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Memory of Mass Persecution of Armenians and Assyrians in Four Recent Iraqi Novels

Abstract

In recent years, a number of Iraqi intellectuals have participated in a discourse on pluralism in Iraq that includes a call to address the traumatic collective experiences of the country's ethno-religious minorities. Such a confrontation with the "wounded memory" of these minority groups – along with a rewriting of the modern history of Iraq to incorporate their stories – would be an important step in creating a new collective memory, one of cultural pluralism, that could lead to a true coexistence among all Iraqis. Since it is very difficult to carry out this process due to deep sectarian divisions within Iraqi society, literature provides an alternative cultural field for the deconstruction and reformulation of existing "master narratives". The purpose of the article is to examine literary representations of the "wounded memory" of minorities in Iraq. The examples used here are related to the 1915–1916 Armenian genocide in the former Ottoman Empire and the 1933 massacre of Assyrians in the northern Iraqi village of Simele. They can be found in the following novels written in Arabic by Iraqi authors of Christian origin: *Aṭ-Ṭuyūr al-'amyā'* (The Blind Birds, 2016) by Laylā Qaṣrānī, *Sawāqī al-qulūb* (The Streams of Hearts, 2005) by In'ām Kağağī, *'Irāqī fī Bārīs: sīra ḏātiyya riwā'iyya* (An Iraqi in Paris: An Autobiographical Novel, 2005) by Ṣamū'īl Šam'ūn, and *Fī intiẓār Faraǧ Allāh al-Ḏahhār* (Waiting for Farag Allah al-Qahhar, 2006) by Sa'dī al-Māliḥ. This article is divided into three sections. An introduction is devoted to the aforementioned discourse. The second and solely descriptive section consists of three subsections focusing on literary characters who experience and/or witness the tragic events and/or tell others about them. The third section contains

concluding remarks and refers to several concepts formulated by researchers in cultural memory studies.

Keywords: memory, mass persecution, Iraq, Christians in the Middle East, Armenians, Assyrians, Iraqi novel, Arabic literature

Introduction: The "Wounded Memory" of Ethno-religious Minorities in Iraq

In *Minorities in Iraq. Memory, Identity and Challenges*,[1] the book's editor and co-author Sa'd Sallūm[2] writes that it provides valuable information about the country's ethno-religious minority groups that was previously unavailable to the public.[3] He clarifies that the study is "a call to reform the dominant culture which involves discrimination."[4] He subsequently states that "this book will dig into the collective memory of minorities and explain their demands and strategies. They are many voices crowded in a small theatre, asking us to let them on the stage and listen to their story and their own narration of history."[5] Later in the book, Sallūm argues that – together with a number of Iraqi intellectuals with whom he cooperates – he seeks to develop "a comprehensive approach to the minority problem through adopting multiculturalism (…) to handle the wounded memory of minorities," and "to raise the identity question." The study is thus "a spiritual journey to explore the 'internal other' or the 'other ego'."[6]

In light of the above, Sallūm appears to be drawing on concepts developed within the fields of postcolonial and memory studies.[7] In the chapter entitled "Towards a Pluralistic Memory in Iraq. From Wounded to Cultivated Memory," there is a direct reference to Paul Ricoeur's reflections on whether it is possible for victims to forget about their tragedies

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[1] Sa'ad Salloum (ed.), *Minorities in Iraq. Memory, Identity and Challenges*, Masarat for Cultural and Media Development, Baghdad–Beirut 2013. In this article, I quote excerpts from the English version of the study that was originally published in Arabic under the title *Al-Aqalliyyāt fī Al-'Irāq. Aḏ-Ḏākira, al-huwiyya, at-taḥaddiyāt*, Mu'ssasat Masārāt li-at-Tanmiya aṯ-Ṯaqāfiyya wa-al-I'lāmiyya, Baġdād 2012.

[2] Sa'd Sallūm has been a lecturer at the Faculty of Political Sciences of Al-Mustanṣiriyya University since 2007. He is an editor of the "Masārāt" journal dedicated to the study of the cultural diversity of Iraq and the Arab world, as well as the author of numerous newspaper articles and book publications. See: Salloum (ed.), *Minorities in Iraq*, pp. 267–269.

[3] The first part of the book comprises chapters devoted to the following minorities: Jews, Christians, Yazidis, Sabian Mandaeans, Baha'is, Black Iraqis, Faili Kurds, Kawliyah (Gypsies), Sheikhiya, Turkmen, Shabaks, and Kakai.

[4] Salloum (ed.), *Minorities in Iraq*, p. 14.

[5] Ibidem, p. 11.

[6] Ibidem, p. 15.

[7] In reference to the former, see: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak*, in: *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, (ed.) Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, Columbia University Press, New York 1998, pp. 66–111; Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers. An Essay on the Geography of Anger*, Duke University Press, Durham and London 2006, pp. 49–85.

and forgive their perpetrators.[8] He expressed these thoughts in his seminal book *Memory, History, Forgetting*, where the term "wounded memory" is used in relation to shared traumatic experiences, i.e. experiences that constitute wounds inflicted on the collective memory.[9] In the study co-authored by Sallūm, this concept is contrasted with the term "cultivated memory", one that "would reconnect what has been broken off and re-build what has been demolished."[10] Sallūm and his fellow researchers call on state decision-makers to face the "wounded memory" of Iraq's minorities and create a new memory, one embodying cultural pluralism "based on diversity and equality among groups."[11] Then, after actions have been taken towards national reconciliation,[12] they propose developing "an anthropologic memory for the Iraqi cultural pluralism," which might be the second step in healing the wounded memory of those vulnerable components of Iraqi social fabric.[13] They also define the cornerstones of "anthropologic memory", which include: first, finding "cultural elements that are common in the beliefs, perspectives and attitudes of Iraqi minorities;" second, the formation of a shared social life based on a deep conviction that the diversity of the state's ethno-religious communities and their multiple sub-identities matter; and third, a rewriting of "historic memory away from ideology through focusing on the very conditions that determine the identity of any people or country." Finally, they conclude that "anthropological memory is a combination of all cultural commonalities" among Iraq's various groups, whose members all belong to one cultural-historic entity. "This entity will be embodied in a national entity" that will enable them to coexist in a peaceful and tolerant manner. This, however, may only be achieved within a strong democratic state.[14]

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[8] Salloum (ed.), *Minorities in Iraq*, p. 243.

[9] In his reflections on the "wounded memory", Ricoeur refers to the Freudian analysis of mourning and extends it to the traumatism of collective identity. He mentions collective mourning behaviours and recollections of painful events that can be helpful in the process of reconciliation. He claims that "symbolic wounds calling for healing are stored in the archives of collective memory." See: Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, (trans.) Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, University of Chicago Press, Chicago–London 2006, pp. 69–79.

[10] Salloum (ed.), *Minorities in Iraq*, p. 239.

[11] Ibidem.

[12] On the socio-political meanings of the process of reconciliation and its failure in post-2003 Iraq, see: Ibrahim Al-Marashi and Aysegul Keskin, *Reconciliation Dilemmas in Post-Ba'athist Iraq: Truth Commissions, Media and Ethno-sectarian Conflicts*, "Mediterranean Politics" 13/2 (2008), pp. 243–259.

[13] Salloum (ed.), *Minorities in Iraq*, p. 245.

[14] Ibidem, pp. 245–247. For more information about history, memory and ideology in modern Iraq, especially under Saddam Husayn's rule, see: Eric Davis, *Memories of the State. Politics, History and Identity in Modern Iraq*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2005. In the introduction to the book, the author defines the term "historical memory" and points to the importance of intellectuals in the production of state-sponsored historical memory. He also describes its ideological uses and abuses by political authorities who strive, among other things, "to undermine the 'subaltern groups' ability to develop a viable civil society and inclusionary political community" (pp. 4–8).

The approach represented in *Minorities in Iraq. Memory, Identity and Challenges*[15] is typical of many Iraqi intellectuals who reflect on the need to create a pluralistic society comprised of individuals who share a common national identity that would not contradict their ethnic, religious and sectarian sub-identities.[16] Such an identity could be created in the aforementioned process of rewriting the history of Iraq. In this revised history, there should be space for memories about the collective fates of previously marginalised groups, including tragic and traumatic events that have affected them – especially different manifestations of mass persecution carried out by government forces.[17]

However, in spite of a growing body of research regarding both the history and current social and legal situation of Iraq's minorities,[18] as well as a number of civic initiatives by those who care about them,[19] it is apparently very difficult for this process to be carried out due to deep sectarian divisions within Iraqi society.[20] In the introduction to *Writing the Modern History of Iraq: Historiographical and Political Challenges*, its editors, Riccardo Bocco and Jordi Tejel, write that after "the multiple histories of the Iraqis were subsumed into a single narrative of state power" during the Baathist regime, the post-2003 "state of violence" "has reactivated some of the old narratives used by them to understand and to justify their political engagement over time." This has led to "uses and abuses of memory (…) and history by diverse political parties, communities or groups, whether ethnic or sectarian (…)." In addition, some of these reactivated post-2003 narratives have been "narratives of victimhood", and thus they have provided "particular

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[15] As well as in other works of Sallūm. See, e.g.: Sa'd Sallūm, *At-Tanawwu' al-ḥallāq: ḥarīṭat ṭarīq li-ta'zīz at-ta'ddudiyya fī Al-'Irāq*, Mu'ssasat Masārāt li-at-Tanmiya aṯ-Ṯaqāfiyya wa-al-I'lāmiyya, Baġdād–Bayrūt 2013.

[16] See works of the prominent Iraqi intellectual Salīm Maṭar: Salīm Maṭar, *Aḏ-Ḏāt al-ğarīḥa. Iškālāt al-huwiyya fī Al-'Irāq wa-al-'ālam al-'arabī "aš-šarqumutawassiṭī"*, Bayrūt 1997; Salīm Maṭar et al., *Ǧadal al-huwiyyāt: 'Arab… Akrād… Turkmān… Suryān… Yazīdiyya. Ṣirā' al-intimā'āt fī Al-'Irāq wa-aš-Šarq al-Awsaṭ*, Bayrūt 2003; Salīm Maṭar, *Yaqaẓat al-huwiyya al-'irāqiyya*, Ğanīf 2010; Salīm Maṭar et al., *Mašrū' al-iḥyā' al-waṭanī al-'irāqī*, Ğanīf 2012; as well as the following articles of other Iraqi intellectuals: Sayyār al-Ğamīl, *Al-Huwiyya al-waṭaniyya al-'irāqiyya. Al-Ma'nā… at-taḥaddiyāt.. wa-al-mustaqbal*, "Masārāt" 3/1 (2007), pp. 34–37; 'Alī Wutūt, *Fī as-su'āl as-sūsyūlūğī li-al-huwiyya. 'Irāq wāḥid… 'an ayyi muğtama' nataḥaddaṯu?*, "Masārāt" 3/1 (2007), pp. 43–57.

[17] See: Maṭar, *Aḏ-Ḏāt al-ğarīḥa*, pp. 377–378.

[18] With regard to the Christian minority, on whose painful memories this article concentrates, three publications can be mentioned as comprehensive works concerning this heterogeneous group: Sa'd Sallūm (ed.), *Al-Masīḥiyyūna fī Al-'Irāq: at-tārīḫ aš-šāmil wa-at-taḥaddiyāt ar-rāhina*, Mu'ssasat Masārāt li-at-Tanmiya aṯ-Ṯaqāfiyya wa-al-I'lāmiyya, Baġdād–Bayrūt 2014; Sargon Donabed, *Reforging a Forgotten History: Iraq and the Assyrians in the Twentieth Century*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2015; Kāẓim Ḥabīb, *Masīḥiyyū Al-'Irāq: aṣāla, intimā', muwāṭana*, Dār Naynawā li-ad-Dirāsāt wa-an-Našr wa-at-Tawzī', Baġdād–Barlīn 2018.

[19] For example, initiatives in support of civil peace and Muslim-Christian dialogue initiated by Sa'd Sallūm and other board members of the "Masārāt" non-profit organization, which deals with research and activities related to Iraq's ethno-religious minorities, collective memory, and inter-faith dialogue, in cooperation with other Iraqi intellectuals. See: *Mu'ssasat Masārāt li-at-Tanmiya aṯ-Ṯaqāfiyya wa-al-I'lāmiyya*, Viewed 25 April 2018, <http://masaratiraq.org/identity/>.

