he returns there to find that his uncle married his girlfriend. Instead of marrying a poor peasant girl, Marzuq, who is now enchanted by modernization and changes his views on tradition, marries a modern woman, a teacher. The struggle between modernity and tradition is couched with classic anti-semitism, one which identifies the Jews with lust. Anti-semitism here is a by-product of the conflict and answers a need to find a scapegoat on the brink of yet another war. The Jews are the "other" in the plot. A Jewish merchant forces a Muslim to sell his beloved palm grove to pay a debt, other Jews in Basra profit from the black market of World War II. Jewish women are presented as lascivious and tempting. Finally, the Jews were not expelled from Iraq in 1951 by a government decree, they ran away with their properties and thus caused an economic crisis. Such expressions of anti-semitism were extremely rare in Iraqi literature before. Clearly, the Jews in this novel serve as a "fifth column," that was considered necessary for the Iraqi national narrative, sponsored by the state, shortly before an American invasion (Abd al-Razzāq 2002).

Other novels were subtler and had a higher literary value. Such was *Kurrasat Qanun* (Draft Law) by Muḥammad Khudayyir (2004). This writer, who after 2003 became the spiritual guide of the new

generation of writers, always wrote about Basra. This short novel is very symbolic and not easy to read. Writing more openly and clearly about the devastation of Basra would clearly have defied the censor and endanger the author. The symbolism may well be a code disguising the criticism. But it is too complicated even for the educated Iraqi reader to decode. This way, the author could be under the illusion of writing independently without irritating the regime. The narrator walks the streets of Basra during the war in 1991. The people of Basra are the heroes of the novel: Basra women who opened soup kitchens and gave free meals to the passengers, and children who get old so swiftly. This is wrapped in an atmosphere taken from the paintings of Goya – the bleakness and the resistance to a foreign invader – or the optimistic surrealism of Chagal, that allows the figures to fly (Khudayyir 2004). They are all being watched by the writer, sitting like Dodo, the Sumerian scribe, who serves as the god of history. One can see how such a novel serves Saddam's campaign. One can also see that the writer is ill at ease in that company and his novel can be interpreted differently. But in order to place the novels in connection with the requirements of the regime, one has to draw the boundaries of the "open space" for the discourse in that period.

THE SPACE AND LIMITS OF DISCOURSE

As seen in the meeting with Saddam, writers were instructed to write within the perimeters of two major themes: the situation and its impact on the Iraqi population and Iraqi patriotism (*Ḥubb al-Watan*). This allowed the writers a relatively wide space for expression and indeed some worthy literary works were written with the blessing of the regime. Under the term "situation," writing on sanctions and their impact, the wars, the Intifadas, the occasional air raids, social problems and even economic irregularities and corruption was tolerated and even encouraged. Hussein told the writers, as he told them during the Iran-Iraq war, not to embellish the situation and describe it as it is: sad, depressing (Al-Jumhurīyya February 23, 2000). He only insisted that the Iraqi figures should be presented with dignity. Therefore, underlining problems do not signify crossing the red lines drawn by the regime. Ideally for the regime, the daily hardships faced by Iraqis were to be combined with Iraqi patriotism to bring out the people's perseverance. This was done in 'Abd al-Khaliq al-Rikābi's novel *Atrās al-Aklām* (The Files of Speech). At times when Iraqi patriotism was left out and the sole focus was on the problems, this literature was tolerated, as long as it respected the other "red lines" (Abd al-Khaliq al-Rikābi 2009).

The "red lines" were quite clear. There was to be no covert or overt criticism of the regime, the Ba'ṯh party, or any other government institution and the president. Though writing about problems

was encouraged, laying the blame on the regime or even raising the question of responsibility was utterly prohibited. Obviously, writers should not call for a political change, reform in the system or democratization, let alone demand freedom of expression and democracy. They were permitted to write about the victims of the wars, provided that responsibility for their death was always that of external factors (Iran, America, rebels) and not the Iraqi regime. Writers were not allowed to ask whether the victims died for a just cause or in vain. No sectarian, especially Shi'ite, contents, were permitted. This was a particularly sensitive subject after the repression of the Shi'ite Intifada in 1991 and the rise of Shi'ite sectarian consciousness later. All these red lines were regularly trampled by Iraqi writers in exile during that period, who did not have to fear the regime. This created a totally different discourse separating these two groups of Iraqi writers (Nasir 2002; Wali 1993; Wali 2001).

