The Artistic Representation of Trauma in Arabic Dystopian Literature

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Abstract

Dystopian literature authored by Arab novelists serves as a reflective medium that elucidates the traumatic experiences endured by individuals in the Arab world amidst on-going crises and conflicts. This article employs trauma theory to explore the complexities of establishing a dystopian text showing how trauma manifests within the unconscious layers of the human psyche, thus leaving an indelible scar that persists over time. The article argues that the events associated with such traumatic experiences emerge into the realm of reality through literary texts, a process that not only allows for the articulation of hidden traumas but also provides the writer with a means to alleviate personal dilemmas through the act of writing. By briefly analysing a selection of prominent and translated Arabic dystopian works, this article examines how certain narratives encapsulate experiences of trauma resulting from oppression and societal upheaval and explores how these texts present harsh realities while engaging readers and fostering resistance against personal adversities. The depicting of dystopian themes and characters in these texts enables readers to understand genuine traumas that bridge the gap between imaginative constructs and lived realities. In conclusion, the article asserts that Arabic dystopian literature acts as a mirror that reflects the injustices and oppression faced by Arabs under authoritarian regimes and the legacies of former colonial powers.

Keywords: Arab literature, dystopian literature, Trauma, the 4th wall.

During the period of conflict that followed the United States' invasion of Iraq and the subsequent instability during the Arab Spring, individuals in Iraq and across the Middle East faced numerous crises. This tumultuous era inspired many Arab writers to articulate their experiences and perspectives through literary texts, which are often characterized by their exploration of complex dilemmas and challenges. Thus, the narrative behaviour of Arab writers goes against idealism and Utopia, a state that paved the way for dystopian truths. In face of dystopian realities, resistance against totalitarian ideologies or any agents of the Party of Evil Genius becomes inevitable (Zuraikat and Al-Nawasreh, 2021), which potentially shapes a society with utopian ideals while resisting tyranny, . As stated by several critics, "Individuals affected by war and political violence reported feeling like life is not fair.

They wondered why these things were happening to them and felt like they did not deserve or choose these experiences" (Hamadeh et al. 2024, 1288). This applies to Ahmed Al-Saadawi's Frankenstein in Baghdad (2018) as it reflects on national unity and identity issues amidst diversity. In this fictional narrative, which was originally written in Arabic in 2013 inspired by Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and translated into English by the British journalist and literary translator Jonathan Wright in 2018, Al-Saadawi characterizes the aftereffects the Iraqis confronted due to the 2003 Iraq War. Christina Phillips (2023) writes, "Frankenstein in Baghdad, announces a relationship with Shelley's classic story, which carries over into details such as a human–monster obsessed with revenge as a central character and a metafictional frame" (378).

To better understand this viewpoint in terms of trauma and human psyche, this article employs trauma theory to explore the complexities of establishing a dystopian text elucidating how trauma manifests within the unconscious layers of the human psyche, thus leaving an indelible scar that persists over time. The article argues that the events associated with such traumatic experiences emerge into the realm of reality through literary texts, a process that not only allows for the articulation of these hidden traumas but also provides the writer with a means to alleviate personal dilemmas through the act of writing. One focal question the article attempts to answer is: how trauma is still alive in unconscious mind of Arab writer and how does it get depicted in dystopian texts, thus functioning as a mirror that reflects the traumatic experience? By briefly analysing a selection of prominent and translated Arabic dystopian works, the study examines how Arabic dystopian narratives encapsulate experiences of trauma resulting from oppression and societal upheaval.

Interestingly, numerous studies have explored the origins of trauma, focusing on its persistence within the unconscious mind while paying careful attention to its manifestation in literature, as found in dystopian texts. An illustrative example is the seminal article "The Body Keeps the Score" by psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk (1994), which examines the mechanisms through which trauma continues to influence individuals. Another example is the study of Barbara Bakker (2018) titled Study on 21st century Arabic dystopian fiction, which provides a brief overview of the development of the genre of dystopian fiction in Arabic literature. In addition, Trauma, and Recovery: The Effects of Violence - From Domestic Violence to Political Terrorism by Judith Lewis Herman (2015) posits that individuals exposed to trauma or distressing scenes may sustain harm in a way that necessitates the initial restoration of safety through relocation to a financially and socially stable environment. He also emphasizes that among the significant rehabilitative strategies to escape trauma outstands the recollection and ''written expression'' of the traumatic event. This therapeutic process is notably akin to the experience of authors who engage in creating dystopian novels, as the act of writing serves as a cathartic means of grappling with and externalizing the internalized trauma. Moreover, Freud, Faulkner, Caruth: Trauma and the Politics of Literary Form" by Greg Forter (2007) explains the concept of trauma and the contributions of Freud, Faulkner, Caruth to explain its impact on individuals. Thus, the present study relies on several pieces of related literature not only to reveal how trauma is reflected in Arabic dystopian literature, but also to illustrate how these texts present harsh realities while engaging readers and fostering resistance against personal adversities, thus creating a kind of reconciliation between readers and their psychological dilemmas. To achieve this, the discussion is divided into three subsections, namely "trauma of war as indelible scar", "trauma of revolution as "Insidious Trauma", and "trauma as a means for 'Breaking the 4th Wall".