[20] For more information, see: Johan Franzén, *Writing the History of Iraq: the Fallacy of "Objective" History*, in: *Writing the Modern History of Iraq: Historiographical and Political Challenges*, (ed.) Jordi Tejel et al., World Scientific, Singapore 2012, pp. 44–45.

opportunities for constructing, or reinforcing, a sense of endangered group belonging or identity."[21] Moreover, the outbreak of the civil conflict in 2006, a result of rising tensions between Sunni and Shia Muslims, has largely contributed to the fact that their "narratives of victimhood" have become "sectarian master narratives". The Western media have referred to these narratives and simultaneously they have neglected many other stories of Iraqi citizens, above all, those of ethno-religious minorities. But more importantly, as Reidar Visser states, the dominance of these "master narratives" may have an impact "on how new histories of Iraq are written."[22]

Although, for now, there is no realistic prospect of writing a new history of Iraq that could serve as the foundation for creating a shared pluralistic memory and identity, there are other scientific and cultural fields that deal with the "wounded memory" of the country's minorities in their own, alternative ways. Among them is oral history, often perceived as a counter-narrative to official or dominant narratives and a method that allows the individual and collective memory of those marginalised and silenced to be preserved and heard.[23] Recording victims' accounts of tragic events not only contributes to the creation of alternative historical narratives, but also, as Karin Mlodoch puts it, the reconstruction of "their fragmented traumatic memory," its transformation "into a narrative sense-making memory," and the reintegration of "the trauma into one's biography." Both on the individual and collective level, this process and other activities regarded as symbolic closures, i.e. apologies of perpetrators, "can help victims to come to terms with the traumatic past."[24]

Literature, both non-fictional and fictional,[25] liberated from the shackles of state censorship after the fall of Saddam Husayn's regime,[26] also enables horrific personal

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[21] Riccardo Bocco and Jordi Tejel, Introduction to *Writing the Modern History of Iraq*, p. xiii.

[22] Reidar Visser, *The Sectarian Master Narrative in Iraqi Historiography*, in: *Writing the Modern History of Iraq*, pp. 47–59.

[23] See the case of the official Turkish narrative about the Armenian and Assyrian genocide and its counter-narratives, i.e. the oral histories of Armenians and Assyrians, as well as those of individual Turkish citizens: Uğur Ümit Üngör, *Lost in Commemoration: the Armenian Genocide in Memory and Identity*, "Patterns of Prejudice" 28/2 (2014), pp. 147–166; Ramazan Aras, *Assyrian/Syriac Oral History as a Counter-narrative in Contemporary Turkish Historiography*, "Mukaddime" 7/2 (2016), pp. 259–273. See also the following oral history studies concerning the fate of Iraqi women from different ethno-religious backgrounds: Nadje Sadiq al-Ali, *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present*, Zed Books, London 2007; Dunyā Mīḫā'īl, *Fī sūq as-sabāyā*, Dār al-Mutawassiṭ, Mīlānū 2017.

[24] Karin Mlodoch, *Fragmented Memory, Competing Narratives: the Perspective of Women Survivors of the Anfal Operations in Iraqi Kurdistan*, in: *Writing the Modern History of Iraq*, pp. 207–209.

[25] In this article, I focus solely on novels. One should not overlook, however, non-fiction works, such as memoirs, that share similarities with oral history studies.

[26] See the following studies on Saddam Husayn's control over Iraqi intellectuals, particularly poets and writers, in the 1980s and 1990s: Stephan Milich, *The Positioning of Baathist Intellectuals and Writers Before and After 2003: the Case of the Iraqi Poet Abd al-Razzaq Abd al-Wahid*, "Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication" 3 (2011), pp. 298–319; Yasmeen Hanoosh, *Contempt: State Literati vs. Street Literati in Modern Iraq*, "Journal of Arabic Literature" 43 (2012), pp. 372–408; Fatima Mohsen, *Debating Iraqi Culture: Intellectuals between the Inside and the Outside*, in: *Conflicting Narratives: War, Trauma and Memory in Iraqi Culture*, (ed.) Stephan Milich et al., Reichert Verlag, Wiesbaden 2012, pp. 5–23; Leslie Tramontini, *The Struggle for Representation: The Internal Iraqi Dispute over Cultural Production in Baathist Iraq*, in: *Conflicting Narratives*, pp. 25–48; Wiebke

memories that haunt members of minority groups to be accessible through their representations, and thus incorporated into the Iraqi collective memory. In this way, literature is able to deconstruct and reformulate existing "master narratives."[27] From the perspective of researchers in cultural memory, particularly Astrid Erll and Birgit Neumann, literature constitutes a medium of memory because the literary "creation of the world" resembles the processes of forming a collective memory, and as such, has much in common with historical writing and life stories recorded for oral history projects. But at the same time, it is distinctly different from other media of remembrance. In the present article, I will draw on the concept of literature as a medium of memory.[28]

The purpose of this article is to examine literary representations of the "wounded memory" of ethno-religious minorities in Iraq. They are exemplified by images of the

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Walter, *Between Heroism, Hesitancy, Resignation and New Hope: the Iraq-Iran War 1980-1988 in Iraqi Poetry*, in: *Conflicting Narratives*, pp. 75–107; Leslie Tramontini, *"Speaking Truth to Power?" Intellectuals in Iraqi Baathist Cultural Production*, "Middle East – Topics & Arguments" 1 (2013), pp. 53–61, Viewed 17 October 2018, <https://meta-journal.net/article/view/1041/986>; Ronen Zeidel, *On Dictatorship, Literature and the Coming Revolution: Regime and Novels in Iraq 1995-2003*, "Nidaba. An Interdisciplinary Journal of Middle East Studies" 2 (2017), pp. 62–74, Viewed 3 October 2018, <https://journals.lub.lu.se/nidaba/article/view/16668/15062>.

[27] On the interest of contemporary Arabic literature's authors in challenging dominant discourses, see: Kamal Abu-Deeb, *The Collapse of Totalizing Discourse and the Rise of Marginal/Minority Discourses*, in: *Tradition, Modernity and Postmodernity in Arabic Literature*, (ed.) Kamal Abdel-Malek and Wael Hallaq, Brill, Leiden 2000, pp. 339, 348–349. See also the following articles whose authors refer to various concepts formulated within the field of memory studies. They present recent Kurdish novels as a counter-narrative about the Armenian genocide that stands in contrast to the official Turkish historiography. Simultaneously, these novels create a space to construct a common Kurdish-Armenian counter-memory about the events. They constitute a medium that shows similarities between the fates of the two suppressed communities: Özlem Belçim Galip, *The Politics of Remembering: Representation of the Armenian Genocide in Kurdish Novels*, "Holocaust and Genocide Studies" 30/3 (2016), pp. 458–487; Adnan Çelik and Ergin Öpengin, *The Armenian Genocide in the Kurdish Novel: Reconstructing Identity through Collective Memory*, "European Journal of Turkish Studies" 2016, pp. 1–21, Viewed 30 November 2018, <https://journals.openedition.org/ejts/5291>.

[28] Since in this section of the article there is no room left for a comprehensive description of this concept, at this point I indicate only to some studies of the above-mentioned and other researchers in the field of cultural memory studies to which I will refer in my further considerations. See: Astrid Erll, *Literatur als Medium des kollektiven Gedächtnisses*, in: *Gedächtniskonzepte der Literaturwissenschaft. Theoretische Grundlegung und Anwendungsperspektiven*, (ed.) Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, De Gruyter, Berlin 2005, pp. 249–276; Astrid Erll, *Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory,* in: *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, (ed.) Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, De Gruyter, Berlin 2008, pp. 391–397; Astrid Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen. Eine Einführung. 3 Erweiterte Auflage*, J.B. Metzler, Stuttgart 2017, pp. 170–190 and the English version of its first edition: Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*, (trans.) Sara B. Young, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2011, pp. 144–156, 160–169; Birgit Neumann, *The Literary Representations of Memory*, in: *Cultural Memory Studies*, pp. 333–340; Ann Rigney, *The Dynamics of Remembrance: Text between Monumentality and Morphing*, in: *Cultural Memory Studies*, pp. 348–350. On cultural memory studies as a multidisciplinary field that has developed a number of methods which can be applied for studying trauma conveyed in literature, as juxtaposed to trauma theory, see: Rosanne Kenedy, *Trauma and Cultural Memory Studies*, in: *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma*, (ed.) Colin Davis and Hanna Meretoja, Routledge, London and New York 2020, pp. 54–65.

1915–1916 Armenian genocide in the former Ottoman Empire,[29] as a result of which many displaced Armenians settled in Iraq and became its citizens,[30] and the 1933 massacre of Assyrians in the northern Iraqi village of Simele (Sumayyil),[31] regarded by some scholars as an event that decisively influenced the development of the chauvinistic nationalism in the modern Iraqi state.[32] Despite the fact that the present article focuses solely on literary memories of the Armenian suffering caused by the "first modern genocide", it is noteworthy that numerous Assyrians also took shelter in Iraq[33] because they were persecuted by Turkish authorities and their local collaborators during and after World War I.[34] Henceforth in this article, I will use the term "impact events" in relation to the Armenian genocide and Simele massacre. According to Aleida Assmann, it was coined by Anne Fuchs and refers to "moments of rupture that challenge the psychic and cultural continuity of a group or nation." Impact events are characterised by a "devastating charge

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[29] I will point to a number of studies on the Armenian genocide in the footnotes to the second and third sections of the article.

[30] On the Armenians in Iraq, see: Darren R. Logan, *A Remnant Remaining: Armenians amid Northern Iraq's Christian Minority*, "Iran and the Caucasus" 14/1 (2010), pp. 143–157.

[31] I will mention a number of studies on the Simele massacre in the footnotes to the second and third sections of the article.

[32] On the impact of the "Simele incident" on the Iraqi nationalism, see: Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2008, pp. 169–170; Sargon Donabed, "Iraq and the Assyrian Unimagining: Illuminating Scaled Suffering and a Hierarchy of Genocide from Simele to Anfal" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2010), p. xxx, 21, Viewed 20 November 2018, <https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/32925/3/Donabed_Sargon_G_201006_PhD_thesis.pdf>; Russell A. Hopkins, "The Simele Massacre as a Cause of Iraqi Nationalism: How an Assyrian Genocide Created Iraqi Martial Nationalism" (MA diss., The University of Akron, 2016), Viewed 17 December 2018, <https://etd.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws_etd/send_file/send?accession=akron1464911392&disposition=inline>; Sopanit Angsusingha, "Aliens in Uniforms and Contested Nationalism: The Role of Iraqi Levies in Shaping Aspects of Iraqi Nationalism under the British Mandate (1921–1933)" (MA diss., Georgetown University, 2018), Viewed 10 December 2018, <https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/1050730/Angsusingha_georgetown_0076M_13917.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>; Donabed, *Reforging a Forgotten History*, pp. 124–128. See also: Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers*, p. 51.

[33] On the Assyrians in Iraq, see: Jonathan Eric Lewis, *Iraqi Assyrians: Barometer of Pluralism*, "Middle East Quarterly" (Summer 2003), pp. 49–57, Viewed 16 December 2018, <https://www.meforum.org/558/iraqi-assyrians-barometer-of-pluralism>; Vahram Petrosian, *Assyrians in Iraq*, "Iran and the Caucasus" 10/1 (2006), pp. 113–147; Laura Robson, *Refugee Camps and Spatialization of Assyrian Nationalism in Iraq*, in: *Modernity, Minority, and the Public Space. Jews and Christians in the Middle East*, (ed.) Sasha R. Goldstein-Sabbah and Heleen L. Murre-van den Berg, Brill, Leiden 2016, pp. 237–257, Viewed 6 May 2018, <http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/books/b9789004323285_010>.

[34] On the persecution of the Assyrians during World War I, see: Hannibal Travis, *"Native Christians Massacred": the Ottoman Genocide of the Assyrians during World War I*, "Genocide Studies and Preventions: An International Journal" 1/3 (2006), pp. 327–371, Viewed 29 November 2018, <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1233&context=gsp>; Riccardo Armillei et al., *Forgotten and Concealed: the Emblematic Cases of the Assyrian and Romani Genocides*, "Genocide Studies and Preventions: An International Journal" 10/2 (2016), pp. 98–120, Viewed 29 November 2018, <dro.deakin.edu.au/view/DU:30091518>; Joseph Yacoub, *Year of the Sword. The Assyrian Christian Genocide. A History*, (trans.) James Ferguson, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016; *Let Them Not Return. Sayfo – the Genocide against the Assyrian, Syriac and Chaldean Christians in the Ottoman Empire*, (ed.) David Gaunt et al., Berghahn, Oxford–New York 2017; *The Assyrian Genocide: Cultural and Political Legacies*, (ed.) Hannibal Travis, Routledge, London 2017.

of violence that destroys not only human lives and material goods, but also shatters the symbolic frameworks," and consequently "produce a collective trauma."[35]

Exemplary literary representations of "impact events" and references to them can be found in the following novels written in Arabic by Iraqi authors of Christian origin: *Aṭ-Ṭuyūr al-'amyā'* (The Blind Birds, 2016) by Laylā Qaṣrānī,[36] *Sawāqī al-qulūb* (The Streams of Hearts, 2005) by In'ām Kağağī,[37] *'Irāqī fī Bārīs: sīra ḏātiyya riwā'iyya* (An Iraqi in Paris: An Autobiographical Novel, 2005) by Ṣamū'īl Šam'ūn,[38] and *Fī intiẓār Faraǧ Allāh al-Qahhār* (Waiting for Farag Allah al-Qahhar, 2006) by Sa'dī al-Māliḥ.[39] Only the first novel, however, revolves entirely around "impact events", whereas the other three tackle a wider range of topics. Their common feature is that they use "the experimental mode of the rhetoric of collective memory."[40] This means, to use Astrid Erll's that they "represent the past as lived-through experience," "evoke the 'living memory' of contemporary history, generational or family memories," and "tend to stage (…) the episodic-autobiographical memory of witnesses."[41] The German researcher enumerates distinctive features of this mode of remembering which are:

> "the 'personal voice' generated by first-person narration; addressing the reader in the intimate way typical of face-to-face communication; use of the more immediate present tense; lengthy passages focalised by the 'experiencing I', in order to convey the embodied, seemingly immediate experience; circumstantial realism, a very detailed presentation of everyday life in the past; and presentation of everyday ways of speaking to convey the linguistic specificity and fluidity of the recent past."[42]

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[35] Aleida Assmann, *Impact and Resonance. Towards a Theory of Emotions in Cultural Memory*, in: *The Formative Past and the Formation of the Future. Collective Remembering and Identity Formation*, (ed.) Terje Stordalen and Saphinaz-Amal Naguib, Novus Forlag, Oslo 2015, p. 53.