INDIVIDUAL VOICES: NIZAR 'ABD AL-SATTAR, IRADA AL-JABOURI

Within this literary world, there were also a few individual voices, who, while generally respecting the red lines, had stretched the limits of the open space and wrote worthy novels. They were significantly younger than the others. Nizār 'Abd al-Sattār (b.1967), published his first novel, *Al-Matar wa Ghibār al-Khuyul* (Rain and Horses Dust), in 1995. Between 1995-2003, he published two more novels in Baghdad. His second novel, *Laylat al-Malāk* (The Night of the Angel), was published in Baghdad in 1999. It tells the story of a child, in Mosul, flying on the back of a mythological creature from the Mesopotamian mythology, the Smartu. The child convinces the creature to change reality on a small scale. The Smartu is of the opinion that only a deluge would bring about change and the child helps him to change his mind by suggesting the constructive approach of making small scale changes. Notice how careful the plot is on that point: there should be no revolution, though the idea is contemplated, but only "constructive" small scale changes such as making grocers sell foodstuff more cheaply or a better sewage system in the child's neighborhood. Mosul in the novel suffers from American air raids and the Americans are the only identified enemy. By contrast, there is no overt mention of the Ba'ath dictatorship and the suffering it inflicted. The Smartu in the novel recounts his suffering under the kings of Assyria, particularly Ashurbanipal. What he sees in Mosul reminds him of the deluge that was contrived by the gods in order to destroy everything and then rebuild it. This can be interpreted as subversive writing. However, by changing the Smartu's mind in favor of small "constructive" changes, this option is discredited by the writer. Instead of being banned,

this novel won the state prize in 1999 ('Abd al-Sattār 2008). This means that as long as the "red lines" were respected, talk about minor problems was tolerated and, at times, even encouraged.

Irāda al-Jabouri (b.1965) published her first novel, *Atr al-Tuffāh* (The Scent of Apples), in the official press in 1996. At the time she was working as a journalist in the official newspaper *Al-Jumhuriyya*. In 1997, she left Iraq for Yemen and returned after 2003. The novel is located in Karbala, al-Jabouri's hometown, with the air raids of the war in 1991 in the background. It narrates the meeting between a man and a homeless woman who finds refuge in his home. Both hide secrets: the woman was raped and the man was fired from his work as a teacher because he was accused of having illicit sexual relation with a student. The man has leukemia. Al-Jabouri is a feminist, therefore the novel is a harsh critique of Iraqi patriarchal society that sends the poor and destitute rape victim to a sanatorium instead of punishing the rapist, who hails from a respected family. The destitute woman is given power in the novel over a dying man. She detests society but is also strongly connected to it, certainly more than the reclusive man. This novel is about the plight of women, and about class differences in Iraqi society: the woman is poor and homeless, a victim of rape; the man is middle class and was left alone in his house. As poor and destitute as the woman is, she is presented as stronger and more solid than the man. Al-Jabouri, a secular Shi'ite, also defies official taboos by portraying Karbala as a Shi'ite city. She is probably the first Iraqi writer in Iraq to have done so. In this case too, this criticism was tolerated by the regime and consequently the writer never felt intimidated (al-Jabouri 1996). These two exceptional novels give a more nuanced view of the subject: not all novels were following the line Saddam was prescribing. At times, independent voices emerged which were going back to the obligation of the writer to reflect social problems. However, as long as they were not protesting against the regime, they were tolerated.

THE DISSIDENT: TAHA MĪD AL-SHABĪB

The only writer in Iraq who consciously broke the barriers is Taha Hāmid al-Shabīb (b. 1953). His literary career started in 1995 with the publication of his first novel, *Inahu al-Jarād* (The Locust). Al-Shabīb did not belong to one of Iraq's literary generations and, being a physician, was an outsider to literary circles. Yet, only his second novel, *Al-Abjadiya al-Ula* (The First Alphabet), published in Baghdad by the official press in 1996, made him a "defiant writer" (*katib tamarudi*) (al-Shabīb 1996). So far he published 14 novels, eight of them between 1995-2003, and is one of Iraq most prolific writers.