TRAUMA OF WAR AS INDELIBLE SCAR

In his article "Departing toward Survival: Reconsidering the Language of Trauma in Cathy Caruth, Ingeborg Bachmann and W. G. Sebald" (2014), Kathleen Ong Xin Wei states: "literary studies is the only one that embraces and configures the nebulous space not just between knowing and not knowing, but between speaking and the inability to speak as well. Literature is thus able to give voice to trauma because it licenses resistance toward conventional narrative structures and linear temporalities through its ability to make wounds perceivable and silences audible" (101). This view is supported by Bessel van der Kolk's study (1994), which associates trauma with psychological and mental disorders. Bessel reports the real story of his patient Tom wherein trauma serves as a memoir of terror that accidently reflects the scene of bloodshed in front of him. Bessel elucidates the case of a former patient, Tom, who presented himself for consultation at the clinic. Tom recounted a peculiar episode while his wife was out, wherein he found himself at home with his child. The child's cries prompted Tom to attempt soothing gestures; however, this routine parental act triggered an acute panic attack. Struggling to maintain composure, Tom was suddenly besieged by vivid hallucinations wherein he envisioned his offspring transmogrifying into lifeless fragments, emitting agonizing screams, and succumbing to torment. Subsequent investigation revealed that these aberrant hallucinations were a manifestation of traumatic memories stemming from his tenure as a medical practitioner during the Vietnam War. Overall, this poignant narrative serves to underscore the enduring impact of trauma on the psyche, encapsulating the intricate interplay between past traumatic experiences and their pervasive influence on one's present mental and emotional well-being (20-23). In fact, any author who attempts to write a literary text, whether poetry or fiction, tends to create an aesthetic object, which is to say, a kind of picture. The aesthetic picture could be surrealistic, gloomy, or natural-according to the author's message or experiences reflected in his text. From a structural viewpoint, the meaning of literary text completes itself. The dystopian text supports the reader's intention to get released from his or her trauma. The reader faces trauma and lives with it repeatedly throughout the text as if he speaks to himself about his memory through a dystopian text. The reader bears within himself all distorted experiences during his life: "Psychic trauma involves intense personal suffering, but it also involves the recognition of realities that most of us have not begun to face" (Caruth, 1995).

As far as Iraq is related, the trauma caused by the 2003 War has been represented in Al-Saadawi's Frankenstein in Baghdad (2018). The idea of lifeless fragments clutched in the protagonist's mind and confused him due to its grotesqueness. As a way to get rid of the memories, he could not orally express himself; he wanted to put his observations of unknown bodies, senseless killings, car bombs, extrajudicial killings, and social corruption into a text through which he could artistically talk to himself about his memories. He then created an imaginary character called Al-Shasmaa, a structure composed of the parts of the Iraqi victims whose limbs were flying in the air, being eaten by street dogs, or disappearing from the effects of explosions. Just like his protagonist, Al-Saadawi suffered from PTSD. In this sense, ''Abram Kardiner reported the same phenomena I was seeing: After the war, his patients were overtaken by a sense of futility; they became withdrawn and detached, even if they had functioned well before. What Kardiner called "traumatic neuroses," today we call posttraumatic stress disorder—PTSD'' (Kolk, 1994, 22). Thus, Al-Saadawi needs a paper and the process of creative writing, as Psychiatric therapy. In this sense, "Freud's Emphasis on the content or inner meaning of a work of art, he does deal with what he calls 'Poetical Effects': Source of our pleasure is the formal control that the writer exercises over his day-deans" (Freud,

1908, 420). Saadawi's works fall within the category of black comedy, as they present a kind of pleasure filled with sadness, or Freud called a "Bribe" or 'The Cherry-Flavored Medicine" (Freud, 1908, 420). Thus, the dystopia presented by Al-Saadawi expresses the pain of killing and destruction in terms of content to compensate for the emotional repression caused by the trauma of Iraq, considering that the work has a comedic form that is used to add a beautiful flavour that attracts the reader to delve into the gloomy reality of Iraq.