[36] Laylā Qaṣrānī, *Aṭ-Ṭuyūr al-'amyā'*, Dār al-Mutawassiṭ, Mīlānū 2016.

[37] In'ām Kağağī, *Sawāqī al-qulūb*, Al-Mu'ssasa li-ad-Dirāsāt wa-an-Našr, Bayrūt 2005. For fragments of the novel translated into English, see: Inaam Kachachi, *Habits of the Heart*, (trans.) Muhayman Jamil, "International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies" 3/3 (2009), pp. 287–306.

[38] The novel was first published in 2005. In this article, I refer to the following edition: Ṣamū'īl Šam'ūn, *'Irāqī fī Bārīs: sīra ḏātiyya riwā'iyya*, Ad-Dār al-'Arabiyya li-al-'Ulūm Nāširūna, Bayrūt 2012. See one of the English versions of the novel: Samuel Shimon, *An Iraqi in Paris: An Autobiographical Novel*, (trans.) Christina Phillips and Piers Amodia, Banipal Publishing, London 2016.

[39] Sa'dī al-Māliḥ, *Fī intiẓār Faraǧ Allāh al-Qahhār*, Dār al-Fārābī, Bayrūt 2006.

[40] According to Astrid Erll, "the rhetoric of collective memory" is "an ensemble of narrative forms, which provokes the naturalization of a literary text as a medium of memory." (…) "Literary works represent the past in varying combinations of experimental, monumental, antagonistic, historicizing, and reflexive modes." See: Erll, *Memory in Culture*, pp. 157–158. For a more detailed description of these modes, see: Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis*, pp. 191–211.

[41] Erll, *Memory in Culture*, p. 158.

[42] Ibidem, pp. 158–159. Cf. Erll, *Literatur als Medium*, p. 268.

In the following section of the article, I would like to show images of "impact events" and references to them in the above-mentioned novels. This section is divided into three subsections, each of which focuses on a particular, distinct perspective embodied by literary characters who have experienced and/or witnessed tragic events, have knowledge of them and/or talk about them with others. The first presents victims' fates "as lived-through experience". The second describes stories narrated by descendants of victims, whereas the third deals with stories told by the ghosts of victims. This division is made due to the fact that the figures of (voiceless) victims, (grand) children giving testimonies to harrowing ordeals of their (grand)parents, and spectres representing the "speaking" dead are frequently employed in fiction about traumatic experiences and events.[43] The second section of the article is purely descriptive, while conclusions concerning the novels under consideration, with references to several concepts formulated by researchers in cultural memory studies, are drawn in the third and final section.

Fictional Narratives about "Impact Events"

Stories Told as Experienced by Victims

The Blind Birds by Laylā Qaṣrānī, an exiled Iraqi author of Assyrian origin,[44] comprises 24 chapters followed by an ending. The realistic narrative centres around an Armenian community in a village called Turbazar (Ṭūrbāzār).[45] The Armenians living in the village, which lies some distance from the city of Diyarbakir (Diyār Bakir), experience persecution committed by Turkish and Kurdish soldiers in 1915. The events are arranged chronologically, but the reader follows the fate of several protagonists in different places. The story of the main character, a young girl named Kohar (Kūhār), and the stories of her family members, her beloved Boghos (Būġūṣ) and other Armenian villagers, are told by an omniscient third-person narrator (in the past tense) who gives voice to them in their dialogues (in the present tense).

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[43] See e.g.: Josias Semujanga, *Narratives of the Rwandan Genocide*, in: *Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma*, p. 401; Tony M. Vinci, *Ghost, Android, Animal: Trauma and Literature Beyond the Human*, Routledge, New York 2020, pp. 1–122.

[44] Laylā Qaṣrānī was born in Al-Anbar Governorate in Iraq in 1967. She studied French literature at the University of Al-Mustanṣiriyya in Baghdad. She has been living in the United States since the 1990s. She has authored two novels. Her debut work entitled *Sahadūṯā* (Testimony, Bayrūt 2011) relates the fates of several generations of an Assyrian family against the background of the socio-political history of 20th-century Iraq. See: Liqā' Mūsā as-Sā'idī, *Taġalliyyātuhunna. Bibliūġrāfiyā ar-riwāya an-nisawiyya al-'irāqiyya ma'a dirāsa fī al-maḍāmīn wa-al-aškāl al-fanniyya (1953–2016)*, Al-Mu'ssasa al-'Arabiyya li-ad-Dirāsāt wa-an-Našr, Bayrūt 2016, pp. 43–44, 221.

[45] Henceforth, in the main body of the article, the names of literary characters and place names will be provided in their English version, while their Arabic equivalents will be transliterated in brackets when they are first mentioned. The authors' names are given only in Arabic transliteration.

The first seven chapters depict happenings that can be regarded as a prologue to the tragedy of their mass displacement into the Syrian Desert.[46] They show how the simple and peaceful existence of the village residents[47] is disturbed by news of the killing of 300 Armenians in Diyarbakir under the pretext of their having refused to join the Ottoman army during the Great War.[48] Upon hearing this news, Armenian men from Turbazar begin to arm themselves for fear of being attacked by government troops or their Kurdish neighbours. Their concern increases after a local Turkish officer named Suleiman (Sulaymān) arrests their priest, accusing him of inciting his faithful not to join the army.[49] Moreover, the officer orders his gendarmes to enter Armenian houses and write down names of all boys under the age of seven. The next day, Armenian men are forced to bring their sons to the church, where Suleiman carries out their slaughter. The children's lives are sacrificed so that other members of their community could survive. Despite the terrifying ordeal, which affects almost every Armenian family, Kohar's parents manage to save the younger of her two brothers by dressing him in girls' clothing before Turkish gendarmes inspect their house.[50] A few weeks later, the priest is arrested again and subsequently killed. Rumours of a planned displacement grow louder.[51] This gloomy news is confirmed when Turkish gendarmes come to an Armenian blacksmith with an official letter which states that he will stay in the village because of his skills, which are useful in the production of weapons.[52]

The next four chapters portray the misery of the displaced Armenians who are walking for weeks in a caravan towards the Syrian Desert, supervised by Turkish and Kurdish soldiers. During the "death march", the villagers experience and witness their cruelty and violence. They grow more and more desperate and terrified as they are forced to watch

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[46] For detailed information about the deportations of Armenians from different Turkish provinces in 1915, see: Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History*, I.B. Tauris, London 2011, pp. 289–680.

[47] On the everyday life of Armenians before the genocide, see the stories of survivors in: Donald E. Miller and Lorna Touryan Miller, *Survivors: An Oral History of the Armenian Genocide*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1993, pp. 67–72.

[48] Qaṣrānī, *Aṭ-Ṭuyūr al-'amyā'*, pp. 11–20. According to the United States ambassador to the Ottoman Empire during the Armenian genocide, Henry Morgenthau, Armenian men conscripted into the Turkish army were "segregated, disarmed, formed into labor battalions, and murdered." See: Rubina Peroomian, *Women and the Armenian Genocide: the Victim, the Living Martyr*, in: *Plight and Fate of Women During and Following Genocide*, (ed.) Samuel Totten, Routledge, London and New York 2017, p. 9.

[49] Cf. testimonies about arrests of intellectuals and priests in the pre-genocide stage, in: Miller and Touryan Miller, *Survivors*, pp. 79–80. See also: Peroomian, *Women and the Armenian Genocide*, p. 9.

[50] Cf. information about dressing Armenian boys in girls' clothing in order to protect them, in: Rouben P. Adalian, *The Armenian Genocide*, in: *Centuries of Genocide. Essays and Eyewitness Accounts*, 4 edition, (ed.) Samuel Totten and William S. Parsons, Routledge, New York–London 2013, p. 144.

[51] Cf. eyewitness accounts of events preceding the deportations, in: Ibidem, pp. 143–148.

[52] Qaṣrānī, *Aṭ-Ṭuyūr al-'amyā'*, pp. 21–60. Cf. the case of a saved Armenian ironsmith whose special skills were needed by the Turkish army, in: Richard G. Hovannisian, *Intervention and Shades of Altruism During the Armenian Genocide*, in: *The Armenian Genocide, History, Politics, Ethics*, (ed.) Richard G. Hovannisian, St. Martin's Press, New York 1992 – reproduced by the Armenian Genocide Resource Center, p. 7, Viewed 13 December 2018, <https://genocideeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Shades-of-Altruism-in-the-Armenian-Genocide.pdf>. Cf. Miller and Touryan Miller, *Survivors*, pp. 83–84.

a new-born boy being burned alive, and the deaths of the elderly and children who are too fragile to endure the hardships of walking in the scorching heat without food and water. One night, they witness the abduction of a young girl who is raped by an officer, then by his gendarmes, and finally killed.[53] After rumours spread that other Armenian women will also be raped,[54] some of them give gold coins hidden in their hair to their husbands and fathers. When Turkish officers learn about this, they order their soldiers to find men suspected of swallowing coins and gather them at a distance from the caravan. The gendarmes shoot the men dead in front of their wives and daughters and order the women to search for the coins in the guts of their murdered kin, under the threat of being shot as well. That is how Kohar loses her father. Shortly afterwards, she is also separated from her mother and brothers because a Turkish officer hands them over to a Kurdish soldier who is allowed to go home.[55] During the journey to his native village, Kohar's mother dies and her brothers are left alone in an isolated place.[56]

The subsequent chapters chronicle both the fates of the separated siblings and other expelled Armenians. After a gruelling march over many weeks, the Turkish officers send the strongest men away to work in a coal mine and leave those who have survived in the decimated caravan in the middle of the desert. Some of the survivors follow Arab hunters, who lead them to the town of Ras al-Ayn (Ra's al-'Ayn), where they are warmly welcome by its residents. Kohar is not among them since she walked away from the caravan earlier in search of Boghos, who managed to escape. The girl walks barefoot

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[53] Qaṣrānī, *Aṭ-Ṭuyūr al-'amyā'*, pp. 61–92. Cf. Miller and Touryan Miller, *Survivors*, pp. 90–101, 106–114. See also: Peroomian, *Women and the Armenian Genocide*, pp. 10–11.

[54] Cf. Miller and Touryan Miller, *Survivors*, pp. 114–115. See also information about sexual violence against Armenian women, based on testimonies of the "death marches" survivors, in: Eliz Sanasarian, *Gender Distinction in the Genocidal Process: A Preliminary Study of the Armenian Case*, "Holocaust & Genocide Studies" 4/4 (1989), pp. 449–453; Najwa Nabti, *Legacy of Impunity: Sexual Violence against Armenian Women and Girls during the Genocide*, in: *The Armenian Genocide Legacy*, (ed.) Alexis Demirdjian, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2016, pp. 118–133. For more information about extermination of children during the "death marches", see: Vahakn Dadrian, *Children as Victims of Genocide: the Armenian Case*, "Journal of Genocide Research" 5/3 (2003), pp. 423–436; Adalian, *Armenian Genocide*, pp. 147–151; Henry C. Theriault, *The Impact of Genocide on Young Armenians and the Consequences for the Target Group as a Whole*, in: *Plight and Fate of Children During and Following Genocide*, (ed.) Samuel Totten, Routledge, London and New York 2017, p. 32; Asya Darbinyan and Rubina Peroomian, *Children: The Most Vulnerable Victims of the Armenian Genocide*, in: *Plight and Fate of Children*, pp. 61–63.

[55] For more detailed information about giving Armenian women and children to Turkish, Kurdish and Arab men or their abduction by members of these groups, see: Sanasarian, *Gender Distinction*, pp. 453–455; Hovannisian, *Intervention and Shades of Altruism*, p. 6; Taner Akçam, *The Young Turks Crime Against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire*, Princetown University Press, Princetown 2012, pp. 220–227, 229–232; Lerna Ekmekcioglu, *A Climate for Abduction, a Climate for Redemption: The Politics of Inclusion during and after the Armenian Genocide*, "Comparative Studies in Society and History" 55/3 (2013), pp. 525–534; Keith David Watenpaugh, *'Are There Any Children for Sale?': Genocide and the Transfer of Armenian Children (1915–1922)*, "Journal of Human Rights" 12 (2013), pp. 283–290; Theriault, *Impact of Genocide on Young Armenians*, p. 32.