Between 1995-2003 al-Shabīb claims that he felt an uncontrollable urge to write whatever he thought,

disregarding the well-known barriers and endangering his life and the security of his family. He was a loner and, to a certain extent, a gambler, yet a calculated one. In explaining the the guiding principles of his style, he explains that the reader is the one who gives meaning to the text. Human beings are universal creatures and therefore the novel should deal with universal and not local subjects. There should be no explicit mention of specific time and location. In essence, al-Shabīb used the allegorical style.

Al-Shabīb became master of making ends meet: writing and surviving. To do that he presented all his manuscripts to the censors, not knowing what they will decide. He also befriended some censors. He claims that censors approved his manuscripts because they appreciated him but also because they detested Saddam. The third step in his strategy consisted of publishing in small, privately owned publishing houses in Baghdad (some no bigger than a bookstore) but also, in one case, in Cairo. Every edition had a thousand copies (Hadi 2011). In those small presses the chances of evading the watchful eyes of the regime was considered better by all those who were willing to take the risk and publish there. Possibly, he was on the watch by the regime. Al-Shabīb was not invited to the February 2000 meeting with Hussien, which he interpreted as an admonition against those writers who oppose the regime but also considered to be directed solely to him.

The cover that al-Shabīb was using could hardly hide the meaning. All his novels from that period are set in totalitarian dictatorships that constantly torture and kill people. In *Al-Dafira* (The Plait) from 1999, the tyrant is from the al-Maḥrus family, insinuating to Saddam Hussein's surname, al-Majīd (al-Shabīb 2009). Other novels abound with clues that scratch the thin surface of the cover, but it is precisely the plot which is loaded with anti-Hussein meanings. It is defiant rather than subversive writing because every Iraqi reader can easily understand the meaning.

However, al-Shabīb was an outsider and a loner, the only literary dissident in Iraq of the time. This may have protected him as much as his strategy did. A loner is not considered to be a danger. The regime probably thought that the warning from Hussein would be enough to silence him. If he was a part of a group, the regime would probably have arrested him. His exceptional case shows how well the system functioned: al-Shabīb in fact exposed the frailness of the regime, but no other writers would explore the paths trodden by this brave writer.

A REVOLUTION IN WAITING

But only looking at the surface of novels written and published during that period is misleading. For under the surface the overbearing pressure of the regime produced totally different results. Away

from the watchful eyes of the regime, there was some activity underground. Young intellectuals would meet in apartments, motels, cafes, parks and even in cemeteries to discuss their plans and express their dreams of a change and the novels they plan to write (al-'Ubaidi 2009). All of them had never written a novel before.

One of them, Nathim al-'Ubaidi, (born 1964) published a novel, *Al-Ta'ir wal-Jamjama* (The Bird and the Skull), in the official press in 2002 (al-'Ubaidi 2002). Set in the first years of the Iran-Iraq war this is a very personal novel written in the first person, dedicated to the writer's brother who was killed in that war. In the novel, the death of the brother in the war shatters the family and the life of the hero. Toward the end, the martyr serves as a kind of a spiritual guide for the hero and it is implied that after death he is in a better place than the Iraq of the 1980s. All these are rather dangerous red lines that the author crossed. Despite the fact that this novel is published close to the fall of the regime, the author was still very cautious. He softens the criticism by laying the responsibility for the continuation of war on the Iranians, the Imperialists and even on Israel and certainly not on the Iraqi regime (Ibid, 55-56, 67). Probably following Saddam's line, one finds traces of anti-semitism in the novel: the hero's parents live in a house that belonged to a Jewish landowner, who left in 1952 and threatens to return in order to retrieve his property. The hero dreams that the landowner returns to throw them from the house (Ibid, 33-35). Yet all this is probably the lip service which the author had to write in order to have the book published in the official press and the crux of the novel is that subversive treatment of bereavement. After 2003, Nathim al-'Ubaidi became one of the founders of the emerging literary circle that would revolutionize Iraqi literature: "The Generation of the 1990s."