Using art of writing as a kind of expression is the act that brings the inner feeling into the surface due to the difficulty of taking trauma from the deeper level of unconsciousness: "trauma is much more than a story about something that happened long ago. The emotions and physical sensations that are imprinted during the trauma are experienced not as memories but as disruptive physical reactions in the present" (Kolk, 1994, 206). Thus, the physical reaction of Al-Saadawi was to write a dystopian text where trauma is conceptualized as protracted psychological incarceration wherein the human self is trapped for an extended duration in the unconscious level of the human mind. Consequently, any encounter that deviates from an individual's accustomed life circumstances, such as natural disasters, domestic violence, governmental torture in prison settings, harassment, rape, road accidents, and criminal activities, has the potential to generate psychological trauma. In reality, as human beings, we either bear witness to such traumatic experiences or coexist with individuals who have undergone such distressing events, an existential case that reflects people's existential life expereinces. In this context, the associate Professor in the biology department at Connecticut College Mays Imad (2024) states:

Whether through witnessing some-thing terrible, enduring verbal abuse, or suffering violent physical harm, our sensory inputs are captured intensely by the reptilian parts of our brain. This portion of the brain, wired for survival, takes precedence in traumatic moments, acting reflexively to enhance our prospects of survival. By understanding trauma through this lens, we realize that it is more than just an emotional disturbance; trauma deeply infiltrates our being at the most primal level. (32)

In Frankenstein in Baghdad, the character Hadi Al-Atak, a "Hollywoodian narrator" depicted as a drunkard with a penchant for blending fiction and reality, recounts a disturbing tale set against the backdrop of sectarian violence in Iraq. Amidst the chaos of suicide bombings and economic blockades, Al-Atak claims to have discovered a bag of dismembered body parts at Tayaran Square, which he purportedly reassembled into a grotesque entity named Al-Shasmaa. According to Al-Atak, this constructed being is animated by the spirit of Captain Hassib and is bent on exacting revenge on those responsible for the violence and suffering inflicted upon innocent civilians. As stated in the narrative: "I am just a tunnel or aisle to my father's will who is in heaven. As my poor mother Ullisu described me, she was very poor. All are poor, and I come as a response and answer to the poor's calling. I am a Saviour, desirable and writable in a particular way" (Al-Saadawi, 2018, 165). This shows how the trauma of war leaves an indelible scar, and its expression through writing often results in a dystopian narrative. Iraqi writers, in particular, use this medium to convey a sombre vision of the war crisis, highlighting the pervasive violence and the religious and political hypocrisy that accompany it.

In this context, it is possible to shed light on the short story "Corporal" by Ali Bader from Hassam Blasim Iraq +100: Stories from a Century after the Invasion (2016). In this short story, Bader depicts a trauma related to the relation between killers and victims. As found in the seminal work titled Trauma, and Recovery: The Effects of Violence - From Domestic Violence to Political Terrorism, Judith Lewis Herman (2015) expresses this relation thus, "All the perpetrator asks is that the bystander do

nothing. He appeals to the universal desire to see, hear, and speak no evil. The victim, on the contrary, asks the bystander to share the burden of pain. The victim demands action, engagement, and remembering" (65). Portraying trauma, Ali Bader narrates the story of victim Corporal Subhan, a member of the disintegrating Iraqi army during the American invasion, who first encounters psychological trauma when a comrade is executed by Baath Party members. Despite knowing the impending defeat in 2003 and the inevitability of occupation and regime change, these party members, driven by fear of authority, perpetuate and defend falsehoods and get ready to kill anyone who speaks against their falsity. This dystopian reality illustrates the profound pain of losing comrades to political hypocrisy: "The negative effects of war experiences are more likely to worsen when survivors are displaced or end up seeking refuge in unfamiliar places" (Almoshmosh, 2016, 54), Consequently, Subhan sought refuge in the first military convoy entering Baghdad, driven by the trauma of the siege and the execution of his comrade. However, he was killed by an American sniper, experiencing betrayal by both the ruling authority and the occupier. In this context, as a refugee from war, Mays Imad states: 'I felt betrayed by people I did not even know but to whom I felt a deep connection through the common thread of humanity" (2024, 32). As for Subhan, the meaning of humanity was broken by both the national authority and the occupier. In a state of dissociation, Ali Bader transports his character, Subhan, into a fantastical realm. Within this dimension, Subhan's soul ascends to heaven, where God decrees his return to Earth after a100-years of death. In this sense," the state of escaping from deep psychological pain leads to what the psychologist Pierre Janet called the change in his consciousness "dissociation" and Freud called it "double consciousness"(Herman, 2015, 7).