[56] Qaṣrānī, *Aṭ-Ṭuyūr al-'amyā'*, pp. 93–110. On abandoned Armenian children and their ways of survival, see: Miller and Touryan Miller, *Survivors*, pp. 119–130.

across the desert, day and night, until a Kurdish soldier encounters her on the way to his village in the vicinity of the town of Mardin (Mārdīn). He feeds her and sexually abuses her. Kohar can do nothing but follow him. Meanwhile, her younger brothers wander southwards, until they are picked up by a wagon going to Mosul (Al-Mawṣil). In the city, they draw the attention of an Arab man who takes them into his home.[57] The other Armenians from the caravan are led by a Kurdish shepherd to his village. Initially, they receive a friendly welcome, but after some time, the villagers decide to enslave Armenian women and kill their husbands. The women later succeed in fleeing the Kurdish settlement. After crossing mountains, they reach the Sinjar region of today's Iraq, where they find shelter in a Yazidi village.[58]

The next part of the narrative concentrates solely on the main protagonists. Kohar becomes the wife of the Kurdish soldier, named Arkan (Arkān). In his house, she is mistreated by his mother and grandmother during his absence.[59] Her brothers, in turn, are treated by the Arab Sheikh Ghazi (šayḫ Ġāzī) as if they were his adopted sons. The man feels emotionally attached to the boys – to the extent that he refuses to send them to a foundation that provides care for Armenian orphans from Turkey.[60] In addition, he does not force them to embrace Islam.[61] On the contrary, once a month, he takes the boys to an Armenian church in Mosul so that they can attend religion lessons.[62] During this time, Boghos continues to wander alone across the desert. He eventually comes upon a small Armenian caravan headed for Mosul, which he joins in the hope of finding Kohar and her family. As time passes, he stops looking for them and devotes himself to his work. Kohar, in turn, after spending countless days in Arkan's house and giving birth to his daughter, meets a rich Armenian merchant from Mosul who promises to help her escape and marry her. His only condition is that she does not take her child with her. The desperate woman kills her daughter, not wanting her to be brought up as a Muslim girl by the Kurdish family she despises.[63]

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[57] Qaṣrānī, *Aṭ-Ṭuyūr al-'amyā'*, pp. 111–122.

[58] Ibidem, pp. 123–130.

[59] Cf. Armenian women's testimonies about how they were treated in their owners' houses, in: Hovannisian, *Intervention and Shades of Altruism*, pp. 8–9. The same motif of an Armenian woman being abducted by a Kurdish man and mishandled in his home village appears in the novel *Bavfileh* (Proselyte, 2009) by the Kurdish author Jacob Tilermenî, see: Çelik and Öpengin, *Armenian Genocide in the Kurdish Novel*, pp. 7, 9.

[60] Cf. Miller and Touryan Miller, *Survivors*, pp. 130–143. On orphanages for Armenian children, see: Sanasarian, *Gender Distinction*, pp. 455–457; Ekmekcioglu, *Climate for Abduction*, pp. 534–542; Watenpaugh, *'Are There Any Children for Sale?'*, pp. 290–293; Lorne Shirinian, *Orphans of the Armenian Genocide with Special Reference to the Georgetown Boys and Girls in Canada*, in: *Armenian Genocide Legacy*, pp. 44–66; Darbinyan and Peroomian, *Children: The Most Vulnerable Victims*, pp. 63–69.

[61] Cf. a case of discouraging Armenians from conversion to Islam, in: Hovannisian, *Intervention and Shades of Altruism*, p. 10. For more about forced conversions of Armenian women and children, see: Akçam, *Young Turks Crime*, pp. 210–220.

[62] Cf. descriptions of the decent treatment of vulnerable Armenians by Turks, Kurds and Arabs, in: Miller and Touryan Miller, *Survivors*, pp. 198–201; Sanasarian, *Gender Distinction*, pp. 457–458; Hovannisian, *Intervention and Shades of Altruism*, pp. 9–10; Dadrian, *Children as Victims of Genocide*, pp. 436–437.

[63] Qaṣrānī, *Aṭ-Ṭuyūr al-'amyā'*, pp. 131–166.

In Mosul, Kohar lives in a palace located at the Tigris (Diğla) River. However, neither her husband's tenderness, their prosperous life, nor her being pregnant again, makes her happy. She struggles with the burden of overwhelming guilt. Nonetheless, the heroine tries to find her brothers, but does so in vain. At the same time, Sheikh Ghazi decides that her brother Hosib (Ḥūsīb) will travel with other Armenian survivors to Aleppo (Ḥalab) in order to meet orphaned Armenian girls, who will become their wives.[64] Kohar's younger brother, Krikor (Krīkūr) leaves his foster father's house to live among Arab Bedouins.[65]

Finally, Kohar's crime leads to her tragic end. One day, the depressed heroine encounters Boghos, who does not want to hear about her love anymore. She also manages to reunite with Hosib.[66] But her joy at finding her brothers does not last long, as the vengeful Arkan sneaks into her palace, where he suffocates his traitorous wife, and then runs away.[67]

Stories Told by Descendants of Victims

The Streams of Hearts by In'ām Kağağī [68] focuses on a group of exiled Iraqis living in Paris in the 1980s. They are bound together by ties of friendship built on the sense of their Iraqiness despite differences in age, gender, ethnicity, religion and political views. For this reason, their meetings constitute an essential element of their everyday life in France. In many chapters of the novel, their stories are narrated by a nameless main character, an intellectual disillusioned with the political situation in his country ruled by the Baath Party, of which he was once a member. His friend, a man called Zamzam, is under surveillance by Iraqi embassy personnel as a former member of the Iraqi Communist Party. But even in exile, he remains involved in politics and participates in pro-Palestinian demonstrations. The major character establishes a romantic relationship with a woman named Sarab (Sarāb). She escaped from Iraq by using a false passport after having been persecuted and imprisoned as a consequence of her pro-communist activities. Sarab is not

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[64] See the information about arranged marriages with Armenian orphans, in: Sanasarian, *Gender Distinction*, p. 457.

[65] Qaṣrānī, *Aṭ-Ṭuyūr al-'amyā'*, pp. 167–180.

[66] Cf. eyewitness accounts of reunion of Armenian siblings, in: Miller and Touryan Miller, *Survivors*, pp. 145–149.

[67] Qaṣrānī, *Aṭ-Ṭuyūr al-'amyā'*, pp. 181–190.

[68] In'ām Kağağī was born in Baghdad in 1952. She studied journalism and worked in this field, and then she moved to France in 1979. She obtained a PhD degree at Sorbonne University in Paris, where she has been living until today. She works for the "Asharq Al-Awsat" newspaper. She authored a biography of a well-known Iraqi painter's wife, entitled *Lūrnā. Sanawātuhā ma'a Salīm Ǧawād* (Lorna. Her Years with Salim Jawad, Bayrūt 1998), and a work containing excerpts from literary texts written by Iraqi women authors, entitled *Paroles d'Irakiennes* (Words of Iraqi Women, Paris 2003). Since her literary debut, i.e. the novel under discussion in this article, she has written the following novels: *Al-Ḥafīda al-amirīkiyya* (The American Granddaugther, Bayrūt 2008), *Ṭaššārī* (Dispersion, Bayrūt 2013), and *An-Nabīḍa* (The Outcast, Bayrūt 2017). See: as-Sā'idī, *Taǧalliyyātuhunna*, p. 117.

meant to live a long and happy life in Paris – she is diagnosed with a serious disease and dies shortly thereafter.[69]

The Iraqi friends usually meet in the apartment of the nameless protagonist's elderly neighbour, an Armenian woman called Kashaniyya Khatun (Kāšāniyya Ḫātūn). One day, she is asked by Zamzam to relate her life story in front of the camera as a part of an oral history project for his doctoral thesis on the modern history of Iraq. The woman begins her narrative as follows:

> "My name is Kashaniyya and I am a daughter of the jeweller Misak Sammakian (Mīsāk Sammāqyān). My mother came to Mosul with my elder sister after they had survived the massacre of Armenians, in which my father, my two brothers, and the rest of my family were killed. My mother was pregnant with me, or maybe it was really my sister, who had been raped by those rough men along with hundreds of unfortunate girls. So, they said that it was my mother who was pregnant, and she kept the secret in order to protect herself and her daughter from a scandal."[70]

Afterwards, Kashaniyya tells Zamzam that he should not ask questions about how they got to Mosul and who saved them because she does not know the answers. She was told that her mother could not stop crying until she died, after which her sister was sent to a convent. Kashaniyya was adopted by a Muslim woman from Mosul when she was just a few months old. The child was breast-fed by the foster mother and treated in the same way as her other daughters. In subsequent years, the Muslim woman would send the girl to an Armenian church every Sunday. She neither forced her adoptive daughter to convert to Islam, nor demanded from her to wear a cloak (*'abā'*). At this point, Kashaniyya interrupts her story and asks Zamzam why he wants to record her. He replies that she is a part of Iraq's modern history, and thus her memories are an important testimony. He adds that one cannot find such details in historical books, and that is why they must be saved from oblivion. In his opinion, sharing her memories is a patriotic act. After all, she is a good citizen of Iraq. Upon his request, the elderly woman proceeds to narrate about her further experiences. She lived in the house of her adoptive mother for many years. She fasted with her Muslim family during Ramadan, but she neither forgot her religion, nor her origins, nor the atrocities suffered by her Christian relatives. When Kashaniyya grew up, she would visit her sister at the convent. The sister revealed to her other facts about their Armenian family and their former life in Deir al-Zour (Dayr az-Zawr).[71]

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[69] For more information about other characters and the contents of the novel, see: Ibrāhīm as-Sabtī, *"Sawāqī al-qulūb" li-al-kātiba al-'irāqiyya In'ām Kağağī: azamātinā wa-kabawātinā 'alā ṭāwila ġarība fī bayt lam yantami ilaynā*, "Al-Quds", 1 August 2006, no. 5342, p. 12; Adrianna Maśko*, Refleksje o emigracji w dwóch powieściach irackiej pisarki In'am Kaczaczi*, "Przegląd Orientalistyczny" 1/2 (2016), pp. 157–158.

[70] Kağağī, *Sawāqī al-qulūb*, p. 21. For more about the difficult situation of Armenian women who became pregnant by their rapists, see: Ekmekcioglu, *Climate for Abduction*, p. 523.

[71] Kağağī, *Sawāqī al-qulūb*, pp. 21–23.

The heroine continues to tell her life story during subsequent meetings with her Iraqi friends. She remembers that one day when she was a young woman she met a foreigner in the Armenian church in Mosul. It turned out that he was a French aristocrat and archaeologist captivated by Iraq and its ancient monuments. And so, Kashaniyya became Philippe's wife and moved with him to Baghdad, where he worked in a museum for many years. Despite his emotional attachment to his second homeland, Philippe was refused Iraqi citizenship. In his old age, he felt unwelcome in Iraq, and therefore returned with Kashaniyya to France. After his death, she lived alone because their children settled in other parts of the world.[72]

As for *An Iraqi in Paris* by Ṣamū'īl Šam'ūn,[73] its large first part is based on the author's memories of his adult life, initially in the Middle East and North Africa, and later in France. The main character recounts his adventures after leaving Iraq, and his dreams of becoming a famous director in Hollywood. In exile, the protagonist has to confront his compound identity, consisting of his Middle Eastern, Iraqi and Assyrian sub-identities.[74]

The second part of the novel, entitled *The Itinerant Seller and the Cinema*,[75] sheds light on Šam'ūn's childhood in the 1960s, which he spent in an Assyrian settlement, once a civil cantonment within the perimeter of the Al-Habbaniyyah (al-Ḥabbāniyya) former British air base.[76] An eight-year-old major character in this part of the narrative, named Joey (Ǧūayy), lives with his poor Assyrian family among neighbours of various ethnic origins, works as an itinerant food seller, and becomes a pupil at a local school.[77] The quiet existence led by Joey's community is disrupted by a curfew introduced in the settlement in the summer of 1968, following the second Baathist military coup in Baghdad.[78] Three months later, the Assyrian, Kurdish, Turkmen and Persian families are ordered to leave

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[72] Ibidem, pp. 25–26, 42–44, 68–69, 94–97, 127–128.

[73] Ṣamū'īl Šam'ūn was born in 1956 to Assyrian parents in Al-Habbaniyyah. In 1979, he left Iraq and subsequently lived in Damascus, Amman, Beirut, Nicosia, Cairo and Tunis. In 1985, he settled in Paris, where he founded a small printing house for contemporary Arabic literature. He has lived in London since 1996; there he co-founded the "Banipal" literary magazine in 2000 and continues to be its editor. He is also the author of two poetry collections and the autobiographical novel under discussion. See: *Samuel Shimon*, "Banipal. Magazine of Modern Arabic Literature", Viewed 6 April 2018, <http://www.banipal.co.uk/contributors/62/samuel-shimon/>.