Another young man, 'Ali Bader published his first novel, *Baba Sartr* (Papa Sartre), in Beirut 2001. This novel was a great success but was not concerned with the Ba'th or Iraq under the Ba'th at all (Bader 2001). In order to publish in Iraq, where he was still living, he approached the official publisher with a manuscript of a novel. The manuscript was written in 1993, but the novel was published in Baghdad only in 2002, the last year of the Ba'th. Nevertheless, *Shitaa al-'Aaila* (The Family's Winter) is a very shameless escapist novel, the romantic type (Bader 2007). In a later novel, written after 2003, Bader confessed that he wrote that novel in such a way only so that he could publish a novel in Iraq of the time (Bader 2005b). He was already known in Iraqi literary circles, but he needed a book published in Iraq to be considered an Iraqi writer living and working in Iraq and not an expat.

After 2003, Bader published six more novels and became the most famous speaker of the "Generation

of the 1990s.” In 2009 he left Iraq and now lives in Belgium. In the summer of 2005, the journal *Masārat* (Routes) expressing the views of this generation, dedicated almost an entire volume to Bader (Masārat 2005, pp.19-61). Bader not only expressed the views of his generation, he also recounted the story of those agitating intellectuals in the 1990s and his novels are an important source for the study of the period (Bader 2011) Thus, in his novel *Masabīh Urushalīm* (The Lanterns of Jerusalem), he describes debates in Baghdad, preceding the American invasion about a democratic Iraq, its role in the region, its relations with the west, Iraqi national identity versus Pan Arab identity and so on (Bader 2007).

As mentioned before, these young intellectuals dreamt about writing a novel. Some manuscripts were written “to the drawer” and were not published, while some would be published after 2003. This is another important indication of the agitation of Iraqi intellectuals, many of the young and frustrated, in Baghdad and Basra during the last years of the regime. One such novel is *Bayt ‘ala Nahr Dijla* (House on the Tigris River) by Mahdi ‘Issa al-Sakr. The manuscript was written in Baghdad in 1991-1992 and published in Damascus in 2006, shortly after the author’s death. More than the aforementioned novel by Nathim al-‘Ubaidi, that was published by the official press, this novel is a complete revision of the writing on the Iran-Iraq war. First, it tells about the war from the point of view of the people in Baghdad during the war as opposed to the soldiers in the frontlines. Repression by the regime is omnipresent. It openly discusses taboo questions such as the number of Iraqi casualties and the psychological impact of the war on those who returned. Finally, almost all the main figures are about to explode in every minute and this, in itself, symbolizes the situation in Iraq during the 1990s (al-Sakr 2006).

The novel was considered the best means for expressing these views. This genre gives the possibility to “pour” out all inhibited emotions. Some novels represent a pure expression of the feelings of this generation: ‘Abd al-Karīm al-‘Ubaidi’s *al-Dhubāb Wal-Zumurud* (Flies and Emerald) and *Diyaa fi Hafr al-Batin* (Lost in Hafr al-Batin), Nassīf Filk’s *Khidr Qad wal-‘Asr al-Zaytuni* (Khidr Qad and the Olive Colored Age), Aḥmad al-Sa’dāwi’s *Al-Balad al-Jamīl* (The Beautiful Land). The message of this literary and intellectual revolution, a message of contents rather than style, is to reform Iraq and Iraqi national identity along the principles of democracy, a deep commitment to pluralism, religious tolerance and civic values. Some writers cross the religious lines to write about members of other communities, encouraging interreligious dialogue. Pan Arabism is substituted by a strong assertion of Mesopotamian identity, which is interpreted as pluralistic and binding the various communities to a land-based patriotism.

Nathim al-‘Ubaidi wrote a manuscript in 2002,

Ard al-Layāli (The Land of Nights), which was published as a novel in Iraq in 2006 (al-‘Ubaidi 2006). Compared with his aforementioned novel, which was published before 2003, this is a more audacious novel. The heroes, four Baghdadi rather educated youth, are arrested, tortured, and witness the destruction of their country and city. Furthermore, they hold the regime responsible for all that and even curse the regime and the president. They feel despair and loss, and no hope is looming in the horizon, even if they do envision an American occupation (Ibid, 118). The only consolation and, to a certain extent, liberation, is singing and, more important, writing: the narrator, Aḥmad, is writing a novel. When the novel was published in Iraq in 2006 it was considered a genuine expression of the “Generation of the 1990s.”