After 100+year of invasion Subhan returned to Iraq to see a huge transformation between Iraq and the United States, where Iraq has become a modern developed country, unlike America, which has become a country ruled by ISIS. Bader employs illusion as a means of psychological revenge. By envisioning Iraq as a modern, democratic state, he counters the devastating impact of the dictator's wars. Simultaneously, he exacts vengeance on the U.S. for its perceived betrayal. However, after seeking refuge with the occupier—who was expected to liberate him from tyranny—he is met with betrayal symbolized by a bullet, representing ISIS. This bullet signifies the further destruction wrought by ISIS following the dictator's removal. In this sense, "religious experiences depicted in art could be explained as manifestations of hysteria" (Herman, 2015, 10). Both Bader and Al-Saadawi wanted to achieve justice through the literary text to get rid of their psychological traumas, a state that shows how "literature—like the law, but in its own terms—is committed to the notion of 'justice" (Leavy, 1962, 5).

Trauma of Revolution as ''Insidious Trauma''

According to Mays Imad, the notion of Laura Brown INSIDIOUS TRAUMA (11991) set out the results of traumatic experiences promoted by brutal systems and institutions. Her idea expands the scheme of trauma beyond overt sudden events, scrutinizing the traumas that lead to often repressive societal norms and corrupting daily experiences, such as discrimination based on sexism, classism, ableism, and racism (Imad, 2021, 122). This type of trauma can be seen in Egypt dystopian literature, which expresses the state of pain, despair and destitution imposed by dictatorial regimes, not by the occupier. These traumas can be seen in the prose dystopia text of the Egyptian writer Mohamed Rabie, entitled Otared (2019), which was translated into English by Robin Mogera. In this context, sociologist Justin Snyder stated: "Most commonly, scholars worry that the focus on victimhood undermines moral accountability, political community, and future-oriented politics" (15). Thus, in his dystopian narrative, Rabie depicts Captain

Mohamed Otared, a sniper tasked with suppressing demonstrators opposing president Hosni Mubarak's military regime. The character embodies both victimhood and guilt, reflecting on the grim reality of contemporary Egyptian society. Rabie portrays this society as akin to hell, suggesting that both Otared and his compatriots are consigned to this infernal state. "It is a dystopian piece that presents an alternative story of events that could have occurred after the Egyptian Revolution in the country in January 2011" (Mokrushina, 2018). The sniper's duality of guilt and victimhood mirrors and is similar to the trauma experienced by the German populace during World War II. Germans were victims of the Nazi regime while simultaneously bearing guilt for the atrocities committed against Jews and the French.

From the outset, the writer's guilt complex is evident as he depicts a starkly deteriorated society. He portrays a grim environment characterized by prostitutes, homeless youths "cockroaches," brothels, and once-prominent Egyptian landmarks now reduced to garbage dumps. In fact, "Otared is graphically violent: it includes intense descriptive scenes of rape, necrophilia, and homicide. Dead, tormented bodies and bodies in terror are not only the pivotal theme in the novel; this is the text's tool for demonstrating a deconstructive reading experience of the idealized uprising" (Said, 2021, 236). The impact of war differs from that of revolutions. War-related trauma often dissipates with the conflict's end and the subsequent treatment of affected individuals of their indelible scars. In contrast, the trauma caused by dictatorial regimes or oppressive political systems persists across generations, continually resurfacing and regenerated as a dark and recurring nightmare due to the intergenerational transmission of poverty and socio-economic disadvantage perpetuates their effects across successive generations.

Hence, the trauma resulting from revolutions is termed INSIDIOUS TRAUMA. As stated by Honaida Ghanim (2017), "the dreams of the millions who demonstrated in Egypt's Tahrir Square in 2011 chanting 'Bread, Liberty and Social Justice' and calling for 'Dignity and Freedom' widespread in Syria, Libya and Yemen, have become terrifying nightmares which have touched on the lives of all members of society" (1). Employing a wandering narrative technique, the writer conveys his recurring traumas from years of "military rule", which he terms Idols of the Occupier, implying external dominance over Egyptian authorities. This perspective concurs with the viewpoint that "The emergence, or at least blatant reinstatement, of repressive regimes and the thinly disguised global support for them are features of dystopian world structures" (Elmeligi, 2024, 127). However, Rabie metaphorically depicts Egypt as being occupied by the "Knights of Malta", referencing the 1967 defeat by Israeli forces. This technique enforces a warlike atmosphere throughout the narrative. As the sniper Muhammad descends from Cairo Tower to traverse desolate streets, he observes corruption, apathy, absurdity, and panic among individuals who wore figure-like mask, feigning happiness and a manner of hiding shame. Wessam Elmeligi explains, "unprecedented increase in violence, oppression, and chaos, represented by security apparel cracking down on dissent, technological surveillance, on the one hand, and streets of mounting suffering that resort to innovatively horrific tactics of survival to cope with the post-apocalyptic realities of a world reeling from public trauma and its aftermath."(2024, 29).