[74] Šam'ūn, *'Irāqī fī Bārīs*, pp. 11–190. For more on the main character's complex identity, see: Ḫawla Bū Baṣala, *Al-Huwiyya wa-al-intimā' fī riwāyat "'Irāqī fī Bārīs" li-Ṣamū'īl Šam'ūn*, "Mağallat Dirāsāt" 7/1 (Fabrāīr 2018), pp. 107–117, Viewed 4 April 2018, <https://www.asjp.cerist.dz/en/article/38551>; Fāṭima A'riǧī and 'Adnān Ṭahmāsibī, *At-Ta'ddudiyya aṯ-ṯaqāfiyya fī riwāyat "'Irāqī fī Bārīs" li-Ṣamū'īl Šam'ūn*, "Mağallat al-Ādāb" 123 (2017), pp. 129–146, Viewed 27 November 2018, <https://www.iasj.net/iasj?func=fulltext&aId=134584>.

[75] For a fragment of this part of the novel in English, see: Samuel Shimon, *The Street Vendor and the Movies*, in: *Contemporary Iraqi Fiction. An Anthology*, (ed. and trans.) Shakir Mustafa, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse 2008, pp. 137–155.

[76] On the Assyrian civil cantonment within the British Royal Air Force camp perimeter, see: Marta Woźniak, *Współcześni Asyryjczycy i Aramejczycy. Bliskowschodni chrześcijanie w poszukiwaniu tożsamości narodowej*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2014, pp. 114–116; Donabed, *Reforging a Forgotten History*, pp. 97, 125.

[77] Šam'ūn, *'Irāqī fī Bārīs*, pp. 192–255.

[78] On the Revolution of July 17th, see e.g.: Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000, pp. 191–192.

their houses, since they are deemed by the ruling nationalists to be "remnants of British colonialism."[79] The boy is separated from his closest relatives and lives three years with the family of his Iranian neighbour and employer in Ramadi (ar-Ramādī), a city inhabited mainly by conservative Sunni Muslims.[80]

During his childhood years in Al-Habbaniyyah, Joey is strongly influenced by an Assyrian man named Kyriakos (Qiryāqūs), who introduces the boy to Western cinema, which becomes their common passion. Kyriakos also makes Joey aware of the painful history of their Assyrian community by telling him the story of his own family, after the boy asks him why he is an orphan. The forty-year-old man replies that the majority of adult Assyrian residents of the settlement were orphans, just like Joey's parents.[81] In response to the main character's further questions, Kyriakos starts to narrate what happened:

> "Well, I will tell you this movie. In the summer of 1933, I was a twelve-year-old boy. It was late in the evening and we were reading our lessons by the light of a lantern. We heard knocking on the door, just like in the movies, Joey. I got up to open the door, but my father got there first. He had barely opened the door, when five or six masked men stormed into the house. I saw one of them plunge his dagger into my father's neck and throw him to the ground. The others stabbed my mother in the chest. I ran inside where Virginia was sitting. I tried to get her out through the back window facing the street, but she refused and wanted to go to see what had happened to my father and mother. I was trembling with fear when I saw two masked men approaching us with daggers. And just as I had seen a knife sink into my mother's chest, I saw the same thing happen to Virginia. I don't know how I made it to the window, threw myself out of the house and crawled along the narrow downward paths. It was a terrifying night. Dozens of masked men broke into the houses of Assyrians and killed the inhabitants. I saw the bodies of women, children, the elderly and young men lying on the thresholds of houses and on the paths. Dozens of cut-off heads were dumped on street corners like immovable balls. Women were wailing as the killers chased them with knifes, axes and thick sticks."[82]

Kyriakos subsequently describes how he survived with the help of an English officer, Sergeant Mike, who encountered the boy on a road, put him into his jeep and sheltered him in his house in Mosul. The officer explained to the orphaned protagonist that his

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[79] For detailed information about Baathist politics towards the Assyrians in the 1960s–1980s, see: Donabed, "Iraq and the Assyrian Unimagining", pp. 138–220.

[80] Šam'ūn, *'Irāqī fī Bārīs*, pp. 294–301. See also a description of the novel in: Adrianna Maśko, *Emigration of Christians from Iraq as Reflected in Selected Post-2003 Novels*, "Rocznik Orientalistyczny" 1/73 (2020), pp. 80–82.

[81] Šam'ūn, *'Irāqī fī Bārīs*, p. 256.

[82] Ibidem, p. 257.

countrymen had known that the Kurds would carry out massacres against the Assyrians at any moment.[83] Sergeant Mike later learned that a number of Iraqi soldiers had also participated in the mass murder, which was soon called "the massacre in Simele,"[84] and that King Ghazi (Ġāzī) had approved this action.[85] Joey then asks Kyriakos what the word "massacre" means and remembers his mother saying that the Assyrians liked the king. The man clarifies to the boy that King Ghazi was forced to accept these criminal acts. This was because a Kurdish commander of the Iraqi army, called Bakr Sidqi (Bakr Ṣidqī), intended to attack the royal palace in Baghdad if the king opposed the decision made by the Kurds to slaughter the Assyrians.[86] Afterwards, Joey asks Kyriakos why the Kurds want to kill the Assyrians, since most of the boy's friends were of Kurdish origin. The man explains to him that the Kurds claimed that northern Iraq was their country and they did not want other nations to live there.[87] After Joey asks what the word "nations" means, Kyriakos answers: "It means people. Assyrians, Arabs, Kurds, Iranians, Turkmen, Jews and Armenians are nations, that is, human communities that live in Iraq."[88] Before the boy asks him another question, the man points out that the young hero should not pay so much attention to the past. If the Assyrians had been stronger than the Kurds – as the adult protagonist argues – they would possibly have killed them, just like the Arabs did. Kyriakos concludes that all Iraqis are victims of backwardness. The inquisitive boy asks what the word "backwardness" means and his companion replies: "When a man thinks in the same way as a sheep thinks, it means that he is backward."[89]

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[83] For information about how the British government perceived the Assyrian crisis in Iraq and how officers of the British Military Mission reacted to the Simele massacre, see: Khaldun S. Husry, *The Assyrian Affair of 1933 (II)*, "International Journal of Middle East Studies" 5/3 (1974), pp. 354–359.

[84] On the Simele massacre and the events that preceded and followed it, see: first, the earliest accounts: R.S. Stafford, *Iraq and the Problem of the Assyrians*, "International Affairs" 13/2 (1934), pp. 159–183, Viewed 28 October 2018, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2603135?seq=27#metadata_info_tab_contents>, and its other version – R.S. Stafford, *The Tragedy of the Assyrians*, London 1935, reproduced by Assyrian International News Agency, chapter 18, Viewed 28 October 2018, <http://www.aina.org/books/tota.htm>; Yusuf Malek, *The British Betrayal of the Assyrians*, London 1935, reproduced by Assyrian International News Agency; and secondly, some later studies: Khaldun S. Husry, *The Assyrian Affair of 1933 (I)*, "International Journal of Middle East Studies" 5/2 (1974), pp. 161–176; Husry, *Assyrian Affair of 1933 (II)*, pp. 344–360; Sargon Donabed, *Rethinking Nationalism and an Appellative Conundrum: Historiography and Politics in Iraq*, "National Identities" 14/2 (2012), pp. 115–138; Donabed, *Reforging a Forgotten History*, pp. 93–122; Sargon Donabed, *Persistent Perseverance. A Trajectory of Assyrian History in the Modern Age*, in: *Routledge Handbook of the Minorities in the Middle East*, (ed.) Paul S. Rowe, Routledge, London 2018, p. 121.

[85] The Simele massacre took place in August 1933, when Iraq was under the rule of King Fayṣal (since 1921). After his death in September 1933, Crown Prince Ġāzī became his successor. For more about their reaction to the slaughter, see: Husry, *Assyrian Affair of 1933 (II)*, pp. 348–352.

[86] On Bakr Ṣidqī and his role in the massacres of Assyrians in Iraq in the 1930s, see: Husry, *Assyrian Affair of 1933 (II)*, pp. 346; 352–353; Donabed, "Iraq and the Assyrian Unimagining", p. 70; Hopkins, "Simele Massacre as a Cause", p. 4.

[87] Šam'ūn, *'Irāqī fī Bārīs*, pp. 257–258.

[88] Ibidem, p. 258.

[89] Ibidem, pp. 258–259. It is worth mentioning that other authors of Assyrian origin described the events of 1933 in their novels, for example Ivan Kakovitch in *Mount Simele* (2001). See: Eden Naby, *Review: Putting*

Stories Told by the Ghosts of Victims

Waiting for Farag Allah al-Qahhar by Sa'dī al-Māliḥ[90] can be classified as a postmodern novel due to its open ending and intricate structure unlimited by the boundaries of time and space.[91] It employs shifting narrative voices as well as multiple literary, theatrical and cinematic techniques, and contains frequent intertextual references. In this ambiguous work, realistic scenes set in concrete geographical locations merge with surreal visions and dreams.[92] The first chapter, told from a third-person omniscient perspective, introduces the character of an ill elderly woman who, together with her daughters, goes to an Assyrian church in order to attend Easter Mass. The woman suddenly notices a candle moving mysteriously around the church. In its flame, she spots the face of a man whom she once saw in her childhood. The man tells her that his name is Farag Allah al-Qahhar. In a flashback, she then recalls getting lost as a little girl in a valley after World War I. When night falls, the girl sees a candle in the sky and the face of that man in its flame. He tells her not to be afraid. The next morning, the lost child is taken by a caravan of people speaking an unknown language. A year later, she is found by her father in their village. Eighty years have passed since these events, and the old lady remembers that this strange face in the candle light also appeared before her husband in the 1930s – then a sixteen-year-old boy – after he survived an accident. When Mass is over, the woman returns to her house, hands her daughters an envelope, and asks them to give it to their brother, who should find Farag Allah al-Qahhar; she then dies.[93]

Assyrians into Middle East Literature: Memoirs and Novels, "Middle East Studies Association Bulletin" 41/1 (June 2007), p. 39.

[90] Sa'dī al-Māliḥ was born in Ankawa ('Aynkāwā) in the Erbil Governorate in 1951. In the 1970s, he was educated as a teacher in Erbil. He also wrote articles for various Iraqi newspapers and magazines. In 1983, he graduated from the Maxim Gorky Literature Institute in Moscow. In 1986, he received a PhD in contemporary Arabic literature from the USRR Academy of Sciences. In 1986–1987, he worked as a teacher of Arabic language and literature in Tashkent. He then moved to Tripoli to teach Russian language, whereas in 1990 he went to Montreal, where he set up a weekly newspaper for Arab immigrants and was its editor-in-chief until 1999. In 1999–2001, he worked as an editor-in-chief of an Emirate magazine, and after his return to Canada – as an Arabic language teacher. In 2005, he returned to Iraq, where he was appointed head of the Department of English Language at Salahaddin University in Erbil. He also presided over the Syriac General Directorate of Culture and Arts in Ankawa. He died in 2014. He authored four novels, four collections of short stories, and a study on Syriac culture. See: "Sa'dī al-Māliḥ", *Ǧā'izat Kātārā li-ar-riwāya al-'arabiyya*, Viewed 27 December 2018, <http://www.kataranovels.com/novelist/%D8%B3%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD/>.

[91] For an extensive analysis of different types of time in the novel, see: Nabhān Ḥasūn as-Sa'dūn, *Taqanāt az-zaman as-sardī fī riwāyat (Fī intiẓār Faraǧ Allāh al-Qahhār)*, in: *Asrār as-sard – min aḍ-ḍākira ilā al-ḥulm. Qirā'āt fī sardiyyāt Sa'dī al-Māliḥ*, (ed.) Muḥammad Ṣābir 'Abīd, Dār al-Ḥiwār li-an-Našr wa-at-Tawzī', Al-Lāḏiqiyya 2012, pp. 193–239.

[92] For more information, see: Muḥammad Ṣābir 'Abīd, *Aṣ-Ṣan'a ar-riwā'iyya wa-īqā' al-mawrūṯ*, in: *Asrār as-sard*, pp. 137–157; Fayṣal Ġāzī an-Nu'aymī, *Maqāmāt al-'abaṯ. Qirā'a fī riwāyat (Fī intiẓār Faraǧ Allāh al-Qahhār)*, in: *Asrār as-sard*, pp. 160–162, 172–181; 'Alī Ṣalībī al-Marsūmī, *Marǧi'iyyāt at-taškīl as-sardī. Qirā'a fī riwāyat (Fī intiẓār Faraǧ Allāh al-Qahhār)*, in: *Asrār as-sard*, pp. 241–258.

[93] al-Māliḥ, *Fī intiẓār*, pp. 7–19.