Taha Ḥāmid al-Shabīb, who never belonged to literary circles, let alone “the Generation of the 1990s,” also wrote a manuscript for one of his most audacious novel, *Tinn Ḥurri* (Soft Mud), in 2002. The novel is about an archeologist who conducts an excavation in a site that was supposed to be an ancient royal palace. The novel explores the origins of civilization and whether there could be a human civilization not based on the eradication of the human being. The answers he discovers are very cruel. As usual in al-Shabīb’s literature, insinuations to Saddam Hussein and his regime are all over the text, but this time the entire plot is even more audacious than his previous novels. It is not known why this novel was published in 2004 and what would have happened to al-Shabīb had he tried to present it before 2003 (al-Shabīb 2004).

In many cases the writers preferred to wait before they publish or write their novels and this was out of cautiousness and expectancy. Since 2001, these intellectuals could sense that the days of the Ba’th regime are numbered. Therefore, shortly after 2003 there was a wave of anti Ba’th novels, published in Iraq, by the representatives of the new generation such as: Nassīf Filk, ‘Abd al-Karīm al-‘Ubaidi, Aḥmad al-Sa’dāwi, Luway Ḥamza ‘Abbās and others.

Who were these writers? Most were born in the 1960s and 1970s. Not all were completely unknown before 2003: some even published poetry books and short stories between 2000 and 2003. ‘Ali Bader (born 1964) was a student and a lecturer in the university of Mustansiriyā, Baghdad, who, with two other students Ḥaydar Sa’id (born 1970) and Nathim ‘Oda (born 1965), founded the literary journal *Naqd* (critique), calling for the use of tools of modern literary critique to criticize the present situation (Bader 2005a, 386). Nathim al-‘Ubaidi (born 1964) was a journalist and a member of the writers’ union since 1995. Luway Ḥamza ‘Abbās (born 1965), holding a Ph.D, was a professor of philosophy. Sa’d Salloum (born 1975) was a student. Aḥmad al-Sa’dāwi (born 1973) and ‘Abd al-Karīm al-‘Ubaidi (born 1960) did not have a specific job before 2003 and after that year

combined writing with working in the Iraqi and international media. Diyaa al-Khālidi (born 1975) was selling books on the sidewalk in Baghdad's al-Mutanabi street. Nassīf Filk (born 1954) was in prison during most of the period and after 2003 works as a journalist. Most were born in Baghdad, only 'Abd al-Karīm al-'Ubaidi and Luway Ḥamza 'Abbās are from Basra. Nearly all of them are secular Shi'ite and this aspect can be discerned in their writing. However, all of them were little known during the period, forming a kind of alternative culture in Baghdad and their leap forward would only come after 2003. Living in Iraq in the 1990s is an experience they all have in common. This meant a loss of any hope. The writers observed the general impoverishment of the society, the dullness of Baghdad and the impossibility of pursuing their dreams. They felt silenced by more powerful forces. They witnessed how literature is detached from the daily experiences of most Iraqis, serving the regime. And they wanted to make literature relevant as it should be. Interestingly, this literary revolution would not originate from the prisons nor would it spring from the luggage of returning Iraqi exiles after 2003. It would start with ordinary Iraqis who served in all of Saddam's wars and lived through the hardships of the 1990s. It would start with young lecturers in the university, part time journalists and the lower echelons of government service.

To close the circle, Diyaa al-Khalidi's first novel, *Yahduth fi al-Bilād al-Sa'ida* (It Happens in the Happy Land), from 2006 (al-Khalidi 2006), is about writers and the repressive Ba'thi regime in the 1990s. In the second half of the short novel, the writer, Marwan, is detained by the regime in a aristocratic villa, in the suburbs of Baghdad, away from his family. He is provided with prostitutes, drinks and entertainment and, in exchange, he is forced to write a novel. His manuscript will be read by a "reviewer," a literary critic working for the central intelligence (Mukhabarat) and he is expected to write a National Novel (Riwāya Wataniyya). The partial manuscript he already submitted, that we read in the first half of the novel, is classified dangerous by the reviewer. Al-Khalidi leaves an open end to this novel. However, this novel captures and criticizes the situation of most of Iraq's writers during the last decade of Saddam's regime. It also criticizes the hierarchy within the literary world with its cruel implications for new writers: the literary critique is given the privilege to decide whether Marwan would be executed or promoted. The novel is also a revolt against "the National Novel," and that is another characteristic of the novels of the "Generation of the 1990s." The first half of the novel, the "novel within the novel," is the opposite of a National Novel and reads like the classic manuscript of "the Generation of the 1990s." As this novel shows, the writers in the 1990s have had to live under two repressions: a paramount repression by the regime and secondary