Ultimately, Elmeligi asserts that this environment is unsuitable for characters like Farida and Zahra, the latter of whom suffers from a disease that obscures her features, symbolizing the incompatibility of innocence with a landscape of oppression and violence. However, amidst the depths of trauma, guilt, and requests for forgiveness, the writer reflects on the trauma induced by the violent events in Egypt. The political crisis, which originated from revolution and protest, evolved into a multifaceted societal, economic, and political malaise, obscuring and

transforming society into an unrecognizable entity. Obviously, "These are the consequences of what we ourselves have done, friends. If, then, in January, we had not opened fire, nothing would have happened. If we had just stood there, the army would never have overthrown Mubarak. But it happened. We learned how to shoot and learned how to get people to rebel" (Rabie, 2019, 71).

From a different perspective, Psychiatrist and trauma researcher Lewis Herman (2015) explained that "Traumatic memories lack verbal narrative and context; rather, they are encoded in the form of vivid sensations and images" (27). This can be illustrated in al-Ṭābūr (2013) written by Egyptian novelist Basma Abdel Aziz and translated into English in 2016 by Elisabeth Jaquette. Highlighting some points in this work, Abdel Aziz said in an interview: "I am fond of watching and explaining behaviour, searching for motives, and reasons, and exploring what is behind each act, what favours a specific reaction, and what can push human beings to refuse or accept certain forms of control" (Daum, 2023). In another interview, Abdel Aziz said: "When I was writing The Queue, I chose to make it placeless, if I can say, without a specific time, because I believe that this state could happen anywhere there is a dictatorship or an authoritarian regime" (Ma, 2022). The writer explores the trauma inflicted by bureaucratic systems under dictatorial regimes that usually humiliates, distracts, and suppresses citizens' awareness of their civil rights. She conceptualizes this oppressive mechanism as the "Gate", before which hundreds of citizens wait in an organized queue seeking official approvals for their basic social needs. The persistent closure of the Gate symbolizes the broader societal issues prevalent in Egypt, where characters interact and reflect on the deep-seated problems inherent in a dictatorship. Elmeligi writes,

The Queue seems based on a bureaucratic ailment of modern society, as a satire of futility of an imposed superficiality of order. The painstaking queuing in front of counters, offices, and buildings waiting for services is crushing and even dehumanizing enough, becoming such a staple of life that small businesses form around it, such as people selling food, drinks, drugs, or helping with paperwork. (2024, 141)

In parallel to Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot (1945), Abdel Aziz portrays characters waiting for hope. Such characters include Umm Mabrouk, who is burdened by severe financial hardship and works as a street vendor, Enas, a young, fashionable teacher who does not adhere to traditional hijab norms and challenges the modesty expectations of Eastern society, and Shalaby who confronts the complexities of martyrdom and sacrifice for order-loyalty and seeks justice for his cousin Mahfouz, a police officer killed by demonstrators while allegedly fulfilling his national duty. Bešková writes, "The fact that people did not join the Queue out of their own will; they were forced to do so through denial of access to their basic needs, medical care as well as requirements of all kinds of permits and certificates" (2022, 267). Each character reveals societal hypocrisy enforced by the oppressive authority . Umm Mabrouk, abandoned without health insurance, is relegated to street vending. Enas faces slander from the "Man in the Galabiya," a symbolic figure of the hypocritical cleric loyal to the regime. Meanwhile, Mahfouz, who kills protesters, is deemed a martyr by the authority for executing its orders, despite the regime's role in his death. "The Queue's theme can very well apply to any nation – reveals how any ideology (that people find solace and hope in) can be used as a means to tame them into embracing their oppression" (Yusuff, 2022).

To underscore the systemic challenges faced by individuals under a dictatorial regime, the writer introduces a central character named Yahya, who is randomly shot during a demonstration. Yahya requires a surgical procedure to remove the life-threatening bullet, but he must first obtain an official permit from the Gate. The persistent inaccessibility of the Gate prevents Yahya from receiving the

necessary medical treatment, leaving his fate uncertain. Such simulations are prevalent throughout the Arab world, where state institutions exert significant control over the lives and futures of ordinary individuals. Obviously, "In the Arab world, the inclination towards dystopian fiction in literature can be seen as the result of several interconnected factors. First and foremost, the long-lasting existence of authoritarian regimes, an atmosphere of repression, the constant violation of human rights, deteriorating living conditions, proliferating corruption, increasing income inequality and the dead-end situation especially of the younger generation of educated but unemployed individuals condemned to a protracted 'wait hood'" (Bešková, 2022, 253).