The next ten chapters are set in a café in a luxury hotel in a Persian Gulf country in the 2000s. An Iraqi man called Abraham (Ibrāhīm), who turns out to be the son of the old Assyrian lady, is waiting for a meeting with Farag Allah al-Qahhar. He observes an American woman with whom he first dances on the dance floor, and subsequently accompanies her to her apartment.[94] Then it seems that the same man is sitting at a table and reading a book while listening to melodies played by a Russian violinist. These melodies evoke memories of his homeland.[95] The violinist, in turn, embodies in Abraham's eyes a Babylonian goddess whose ancient guitar has the power to carry him across time and space.[96]

The melodies played by Nina (Nīnā) take the protagonist into dark and bloody spaces in 20th-century Iraq. In these imaginary spaces, he comes upon the ghosts of victims persecuted and/or killed on the orders of successive Iraqi rulers. The spectres attempt to comprehend what has happened to them. First, Abraham notices the ghost of a Kurdish man who recounts the circumstances of his death during the "Al-Anfal campaign" (*ḥamlat Al-Anfāl*), led by Saddam Husayn's regime against the Kurds in 1988.[97] Along with many others, the Kurdish man was transported by truck to a desert where Iraqi soldiers dug mass graves and shot them. The wounded man survived the massacre, but the next day he fell prey to wild birds. His ghost has seen other wandering spirits of dead Kurdish women and men, both buried in mass graves in the desert and killed in chemical attacks in the town of Halabja (Ḥalabğa).[98] Afterwards, Abraham meets the ghost of a Shia Muslim called Abd al-Husayn (ʻAbd al-Ḥusayn). This man was torn apart by wild dogs on a street in Basra (Al-Baṣra)[99] after he came out of his house looking for his missing brother, who participated in an uprising against Baathist authorities in 1991.[100] That night, Abd al-Husayn sees several dead bodies lying in the streets, and his brother's body among them.[101] Successively, the main protagonist comes across the apparitions of Assyrians killed in the Simele massacre. Last but not least, Abraham encounters the ghost of an Iraqi Jew, doctor Job (Ayyūb). The spectre narrates his journey to the graves of Iraqi Jews who settled in Galilee (Al-Ğalīl) after they had been expelled from their homeland

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[94] Ibidem, pp. 20–26, 123–131.

[95] Ibidem, pp. 35–42.

[96] Ibidem, pp. 101–106. For more on musical references and the role of music in the novel, see: an-Nuʻaymī, *Maqāmāt al-ʻabaṭ*, pp. 181–190.

[97] On the Al-Anfal campaign, see: Michael J. Kelly, *Ghosts of Halabja. Saddam Hussein and the Kurdish Genocide*, Praeger Security International, Westport 2008.

[98] al-Māliḥ, *Fī intiẓār*, pp. 43–50.

[99] The wild dogs may symbolise Baathist authorities or their subordinates. See: Fayṣal Ġāzī Muḥammad an-Nuʻaymī, *Min al-ḥadaṯ at-tārīḫī ilā ta'sīs al-qudsī. Qirā'a fī riwāyat "Fī intiẓār Faraǧ Allāh al-Qahhār" li-Sa'dī al-Māliḥ*, "Maǧallat at-Tarbiya wa-al-ʻIlm" 20/4 (2013), p. 243, Viewed 4 November 2018, <https://www.iasj.net/iasj?func=fulltext&aId=90009>.

[100] On the 1991 uprising in Iraq, see: Tripp, *History of Iraq*, pp. 255–256.

[101] al-Māliḥ, *Fī intiẓār*, pp. 51–58.

in 1948.[102] In addition, the ghost of Job reports about his encounters with the apparitions of other Jews stripped of their Iraqi citizenship; they once lived in the vicinity of the town of Zakho (Zāḫū) in Iraqi Kurdistan. One of these spirits, named Jacob (Ya'qūb), reveals to the doctor's ghost that he spent ten years of his life, from 1948 to 1958, in an Iraqi jail where he was tortured and ordered to leave the country. In spite of these prison hardships, Jacob refused, and so he was arrested again in 1963.[103]

During Abraham's magical journey to the village of Simele, he meets with numerous spectres that have been present there for about seventy years. They all want to share their stories, but the hero asks that one of them speak on all of their behalf. They choose the apparition of Kurial (Kūryāl), who supported the Iraqi government up until the time the tragedy occurred.[104] The ghost remembers that tensions in the country presaged the looming catastrophe. He mentions that official newspapers would increasingly incite Iraqi citizens from other ethno-religious groups against fellow members of his community.[105] Moreover, the government threatened to kill the Assyrians, which actually happened.[106] The authorities ordered the inhabitants of a number of Assyrian villages to head to Simele, the biggest settlement in the area, where the only police station was located. After receiving assurances from the local police that they would be safe, Kurial brought many of his relatives and other tribe members to Simele, so that there were more than five hundred Assyrians assembled in the village.[107] His spirit proceeds to describe the frightening events as follows:

> "After the authorities made sure that the Assyrians would obey their orders, did not have weapons, and the majority of them were not fighters, a brigade of soldiers arrived and surrounded the village. Then, a squadron of soldiers with machine guns approached the police station and opened fire on the defenceless people crowded in its square, mercilessly. No one survived. Afterwards, they pulled prisoners out of the police jail, stabbed them with bayonets in their bellies, and desecrated their bodies. While this

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[102] On the expulsion of Jews from Iraq, see: Moshe Gat, *The Jewish Exodus from Iraq 1948–1951*, Routledge, London 2013; *Iraq's Last Jews: Stories of Daily Life, Upheaval, and Escape from Modern Babylon*, (ed.) Tamar Morad et al., Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2008.

[103] al-Māliḥ, *Fī intiẓār*, pp. 84–91.

[104] In the earliest accounts of the Simele massacre, their authors mention that the Assyrian leader in the village, named Gabriel (Goriyyil), was a supporter of the Iraqi government. When he came out of his house to ask for mercy, he was killed by soldiers who surrounded the settlement. See: Stafford, *Iraq and the Problem of the Assyrians*, p. 173; Stafford, *Tragedy of the Assyrians*, pp. 144–145; Malek, *British Betrayal*, p. 118.

[105] Some historical studies report that on the 29th June 1933, members of the Iraqi parliament gave speeches against the Assyrians that were then published by several Iraqi newspapers, among others the "Al-Istiqlāl" newspaper. See: Donabed, "Iraq and the Assyrian Unimagining", p. 67; Hopkins, "Simele Massacre as a Cause", p. 48.

[106] On the attacks on Assyrians that preceded the Simele massacre, see: Malek, *British Betrayal*, p. 117; Donabed, "Iraq and the Assyrian Unimagining", pp. 66–67.

[107] al-Māliḥ, *Fī intiẓār*, pp. 77–79.

> was happening, we were terrified. Women and children started to cry and wail, whereas men insisted that I should act, since I was a supporter of the government and its politics. So, I found the courage within myself to go out in the company of my son, William, with the hope to meet with the local chief of police and remind him of his promises. I carried my documents in one hand and a white flag in the other. I was sure that, at least, I could do something to save the people who found refuge in my house. But hardly had I reached the door, when a hail of bullets was fired in my direction. I turned around to return from whence I came out. I noticed that my young son had fallen down dead in front of me, and his mother rushed toward us. Then, another hail of bullets hit me in the back. Blood spurted from my body and the world was spinning around me. I fell on the threshold of my house. In the first minutes, when I was almost unconscious, I felt heavy shoes tread on my body and a terrible throbbing pain in my head. I heard screams and voices moving away quickly. And I do not know anymore about what happened."[108]

The course of subsequent events is narrated by the ghost of a girl who witnessed Kurial's death. The spectre recalls that soldiers entered his house and murdered everyone they encountered. The frightened people began to run away, but the soldiers pursued them and killed them with bullets and bayonets. While the combatants were busy killing the men, several women and children were able to slip away. The ghost of the girl was among those who managed to flee the village. But she was captured by other soldiers surrounding the settlement, and so were the other women and children who had just survived the slaughter.[109] Furthermore, the spirit of the girl reports that a brigade commander approached the trapped women and ordered them to take off their clothes, threatening them with being shot. A girl named Shammiran (Šammīrān) called upon the women to resist. The commander advanced toward her and demanded she remove her clothes. When Shammiran started to curse him, he ordered his subordinates to bring him a can of kerosene and threatened to set the girl on fire. He ultimately did so as she did not want to back down. The other women watched the burning girl and did not dare to approach her. They were tied up and raped by the soldiers. The following morning, they were led towards the border with Syria. They walked barefoot, and they were exhausted and thirsty. When they finally were allowed to drink water from a well, it turned out that it was contaminated with the blood of murdered Assyrian men. Despite that, the women were forced to drink it.[110] Later on, fellow members of their community learned that more

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[108] Ibidem, pp. 79–80.

[109] Cf. descriptions of the Simele massacre, in: Stafford, *Iraq and the Problem of the Assyrians*, p. 174; Malek, *British Betrayal of the Assyrians*, p. 118; Donabed, "Iraq and the Assyrian Unimagining", p. 70; Donabed, *Persistent Perseverance*, p. 121.

[110] Cf. information about how the Assyrian women captured in Simele were treated, in: Stafford, *Iraq and the Problem of the Assyrians*, p. 175; Stafford, *Tragedy of the Assyrians*, p. 146; Malek, *British Betrayal*, p. 118.

than four hundred people were killed in the Simele massacre; the dead bodies remained in the village for four or five days. When the policemen could no longer bear their stench, the government sent a group of workers from Mosul to dig three mass graves.[111]

Conclusions: Literary Remediation of "Impact Events"

What connects the authors of the novels under discussion is not only their Iraqi nationality and Christian affiliation, but also their experience of living in diaspora in the West. They share a sense of uprootedness, and at the same time, a sense of themselves having multiple identities, which may be of great relevance for their literary reflections on the situation of ethno-religious minorities in Iraq. Yāsmīn Ḥanūš (Yasmeen Hanoosh), an Iraqi academic based in the United States, argues that the oeuvre of these and other Iraqi diasporic writers serves to "unsettle the models of ethno-religious belonging available outside of fiction." Moreover, according to the Iraqi literary critic, ʻAbd Allāh Ibrāhīm, cited by Ḥanūš, their output aims to articulate "Iraqi alternative identities" and deconstruct "unified, absolute identities."[112] In their novels, which often create a subversive discourse as opposed to mainstream narratives, "marginal Iraqi identities can legitimately narrate themselves or be narrated by an Iraqi Other."[113] Furthermore, these works do not focus on religious or ideological issues, but on the lives of representatives of marginalised groups in their socio-historical contexts.[114] This is why they constitute appropriate sites for handling the painful collective experiences of Iraq's minorities through the prism of the life stories of exemplary, albeit fictive members.

On the sixth page of *The Blind Birds*, Laylā Qaṣrānī makes the following dedication: "For those who died without a chance to reveal their tragedies. For the soul of my grandfather Khoshaba (Ḫūšābā), who left his son, an orphan in this world, in the high Hakkari (Hakkārī) Mountains."[115] On the next page, she thanks Nūrā Arīsyān for fact-checking the novel.[116] Qaṣrānī's literary text can be thus viewed from within the framework of literature produced by the third generation of the Armenian and Assyrian genocide writers.[117] However, the exiled Iraqi author does not construct her narrative based on

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[111] al-Māliḥ, *Fī intiẓār*, pp. 80–83. Cf. information about what happened with the bodies of killed Assyrian men, in: Stafford, *Iraq and the Problem of the Assyrians*, p. 175; Stafford, *Tragedy of the Assyrians*, p. 146.

[112] Yasmeen Hanoosh, *In Search of the Iraqi Other: Iraqi Fiction in Diaspora and the Discursive Reenactment of Ethno-Religious Identities*, "Humanities" 8/4, 157 (2019), 6 October 2019, Viewed 23 November 2019, <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0787/8/4/157>, p. 3.

[113] Ibidem, p. 11.

[114] Ibidem, p. 17.

[115] Qaṣrānī, *Aṭ-Ṭuyūr al-ʻamyāʼ*, p. 6.

[116] Ibidem, p. 7.

[117] See the following studies on other literary works dealing with the Armenian genocide, written by descendants of victims and survivors: Sona Haroutyunian, *Echoes of the Armenian Genocide in the Literature and Cinema*, "Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale" 51 (June 2015), pp. 46–50, Viewed 23 November 2018, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/dfaf/bdefe0a2bb7a73876cd30d3b8bc5847623ca.pdf>; Andrea Mironescu, *Quiet Voices, Faded*

the biography of her Assyrian grandfather.[118] Instead, she prefers to depict the fate of an imagined Armenian community living in a village in the vicinity of Diyarbakir, whose members experience atrocities similar to those faced by her ancestor. Hence, *The Blind Birds* can be also perceived as a "fiction of memory", as it "refers to the stories that individuals or cultures tell about their past" in order to define their individual or collective identity. These stories are "an imaginative (re)construction of the past in response to the current needs," as Birgit Neumann claims.[119] Qaṣrānī's dedication clearly points to her need to give voice to those whose tragedies were silenced. Her novel "constitutes an imaginative counter-memory, thereby challenging the hegemonic memory culture and questioning the socially established boundary between remembering and forgetting."[120] This is a shared counter-memory of the Armenians and Assyrians who suffered during the 1915–1916 genocide in the same way.