repression by the overlords of the literary world such as writers, poets, and critics. This novel also shows that in the 1990s it was not possible to openly defy those forces and this would only become possible after April 2003.

CONCLUSIONS

Not all the reasons for the concentration of Saddam Hussein's regime (and him personally) on the novel are known. However, this article shows that it has a lot to do with previous experience of using novelists successfully during the Iran-Iraq War and even more so with a personal proclivity of the dictator who groomed a "literary career." With the exception of one dissident, the regime managed to have an "Iron grip" on literary circles. Iraq was isolated from the distribution of anti-regime literature by expat writers. However, all this only paved the ground for the literary revolution that would erupt after 2003.

Gramsci applies to the Iraqi reality in so far he describes the use of intellectuals for the maintenance of hegemony. The structure of submissive obedience by intellectuals to the dictatorship has been laid down in Iraq already during the 1970s. In the 1990s the regime was repeating the same patterns. How "organic" were the "organic intellectuals" in the sense that they willingly cooperated with the regime is impossible to establish, though for Gramsci and 'Abud a measure of willingness always exists. Gramsci misses the personal aspect of a dictator who grooms literary aspirations and therefore focuses on the novel. This caprice exists in many other dictatorships and does not fit into any logical model. If Gramsci sees hegemony as a reaction to the existence of alternative discourses, 'Abud totally fails to see that. He does not see a difference between writers in Iraq and out of Iraq. He does not notice the "winds of change" which bred the "Generation of the 1990s."

For the young writers and intellectuals behind the revolution, the twelve years between 1991-2003 were years of loss of hope. The end, in 2003, rekindled this hope and they started writing about the 1990s and not about post-2003 Iraq and its problems. This is a literary revolution in delay, trying to reform the present by undoing the past and getting liberated from its chains. Their de-Ba'thification is very profound. It is based on a reappraisal of all the pillars of Ba'thist national ideology and thinking. Instead of a homogeneous society and community, they call for a pluralistic community in which even the sectarian identity would find place (Sa'īd 2009; Zeidel 2011). They strongly oppose militarism and consider the match between it and a very violent form of nationalism to be responsible for Iraq's wars. This writing expresses a reaction against Arabism and the Arabization of Iraqi culture and also against the dictator and the personality cult that surrounded him.

Gradually, some of these writers started writing about post-2003 Iraq and its problems, especially sectarian violence. Diyaa al-Khalidi's best-selling novel *Qatala* (Murderers) from 2012 is one example (al-Khalidi 2012). Intellectuals, such as Sa'd Salloum, direct their efforts to changing Iraqi politics and developing a more pluralistic Iraqi society and national identity. But writing about the present, all of these writers connect it to the Ba'thi dictatorship and its heritage. The writers argue that the same people continue to kill in their struggle to control. The same philosophy of power and fear prevails. The battle has not been won with the fall of the Hussein regime. The miserable situation in Iraq following 2003, makes some intellectuals, notably Sa'id, Salloum and al-Khalidi, pose historical questions on the trends of

Iraqi history: what was wrong in it? Can the process of state formation be changed? All these questions require a separate study. However, most of the novels written by these writers are still about the 1990s and not about the present.

The "Generation of the 1990s" was only the by-product of the period between 1995-2003 and deserves a separate study like this one. Novels, not even those of Taha Hāmid al-Shabīb, did not bring down the Ba'th regime in 2003. An American invasion did that. Yet my study showed that by tightening the grasp on literature and the novel in the period of study, the Iraqi regime actually produced an antithetical and revolutionary trend in the literary and intellectual life in Iraq, emerging only after American tanks overthrew the dictatorship.

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