Thus, the trauma depicted by Arab writers who experienced the Arab Spring is portrayed as INSIDIOUS TRAUMA. This trauma, characterized by its malignant nature, is deemed intractable due to its role in perpetuating successive generations of injustice. Such a state fosters the emergence of societies characterized by dysfunction and stereotype, thereby impeding their capacity for development. Mays Imad (2024) describes this kind of trauma using the words of her colleague in chemistry, Dr. Harry Price, using "a poignant biological metaphor to describe the effect of betrayal, and trauma, when first sown, might seem small and insignificant, like the initial ripple on the water's surface. But as these seeds grow and take root, they spread their influence far and wide, just like waves propagating across an ocean. As the waves grow in size and strength, so do the impacts of systemic racism. They expand, become more pervasive, and impact more and more people as they spread across society and through time" (35).

Trauma as a Means for "Breaking the 4th Wall"

In theatre, the phrase BREAKING the 4th WALL, refers to an imaginary wall that separates the story from the real world. This term comes

suggests that the three surrounding walls enclosing the stage are supported by an invisible "4th wall" that is left out for the sake of the viewer. The "4th wall" is the screen we're watching. We treat this wall like a one-way mirror, where the audience can see and comprehend the story, but the story cannot comprehend the existence of the audience (Lannom, 2020). When individuals breach this metaphorical wall, their true narrative comes to self-awareness, which implies that the writer reveals his trauma in a way that makes him reveal his inner secrets to people as a kind of confession. This trauma is intrinsically linked to writers, as it manifests when they endeavour to project confidence while confronting their own profound flaws and failures. It represents a contentious dialogue between individuals and their inner self, which implies that this trauma persists throughout the individual's life, not stemming from external factors such as war or oppressive systems, but originating from within the human condition itself. In Greg Forter article, "Trauma, Literary Form, and Faulkner", "Trauma comes 'too late' because, by the time that infant is old enough to understand what has befallen him, it has, quite simply, already befallen him, and is in fact lodged within him as an inadmissible past experience whose affective repercussions are exceedingly difficult to defend against" (2007, 264).

The trauma experienced from the Coronavirus pandemic, global warming, climate change, and natural disasters can be attributed to human misbehaviour. Similarly, the devastation caused by wars and the potential existential threat posed by nuclear weapons stem from humanity's pursuit of control and dominance. Additionally, the advent of artificial intelligence, which threatens to marginalize human creativity, has prompted discussions about population reduction. These traumas arise from human actions and their often-unrecognized consequences, with many individuals either failing to grasp or deliberately ignoring their repercussions in favour of pursuing their own

insatiable desires. Human beings, caught between the pursuit of their desires and the methods employed to achieve them, often make errors that result in significant repercussions. These repercussions are manifested as societal traumas and are reflected in dystopian literature, which exposes the inherent late comprehended truths about humanity. Such texts reveal how human actions contribute to the crises of war, the rise of authoritarian regimes, racial discrimination, slavery, and colonialism. "This procedure enables readers an extraordinarily rich and empathic understanding of what it means to be traumatized by a specific set of historical processes" (Forter, 2007, 270).

Influenced by William Golding's Lord of the Flies (1954), Musa Sabry's Al-Sayyid Mn Haql al-Sabanekh (1981) reflects the traumatic impact of Post-colonial era and the ensuing conflict between liberal democracy and totalitarian communism. This conflict, which extended into the 1960s and 1970s, when Sabry was coming of age—shaped his novel. In Al-Sayyid Mn Haql al-Sabanekh, Sabry explores the theme of escaping civilization to pursue a natural way of life, mirroring the broader repercussions of the era. This dystopian narrative explores the human condition through the character Homo, who inhabits the Honey Age, a society set in the year 2481. This era emerged from the devastation wrought by a catastrophic war that rendered Earth uninhabitable. In response to this apocalypse, survivors relocated to a newly established era and territory where all conceivable human desires are ostensibly fulfilled. Thus, the narrative shows that "The tragedy of Man in the coming age lies in his acceptance of slavery imposed by the programmed system, while any attempt to escape it will be abortive and lead to loss and frustration" (Asaqli and Masalha, 2018, 129). Interestingly, the goal in this advanced technological age is the absolute satisfaction of human desires: "Lord of the Spinach Field is relevant to discussing futuristic technology set in an unspecified world as a literary imaginative

enterprise to exercise freedom of expression, to exhibit fears, hopes, and inner tensions allegorically in a post-colonial era" (Alkhayat, 2021, 234). Despite the apparent abundance of the Honey Age, the central character, Homo, employed in a spinach field, becomes increasingly dissatisfied with the modern system. Homo's sense of intellectual freedom and introspection prompts him to seek a return to the ravaged Earth to rebuild it. This ambition leads Homo and Professor Proof to abandon the Honey Age. Still, they realize that their quest is impossible due to their inability to rebuild the planet again without technology, which suggests that "Homo's journey to the past is an inspiring force to abolish static immobility and to defy orthodox determinism, which is advocated by the antagonistic capitalist society" (231). In this context, the writer raises a provocative question regarding the nature of human ambition, suggesting that it is often boundless and can lead to the devastation of the Earth. The narrative explores the paradox of human behaviour: individuals harness technology to effectuate catastrophic outcomes; simultaneously, they criticize and seek to abandon that same technology in attempts to address the consequences. Homo's journey back to the ruined Earth underscores this irony, as he discovers that the very technological advancements he initially rejected are essential for any potential reconstruction of the planet.