As already indicated, Qaṣrānī employs both a third-person omniscient point of view and dialogues by literary characters. Consequently, the reader has access to their thoughts and words concerning the trauma they were exposed to. According to Astrid Erll, this is what distinguishes literary texts that are privileged to present peoples' inner worlds and able to articulate what is almost impossible to articulate.[121] In Qaṣrānī's novel, the reader can thus penetrate the main heroine's mind in one of the moments she is experiencing the "death march": "Kohar found it hard to open her eyes in order to welcome the sun's rays that morning. She remembered the sight of her dead father, the warmth of his entrails, touching his blood and intestines, and the smell of rot. She wished she was dead."[122]

But the author of *The Blind Birds* not only uses a variety of literary techniques to convey the tragic dimensions of imaginary happenings in such a way that they closely resemble actual historical events, as well as the mental state of individuals experiencing trauma; she also refers to a number of elements of the Armenian folk tradition. Qaṣrānī's narrative incorporates, among other things, the lyrics of songs sung by Kohar's grandmother in their house in Turbazar and by a group of girls in the caravan of deportees, as well as the words of a lullaby sung by Kohar for her daughter in Arkan's house. In the last case, Kohar's singing of the lullaby in the Armenian language can be seen as an expression

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Photographs: Remembering the Armenian Genocide in Varujan Vosganian's 'The Book of Whispers', "Slovo" 29/2 (Summer 2017), pp. 20–39, Viewed 20 November 2018, <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1558244/1/3.%20Mironescu.pdf>. On the first, second and third generations of the Armenian genocide writers based in the United States, see: Barlow Der Mugrdechian, *The Theme of Genocide in Armenian Literature*, in: *Armenian Genocide Legacy*, pp. 273–286.

[118] It is noteworthy that most of the Assyrian survivors who reached Iraq came from the Hakkari Mountains, see: Donabed, "Iraq and the Assyrian Unimagining", p. 48; Donabed, *Reforging a Forgotten History*, pp. 71–81.

[119] In the broader sense of the term. In the narrow sense, Neumann uses this term to designate "texts which represent processes of remembering." See: Neumann, *Literary Representations of Memory*, p. 334; Birgit Neumann, *Literatur, Erinnerung, Identität*, in: *Gedächtniskonzepte der Literaturwissenschaft. Theoretische Grundlegung und Anwendungsperspektiven*, (ed.) Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, De Gruyter, Berlin 2005, p. 164.

[120] Neumann, *Literary Representations of Memory*, p. 339.

[121] Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis*, p. 196.

[122] Qaṣrānī, *Aṭ-Ṭuyūr al-'amyā'*, p. 103.

of her resistance to the oppression she suffered at the hands of her Muslim husband, his mother and grandmother. Interestingly enough, this lullaby depicts the agony of several Armenians wandering across the desert while numerous blind birds hover over their land.[123] It is worth recalling that the image of blind birds occurs also in the title of the novel, and therefore may symbolise both the horrific ordeal of Armenian (and Assyrian) people during the "death marches" and the cruelty of their perpetrators. In this manner, the writer emphasizes that the Armenian folk tradition is an important factor in shaping Armenian identity, as it testifies to its continuity by storing significant memories of the community. In particular, it immortalised the memories of the mass persecution in 1915–1916 that has left a deep and indelible mark on the collective identity of Armenians (and Assyrians) in the 20th and 21st centuries.[124]

What is more, Qaṣrānī participates in the process of remediation of memory[125] about the Armenian (and Assyrian) genocide. As stated by Astrid Erll, each "impact event" is a "transmedial phenomenon", a remembered event whose representations travel "from novels to drama, to movies, to series, and to the Internet."[126] Its remediation, however, is not limited to different literary and movie genres, because several authors of fictional and non-fictional works who belong to the second and third generations, as well as writers of other nationalities, tend to resort to historical information. Their memory about the "impact event" is thus, as Aleida Assmann notes, much more homogenous than the memory of the genocide survivors, "as it is reconstructed by historians and represented by public narratives, images, and films."[127] Indeed, the stories of Qaṣrānī's protagonists echo other literary stories of Christian victims of the late Ottoman persecution, as well as eyewitness testimonies and historical narratives,[128] since they include such events and incidents as: the killing of Armenian priests, regarded by the Turkish authorities as representatives of the minority's elite and local leaders of their urban and rural communities; mass murders of children in front of their parents; Armenian boys dressed in girls' clothes in order to protect

[123] Ibidem, pp. 14, 89–90, 147.

[124] It is worth mentioning that in his article devoted to the oral history of the Assyrians in Turkey, Ramazan Aras notices that narratives about this minority's past were transmitted from generation to generation through various narrative genres, such as life stories, songs, laments, lullabies, jokes, and family stories, which served to maintain their collective memory. See: Aras, *Assyrian/Syriac Oral History*, p. 270. One may assume that the same can be applied to those Armenians who once lived in that area.

[125] According to Astrid Erll, the term "remediation" refers to "multiple representations of memorable events in different media for long periods of time." See: Erll, *Literature, Film, and the Mediality*, p. 394.

[126] Ibidem, p. 395; Erll, *Memory in Culture*, p. 160.

[127] Aleida Assmann, *Memory, Individual and Collective*, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*, (ed.) Robert E. Goodin and Charles Tilly, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2006, p. 216. Cf. Çelik and Öpengin, *Armenian Genocide in the Kurdish Novel*, pp. 12–13; Haroutyunian, *Echoes of the Armenian Genocide*, p. 44; Mironescu, *Quiet Voices*, p. 22.

[128] See: Çelik and Öpengin, *Armenian Genocide in the Kurdish Novel*, pp. 12–13. The authors of the article state that many Kurdish novels about the fate of abducted and Islamized Armenian children were written as if they were based on witness accounts. Moreover, some studies on oral history, which include research carried out in the vicinity of Diyarbakir, confirm that the memories of Islamized Armenian survivors have been transmitted orally among the Kurdish population.

them from death; old people and children dying of exhaustion, hunger and thirst during "death marches"; the mass rape and abduction of Armenian women; the mass slaughter of displaced Armenian men; as well as taking care of Armenian orphans and searching for them.[129] By comparing Qaṣrānī's novel with both other fictional representations of the "first modern genocide" and factual narratives, the reader may reasonably get the impression that *The Blind Birds* is a literary work composed of various elements derived from other texts and extratextual reality. And yet, as Astrid Erll writes, "In the context of the fictional world, the repeated reality becomes a sign and takes on other meanings." And thus, "through this interplay between the real and the imaginary, fictional texts restructure cultural perception."[130]

In her press interviews, In'ām Kağağī states that despite the tragic reality of post-2003 Iraq, she returns in her novels to a time when Iraqis were more tolerant towards each other. She is also convinced that the country's strength comes from its ethno-religious diversity.[131] Kağağī illustrates that Iraqi tolerance and diversity, for which she longs in *The Streams of Hearts*, as exemplified by a group of friends living in Paris. The title of the work alludes to the Iraqi proverb "al-qulūb sawāqī", which in turn, refers to an emotional closeness between people. In a dialogue between the major character and Kashaniyya Khatun, the old lady mentions this proverb in order to describe their relationship. On the other hand, the protagonist says in his internal monologue that she reminds him of other Iraqi women with whom he felt emotionally attached: his mother, aunt and female neighbours.[132] What is also remarkable about Kağağī's novel is that all her characters have particular perspectives on their own experiences, both in Iraq and in exile, and on the political situation in their homeland in the 1980s. This multi-perspectival narration provides insight into their different memories, thereby allowing for a narrative about the collective Iraqi past.[133]

According to the Israeli researcher Ronen Zeidel, among the main factors shaping this diverse micro-community is Kashaniyya Khatun's Christian identity; and yet, she

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[129] See relevant references in the footnotes to the second section of the article. See also bibliographies of diaries, eyewitness accounts, memoirs and autobiographies, biographies, fictional works, films, and secondary material, with short descriptions of their contents, in: Peroomian, *Women and the Armenian Genocide*, pp. 16–24; Theriault, *Impact of Genocide on Young Armenians,* pp. 43–55; Darbinyan and Peroomian, *Children: The Most Vulnerable Victims*, pp. 75–83.

[130] Erll, *Memory in Culture*, pp. 149–150. In this context, Erll relates to the "*mimesis* theory" formulated by Paul Ricoeur, who distinguished: "*mimesis 1*", i.e. the prefiguration of the text and its reference to the already existent extratextual world, "*mimesis 2*", i.e. the textual configuration and operation of emplotment, and "*mimesis 3*", i.e. the refiguration by the reader. See: Ibidem, p. 152.

[131] See: aš-Šāriqa Salīm, *Ar-Riwā'iyya wa-aṣ-ṣuḥufiyya al-'irāqiyya In'ām Kağağī*, "Ğazāyirs", 8 November 2014, Viewed 28 November 2018, <https://www.djazairess.com/annasr/74229>; 'Abīr Yūnis, *In'ām Kağağī: aktubu li-udawwina sīrat 'Irāq zalzalathu al-ḥurūb*, "Al-Bayān", 13 February 2018, Viewed 28 November 2018, <https://www.albayan.ae/books/author-book/2018-02-13-1.3184787>.

[132] Kağağī, *Sawāqī al-qulūb*, p. 128.

[133] See: Neumann, *Literary Representations of Memory*, p. 338.

is apparently more of an Iraqi than an Armenian.[134] The former identity appears to be founded on the collective trauma of her Christian community. On the one side, the elderly lady hates everything that reminds her of Turkey. During a friends' meeting in her apartment, she yells at the main character when he recalls the Turkish name of a dish which his aunt would prepare in his childhood. He realizes that he dared say a forbidden word to a woman whose family was killed by "the grandsons of Janissaries". After a while, Kashaniyya Khatun clarifies to her friends that her Muslim adoptive mother used other names, not Turkish ones, for the dishes she cooked in order to respect her Armenian daughter's feelings.[135] Furthermore, the old lady admits in a dialogue with the main protagonist that she does not stay in touch with her daughter in Canada. She does not even say her name because she married a Turkish man: "In this world, there are many nations and ethnicities created by God: Arabs, Iranians, Africans, the British, the Portuguese, Serbs, Gypsies, the people of Gog and Magog… so why, then, the choice of this nameless one had to be a descendant of the Ottoman pashas?"[136] On the other side, Kashaniyya Khatun confronts herself with her love for an imaginary Armenia when she travels to the real country after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Four days later, she returns to Paris much disappointed: "I have lived my whole life singing the song 'Yerevan', learnt and passed down by members of my exiled nation from generation to generation. I had been dreaming of seeing that city before I died. But the stench of urine blocked our noses from the moment we put our feet on the ground at the airport in Yerevan. And the rest of the trip was no better."[137]

In comparison with *The Blind Birds*, in Kağağī's novel very little attention is devoted to particular scenes of the Armenian genocide. It rather deals with how remembrance of the tragic events impacts the formation of Kashaniyya Khatun's Armenian identity. This literary character can thus be examined by means of Marianne Hirsch's concept of "post-memory". As Hirsch notes:

> "Postmemory describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among with they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory's connection to the

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[134] Rūnīn Zaydal, *Al-Masīḥiyyūna fī ar-riwāya al-'irāqiyya*, in: *Al-Masīḥiyyūna fī Al-'Irāq*, p. 457. See also the English version of the article: Ronen Zeidel, *The Iraqi Novel and the Christians of Iraq*, "Journal of Levantine Studies" 4/2 (Winter 2014), p. 131, Viewed 5 April 2018, <https://levantine-journal.org/product/the-iraqi-novel-and-the-christians-of-iraq/>. Similarly, Yasmeen Hanoosh argues that the character of Kashaniyya is "a paradigm of an imagined national unity". See: Hanoosh, *In Search of the Iraqi Other*, p. 14.

[135] Kağağī, *Sawāqī al-qulūb*, pp. 63–64.

[136] Ibidem, p. 129.

[137] Ibidem, pp. 177–179.