This dystopian text reinforces Freud's theory that traumatic events are carried out by humans in a repetitive manner outside of the conscious mind. The person's desire to achieve his needs is greater than his will, considering that "these repetitions are particularly striking because they seem not to be initiated by the individual's own acts but rather appear as the possession of some people by a sort of fate, a series of pain - full events to which they are subjected, and which seem to be entirely outside their wish or control" (Caruth, 1996, 5). This phenomenon should not be attributed to inherent human nature but rather to external events that have historically afflicted

humanity, causing profound psychological trauma. Such trauma has led to a repetitive cycle of hostility and destruction. The impetus for human conflicts and the resulting devastation of nature can be traced to an underlying existential fear of the future, which drives individuals to perpetuate cycles of aggression and environmental degradation. Freud, in Beyond the Pleasure Principle, confirms that "the breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world—is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that 'too unexpectedly, to be fully known'" and is therefore "not available to consciousness" until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor (Caruth, 1996, 7). At the end of the dystopian text, the hero is portrayed as a fugitive, driven by a fear of regression to primitiveness. His perceived weakness prompts him to return to the familiar realm of civilization and technology, only to find that it remains closed to him, reflecting the irreversible nature of time. He is not acceptable by technology anymore; the advanced world lacks mercy and emotion. Homo said: "Here we find ourselves transitioning from a haven of security and clarity to the perils of primitive existence, where the ancient, brutal, and regressive slogan— 'survival of the fittest'—once again prevails"(Alkhayat, 2021, 234).

This kind of fear could be seen in Ibrahim Nasrallah, a Jordanian of Palestinian descent, grew up in Amman's Wahdat Camp, whose dystopian novel, The Second Dog War (2016), dismantles the division between personal's initial patriotic ideals and evolution into a corrupt, power-hungry dictator. Through Rasheed's character, the novel explores moral and ethical transformation driven by trivial desires. The narrative centres on a dispute over an unpaid sum from the sale of a dog, escalating into a tribal conflict that ultimately ignites a global war, resulting in Earth's destruction and the onset of the Dark Age. The narrative reports, "Every war begins with a bullet, no matter the size of the bullet. Sometimes it can start with a stray shot"(Nasrallah, 2016, 9). The system collapses and the dictatorial entity of the Castle rises to rule the dark world. Rasheed, a man who spent his life in prison fighting for democracy, abandons his principles and becomes one of the elements of the Castle. He also becomes a lustful character when he decides to clone his wife's face to make two copies of her to satisfy his lust. This shows that "The sequence of all contemporary societies is now manifested in brands, models, gestures, and even the ideas that have been copied. It is no longer a path that provides progress for man towards perfection, but has turned him into a creature so bored and confused in his thoughts that he closes all paths to peace for himself and others, and there is no path left but war and violence" (Hosseini and Mahmodabadi, 2021, 164). Eventually, this process turns into a "cloning epidemic" that spreads among humans and leads to chaos. The narrator's technique exposes the transformation of individuals from idealistic revolutionaries to authoritarian figures who engage in trivial conflicts for frivolous reasons, resulting in the death of millions. This reveals a broader truth about human nature: the drive for imitation and superficial excellence leads people to replicate appearances, actions, and behaviours in pursuit of greater beauty.

Interestingly, the depiction of dystopia in dystopian Arabic texts has witnessed a major change caused by the psychological experience of Arab writers who have kept pace with the events of the wars and the Arab Spring. In this context, dystopian literature reflects... 'real world' of Arab nation. In his article "Egyptian Dystopias of the 21st Century: A New Literary Trend" (2021), Keith Booker states, "The treatment of imaginary societies in the best dystopian fiction is always highly relevant more or less directly to specific 'real world' societies and issues" (19). The present reality is intricately connected to the harrowing scenes that illustrate the profound apprehension regarding the future, as evident in the aftermath of the U.S.

colonization of Iraq and the Arab Spring revolutions. These historical events have significantly shaped the socio-political landscape, reflecting a pervasive sense of uncertainty and fear. In this sense, Bakker refers to a special definition of trauma related to real-world of Arab countries, delved from The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited (1994), a study by Lyman Tower Sargent, in which she stated that dystopia (or negative utopia) is "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which the reader lived" (9). To portray dystopia in Arabic literature, the writer employs the technique of alienating the reader from the familiar environment, creating a bleak, imaginary framework. This framework, while populated with fictitious elements, characters, places, and names, accurately reflects the tragic realities experienced by the Arab citizen, allowing for a critical examination of contemporary issues away from government's surveillance. Appropriately, Bakker inspired by the term of Defamiliarisation, a Russian Formalist term coined by Viktor Shklovskiĭ, which implies spatial and/or temporal settings distant from the author's own. This literary technique involves "depicting common and familiar concepts in a strange and unfamiliar setting in order to enhance the perception of the familiar" (Bakker, 2018, 81).