> past is thus not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection and creation."[138]

As already indicated, Kashaniyya Khatun could not remember the massacre in which her family members were killed because she had not yet been born. Nonetheless, as a child and young woman, she listened to stories about her relatives' fates and the circumstances of their deaths told by her sister and foster mother. In the novel, there is no mention of whether her memories of those events were influenced by other narratives. But one can presume that through all the years of her long life, she learned more about the genocide from many other sources. As Marianne Hirsch claims, "family life, even in its most intimate moments, is entrenched in a collective imaginary shaped by public, generational structures of fantasy and projection and by a shared archive of stories and images that inflect the transmission of individual and familial remembrance."[139]

The character of Kashaniyya Khatun can thus be seen as embodying several other members of the Armenian community in exile who share a diasporic memory founded both on memories of the collective trauma[140] and romantic imaginations of their old homeland, the country of their Armenian ancestors.[141] Furthermore, this heroine can also be viewed as a representative of older generations of Armenians, and in a broader sense, of Iraqis, as she bequeaths both the memories of eyewitnesses of the genocide[142] and her own memories of other socio-political events in the 20th-century history of Iraq to younger generations of her exiled compatriots. She remembers, among other things, what happened in Mosul after the overthrow of the Hashemite monarchy in 1958.[143]

In an interview, Ṣamū'īl Šam'ūn emphasized that Al-Habbaniyyah in the 1960s, depicted in the second part of *An Iraqi in Paris*, "was a great example of coexistence between the different components of Iraqi society." In the novel, he "spoke about the life of harmony and coexistence that was prevalent at the time," but "this coexistence came

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[138] Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, "Poetics Today" 29/1 (2008), pp. 106–107, Viewed 10 December 2018, <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/ehrc/events/memory/poetics_today-2008-hirsch-103-28.pdf>. See also the following articles referring to the concept of post-memory in the field of oral history and dedicated to the transmission of genocide stories by successive generations of Armenians and Assyrians: Joyce Bynum, *Oral History and Modern Identity: A Case Study*, "Folklore: Maps & Territories" (Summer 1991), pp. 220–227; Sofia Numansen and Marinus Ossewaarde, *Patterns of Migrant Post-memory: the Politics of Remembering the Sayfo*, "Communication, Politics & Culture" 48/3 (2015), pp. 41–52.

[139] Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, p. 114. On Hirsch's concepts of "postmemory" and "postgeneration", see: Astrid Erll, *Generation in Literary History: Three Constellations of Generationality, Genealogy, and Memory*, "New Literary History" 45/3 (Summer 2014), pp. 397–400, Viewed 20 December 2018, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/558876/pdf>.

[140] See: Anthonie Holslag, *Memorization of the Armenian Genocide in Cultural Narratives*, in: *Armenian Genocide Legacy*, pp. 261–266.

[141] See: Numansen and Ossewaarde, *Patterns of Migrant Post-memory*, p. 46.

[142] See: Ibidem, p. 44.

[143] Kağağī, *Sawāqī al-qulūb*, pp. 154–155. On the 14th July Revolution, see: Tripp, *History of Iraq*, pp. 143–147.

to an end with the rise of both nationalist and religious ideologies."[144] In Ronen Zeidel's view, Šam'ūn's fictional settlement can be considered a microcosm of Iraq, whereas the identity of its Assyrian residents can be defined as secular-ethnic because it is based on history, community of origin and language, but at the same time, accepts Iraqi pluralism and the Others.[145] As the words spoken by the character of Kyriakos suggest, however, this kind of pacifist identity does not mean forgetting the wounds inflicted by members of other Iraqi communities in the past. In his dialogue with Joey revolving around the Simele massacre, the protagonist says to the boy that he should not pay much attention to the past events. This may be understood not as encouraging him to ignore the painful collective experiences of the Assyrians, but rather as convincing him that their past trauma should not determine his present relations with other Iraqis, be they Arabs or Kurds. And yet, Joey should also realize that the massacre greatly impacted the fate of his parents, Kyriakos and other Assyrians living in the settlement.

As in the case of Kashaniyya Khatun telling her life story to her Iraqi companions in Paris, the reader deals with the intergenerational transmission of traumatic stories in regard to Kyriakos conversing with Joey. But in contrast to the elderly Armenian lady in *The Streams of Hearts*, the Assyrian man in *An Iraqi in Paris* is shown as a direct witness (a twelve-year-old boy) of the extermination during which his family members were murdered. What is of significance is that he does not seem to be possessed by negative feelings, such as hatred towards the perpetrators and their descendants and a desire for revenge. The information he shares with Joey is much more accurate than that given by Kashaniyya Khatun to her friends. Kyriakos tells the boy his horrific story, which actually happened, as if it were a film. He adapts his narration and answers to Joey's questions so that the young protagonist understands. That is how he tries to explain to the boy that in exceptional circumstances people may become inhumane because of their backwardness, regardless of their ethnic and religious background. By so doing, Kyriakos uses his "personal voice", typically of the experimental mode of the rhetoric of collective memory. This gives the readers the impression that they are being confronted with an actual testimony. Moreover, it is not without significance that there are several factual details in Kyriakos' story that can be juxtaposed against information about the Simele massacre in historical texts. But Kyriakos' voice may also be considered a "communal voice", since he seems to speak on behalf of other orphaned inhabitants of the settlement. His experience becomes thereby paradigmatic of the ordeals experienced by other members of the Assyrian community.[146]

In discussing *Waiting for Farag Allah al-Qahhar*, it is essential to refer to Sa'dī al-Māliḥ's explanation in order to capture the main idea of his ambiguous work. The

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[144] Kaitlin Hawkins, *My Life as Cinema: A Conversation with Samuel Shimon*, "World Literature Today", November 2011, Viewed 10 October 2018, <https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2011/november/my-life-cinema-conversation-samuel-shimon>.

[145] Zaydal, *Al-Masīḥiyyūna fī ar-riwāya al-'irāqiyya*, p. 455; Zeidel, *Iraqi Novel*, p. 129.

[146] For more on the "communal voice", see: Birgit Neumann, *Erinnerung – Identität – Narration. Gattungstypologie und Funktionen kanadischer „Fictions of Memory"*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2005, pp. 160, 166–168.

writer points to a theological thought that has been rooted in the religious cultures of Iraq for thousands of years – in other words, a notion that was transferred from the ancient Babylonian culture to the later Semitic cultures. This is the concept of waiting for a saviour, popular especially among the most impoverished and excluded social groups suffering from persecution.[147] Whether they are Christians waiting for the reappearance of the Messiah or Shia Muslims waiting for the reappearance of Imam Mahdi, they all are waiting for the same person represented in al-Māliḥ's novel by the character of Farag Allah al-Qahhar.[148] As noted by the Arab researcher Muḥammad Šākir as-Sab'a, this character appears in the first chapter of the novel four times, before some members of the Assyrian community, while in the subsequent chapters, he does not appear at all.[149] In the context of Iraq's ancient and modern history to which al-Māliḥ's work refers, Farag Allah al-Qahhar may symbolise the hope for the future of all suppressed Iraqis.[150]

With this in mind, the aforementioned journey of the main protagonist, during which he travels to imagined spaces where he faces the ghosts of victims of various crimes committed by or with the permission of successive Iraqi regimes, should be addressed once again. This strange representation of Abraham's consciousness or "the imagination of alternative realities belongs to the privileges enjoyed by the symbolic form of literature."[151] In this alternative Iraqi reality, the spirits of victims from different ethno-religious groups wander around the places where they were killed as if they were waiting not only for salvation, but also to tell the living about their suffering and give testimony about their deaths. They speak with their own voices, relate the massacres in which they lost their lives, and indicate who was responsible for these horrible deeds. Among them are the ghosts of Assyrians slaughtered in Simele. They present their agony in such detail that the reader seems to be observing a re-staging of the very atrocities described in historical works. Through the employment of ghostly characters, "the novel gains an effective intensity that makes the story far more memorable than reciting the facts alone." They "provide a vehicle for conveying the ways in which the past threatens and unsettles the present."[152] This is how the literary narrative delves into the collective memory of Iraqis,

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[147] Ḥusayn Rašīd, *Sa'dī al-Māliḥ: aṭ-ṭaqāfa as-suryāniyya nahaḍat min kabwatihā ba'da sanawāt min al-'uzla wa-al-ḥiṣār*, "Al-Ḥiwār al-Mutamaddin", 7 August 2013, Viewed 11 October 2018, <http://www.m.ahewar.org/s.asp?aid=372214&r=0>.

[148] Cf. Zaydal, *Al-Masīḥiyyūna fī ar-riwāya al-'irāqiyya*, p. 456; Zeidel, *Iraqi Novel*, pp. 130–131; 'Abīd, *Aṣ-Ṣan'a ar-riwā'iyya*, pp. 150–152.

[149] Muḥammad Šākir as-Sab'a, *At-Tayh fī intiẓār Faraǧ Allāh al-Qahhār*, "Aš-Šarq al-Awsaṭ", 14 February 2003, Viewed 28 October 2018, <http://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?article=152699&issueno=8844#.XCj7EVxKjIV>.

[150] See: an-Nu'aymī, *Maqāmāt al-'abaṭ*, p. 172.

[151] Erll, *Memory in Culture*, p. 150; Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis*, p. 195.

[152] These words are taken from Rosanne Kenedy's interpretation of *Beloved* by Toni Morrison. In this novel, which deals with the dark era of slavery in American history, the character of a ghostly slave daughter plays a crucial role. See: Kenedy, *Trauma and Cultural Memory Studies*, p. 61. For a more comprehensive interpretation of Morrison's ghostly character, see: Vinci, *Ghost, Android, Animal*, pp. 85–122.

particularly those who have been marginalised and oppressed, and rewrites the modern history of their country, one far removed from the official historiographical narrative.[153]

Strikingly, none of the dreadful events is shown in al-Māliḥ's novel as being more important than the others, with all the victims being Iraqis who have shared the same calamitous fate. Moreover, the later mass murders appear as repetitions of the earlier ones. When the main character meets the ghost of a Kurdish man whose body was torn apart by falcons during the "Al-Anfal" campaign, the spectre mentions that after he survived the execution at the mass graves in the desert, he found a wounded old man amongst a pile of dead bodies. The elderly Kurd compared their massacre with "Farhud" (*al-Farhūd*).[154] This 1941 pogrom of Jews in Baghdad can be regarded as another "impact event" seared into the Iraqi collective memory.

To conclude, the four recent novels written by Iraqi authors of Christian origin perform the functions of alternative spaces in which a confrontation with the "wounded memory" of Iraq's ethno-religious minorities takes place. By depicting multiple forms of violence suffered by their members, these fictive narratives, just as the historical ones, can open, in a performative way, a previously closed past. However, they cope with this painful past in a less direct way, but still potentially informative and reflective. They have the ability to analyse traumatic events that happened in the past, as well as the emotional aspect of experiencing them.[155] Through the use of the experimental mode of the rhetoric of collective memory, these fictional texts, in the words of Birgit Neumann, "produce the past which they describe" and "configure memory representations because they select and edit elements of culturally given discourse."[156] By combining "the real and the imaginary, the remembered and the forgotten," they "explore the workings of memory," and therefore "offer new perspectives on the past."[157] Last but not least, by shaping the perception and knowledge of readers, these and other literary works impact their actions.[158]

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[153] See: an-Nu'aymī, *Maqāmāt al-'abaṭ*, p. 165.

[154] al-Māliḥ, *Fī intiẓār*, p. 47. On the 1941 massacre of the Jewish population in Baghdad, see: Daphne Tsimhoni, *The Pogrom (Farhud) against the Jews of Baghdad in 1941: Jewish and Arab Approaches*, in: *Remembering for the Future. The Holocaust in an Age of Genocide*, vol. I–III, (ed.) John K. Roth et al., Palgrave Macmillan, London 2001, pp. 570–588; Bashkin, *Other Iraq*, pp. 188–190; Orit Bashkin, *New Babylonians: A History of Jews in Modern Iraq*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2012, pp. 100–140. Interestingly enough, Sargon Donabed mentions that Eric Davies, a well-known researcher investigating the relationship between state power and historical memory in modern Iraq, compared the Simele massacre to *al-Farhūd* because he saw parallels between them, as far as the ethno-religious hatred incited by politicians is concerned. See: Donabed, *Rethinking Nationalism*, p. 422.

[155] See Dominick LaCapra, *History in Transit. Experience, Identity, Critical Theory*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London 2004, pp. 122, 131–132. Cf. Theriault, *Impact of Genocide on Young Armenians*, p. 37.

[156] Neumann, *Literary Representations of Memory*, p. 333.

[157] Ibidem.

[158] Erll, *Memory in Culture*, p. 155. See also: Çelik and Öpengin, *Armenian Genocide in the Kurdish Novel*, p. 3. In her article on Armenian survivors in Turkey forced to convert to Islam, Ayshe Gül Altinay stresses that various works of fiction, memoirs and studies published in the 2000s, as well as their enthusiastic reception by Turkish readers have contributed to the growing public interest in Islamized Armenians, see: Ayshe Gül Altinay, *Gendered Silences, Gendered Memories. New Memory Work on Islamized Armenians in Turkey*, "Eurozine", 12 February

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2014, Viewed 1 December 2018, <https://www.eurozine.com/gendered-silences-gendered-memories/>. Similarly, *Austerlitz*, a novel published by W.G. Sebald in 2001, “has become a point of reference in public discussions in England about the *Kindertransport*”, i.e. the Jewish children who survived Holocaust and arrived by train to London in 1938 or 1939. See: Ann Rigney, *Literature and Cultural Memory*, in: *The Life of Texts. An Introduction to Literary Studies*, (ed.) Kiene Brillenburg Wurth and Ann Rigney, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2019, pp. 374–375.

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