Accordingly, Al-Saadawi portrays Iraq, fractured by sectarian divisions, as a "Frankenstein", or what is known in Iraqi dialectical language as Al-Shasmaa to express the sense of horror caused by the brutal reality of war. Similarly, Ali Bader employs magical realism, imagining that Corporal Sabhan is resurrected by a divine miracle to seek revenge for his disillusionment with the American dream. This depiction of trauma serves as an indelible scar from the memory of war, enhanced with elements of suspense and irony to add excitation to the story. In contrast, Egyptian writer Rabie

conveys his disillusionment with the ruling authority imposed by colonial legacies, which transformed Egyptian society into a stifling environment of fear and despair. He describes his people as "sons of hell", to reflect the sense of desperation. Abdel Aziz, depicts people as static and stereotypical, constrained by authoritative frameworks that hinder interaction and productivity. This stigma from the Arab Spring is portrayed as a harmful force that distorts and erases traditional values and behaviours in Arab societies. In this context, Karen Bennett in her paper "Epistemicide!" (2014), employed the term Epistemicide as the systematic destruction of rival forms of knowledge, is at its worst nothing less than symbolic genocide" (19). During the period of colonialism or occupation, policies were executed with the explicit objective of eliminating and abolishing the customs, traditions, and knowledge of a particular society, thus replacing them with a new cognitive framework that aligns with the interests of the occupying power. Additionally, Egyptian writer Musa Sabry illustrates the trauma that exposes the disconnect between the inner of the human psyche and its external form. His character, Homo, rebels against the modern capitalist system, but he is unable to rebuild the ruined earth without hat detested system, which highlights the emptiness of contemporary slogans of nationalism in front of the power of Capitalism. Finally, Ibrahim Nasrallah introduces the character Rasheed, who undergoes transformation, to exemplify how people conform to obtain their desires, a state that shows how trauma reveals the abstract truth of human nature by breaking down the boundaries between the ego, Id, and superego to present the human psyche as a naked object.

Conclusion

It can be extrapolated that trauma depiction in Arabic dystopian literature frequently oscillates between illustrating the effects of war and invasion on individuals and exploring the

experiences of Arabs in the post-Arab Spring era. The texts discussed in the paper investigate the relationship between Arabic individuals and their repressed desires for truth, justice, morality, and equality—values that have eroded as Arab society has increasingly emulated other cultures. Consequently, the portrayal of trauma in these dystopian narratives offers insight and familiarity for those who have not directly experienced the traumas prevalent in the Arab world in order to give voice for alienated Arabic texts under the silence policy. Thus, trauma proves to be a significant concern for individuals who suffer from wars and repression in their country. In this sense, it is necessary to represent psychological traumas by depicting them through dystopian texts. As Forter says, 'The contemporary version of trauma theory does something similar: it makes the human predicament a trauma we can only "know" by re-peating. This repetition happens precisely under our common linguistic condition: through our talking and listening, our reading and writing—in short, our very being in language" (2007, 282). Thus, reading and interacting with the images reflected from traumas in dystopian texts helps avoid what Freud calls 'foreign bod[ies]' in the psyche, which suggests that "The aim of this compromise is to keep intact the unconsciousness of repressed material while giving [voice] to the suffering that caused its

repression" (Forter, 2007, 263). Moreover, it is feasible to say here that the portrayal of trauma in Arabic literature plays a crucial role in aiding Arab readers to overcome anxiety, fear, and any sense of helplessness, besides addressing feelings of uncertainty, isolation, and loss of meaning (Imad, 2021, 7). By eliciting empathy for fictional characters and fostering an imaginative engagement with the text, such literature allows readers to reflect on shared Arab experiences of injustice and depression, where negative emotions can serve as guiding lights to help individuals navigate their suffering and find hope. In short, engaging with the depiction of trauma in Arab dystopian literature facilitates a process of reconciliation with personal and collective traumas.

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• The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.
• The authors have no competing interests to declare.
• All authors contributed to the study conception and design. All authors participated in material preparation, data collection, and analysis. They all cooperated to compose the first draft of the manuscript, comment on previous versions of the manuscript, and read and approve the final manuscript.

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