

Narratives on Terrorism in Iraq through the Arabic Novels of *Yā Maryam*, *Al-Kāfirah*, and *Frankenstein fī Baghdād*

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Abstract

To date, the narratives on terrorism carried out by some scholars tend to use a monolithic perspective that relates the acts of terrorism as a manifestation of the dogmatic teaching of a particular belief. Massive narratives on terrorism through this monolithic perspective reached their momentum after the infamous 9/11 terrorist attack. Therefore, there is a need to study terrorism through Arabic novels through a more genuine narrative. This paper aims to analyze Arabic novels on terrorism in the Iraqi context. The author investigates how Arab novelists narrate terrorism in their literary works. The novels studied here are 1) *Yā Maryam* by [O...Maryam] Sinan Antoon (2012), 2) *Al-Kāfirah* [The Disbelieve, fem.] by Ali Badr (2015), and *Frankenstein fī Baghdād* [Frankenstein in Baghdad] by Ahmad Sa'dawi (2013). The study found that the three novels represent the same narratives on terrorism: terrorism is detrimental and destroys social lives. The acts of terrorism do not represent any true religious belief, but it was a deviated one coming from misinterpretation of religious doctrines.

Keywords: Terrorism, narratives, Arabic novel, Iraq, misinterpretation, religious doctrines

Introduction

The terrorist attack on the World Trade Center (WTC) on September 11, 2001, is still invariably used as a reference to see the relationship between acts of terrorism and certain religious doctrines. Islam, in this context, is the accused religion and is portrayed as responsible for this terrible event.¹ Whether Islamic doctrine supports acts of terrorism has been debated in various Western media.² It has also triggered hundreds of books on the relationship between Islam and terrorism.³ Western media propagate a similar narrative when connecting acts of terrorism with Islam.⁴ Therefore, this monolithic perception is misleading.⁵

Nevertheless, there are still several fair views that do not see Islam from a single religious perspective. Thus, terrorism is seen as an implication of a misconception of religious doctrine and is only carried out by a small community in Islam.⁶ In addition, terrorism does not have to be associated with a specific religion because anyone of any religion is potentially able to carry out acts of terrorism. However, books written by Western scholars on terrorism after September 11 tend to discredit only one religion. In addition, the books can be said to be of low quality due to the non-existence of reliable data to support the facts and tend to be emotional.⁷

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¹ Yoyo Yoyo, "Model Perjuangan Gerakan Fundamentalisme Islam Di Mesir," in *Dinamika Masyarakat Dan Kebudayaan Kontemporer*, ed. J Hasse Irwan Abdullah, U Wening (Tici Publications Bekerjasama Pustaka Pelajar, 2009), 189.

² Rasha A Abdulla, "Islam, Jihad, and Terrorism in Post-9/11 Arabic Discussion Boards," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12, no. 3 (April 1, 2007): 1063–81.

³ "Terrorism Bookshelf: Top 150 Books on Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism | Sinai | Perspectives on Terrorism," accessed January 29, 2020, <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/sinai-terrorism-bookshelf/html>.

⁴ Khalid Sultan, "Linking Islam with Terrorism: A Review of the Media Framing since 9/11," *Global Media Journal: Pakistan Edition* 9, no. 2 (2016): 1–10.

⁵ Syed Mansoob Murshed and Sara Pavan, "Identity and Islamic Radicalization in Western Europe," *Civil Wars* 13, no. 3 (2011): 259–79.

⁶ Nahid Kabir, "Representation of Islam and Muslims in the Australian Media, 2001–2005," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 26, no. 3 (2006): 313–28.

⁷ Katerina Dalacoura, "Middle East Area Studies and Terrorism Studies," in *Critical Terrorism Studies: A New Research Agenda*, ed. Richard Jackson, Marie Breen Smyth, and Jeroen Gunning (Routledge, 2009), 124–37.

In responding to terrorism, Western scholars produce academic output such as books or journals and literary works in novels. Since 1970-2001, the theme of terrorism has become mainstream in many English-language novels. These novels generally have different trends when narrating terrorism. However, many novels carry diverse backgrounds and motives.⁸ The 9/11 incident has once again become a momentum for the massive revival of English-language novels on terrorism, which generally describe the drastic changes in Western society after the incident, as narrated in a novel entitled *Terrorist* (2006) by John Updike.⁹ In addition, other American novels, namely Tom Clancy's *The Teeth of the Tiger* (2003), Richard A. Clarke's *The Scorpion's Gate* (2005), and John Elray's *Khalifah* (2002), are best-selling novels and generally describe Islam as a terrorist religion.¹⁰

Considering the complexity and challenges of studying terrorism, this paper is interested in analyzing terrorism through Arab novels. The Arab world, after the Arab Spring, experienced rapid changes in the socio-political order.¹¹ However, these changes are accompanied by uncertain political stability¹², including the issue of terrorism. The terrorism faced by Arab countries is not a surface issue but rather severe. Till date, every act of terrorism in the Arab World has specific arguments that sometimes contradict one faction to another. The murder of the great Syrian cleric, Sheikh Muhammad Ramadhan al-Bouti, shows that acts of terror can even target prominent clerics who have opposing views to the terrorists. Al-Bouti is seen by the Jihadist groups in Syria as a pro-government cleric and rejects Jihad's fatwas against the Syrian government regime.¹³

Literature Review

As a product of the reality of Arab society, Arabic novels work not only as entertainment but also as reflections or mimesis of the existing facts.¹⁴ In this case, terrorism has become a global issue and has attracted the interest of several Arab novelists to raise the problem in literary works. Therefore, in the novel about terrorism, cultural traditions attract the reader or audience to understand terrorism more comprehensively.¹⁵ In addition, the topic of religion in Arabic novels has become one of the main streams raised by Arab novelists. In Egypt, for example, literary works that carry the subject of religion (Islam) can be traced from as early as the 19th century.¹⁶

In his paper '*Politics and the Terrorist Novel*,' Blessington states that novels about terrorists are the same as political novels. The novels present a certain ideological tendency and choices that the author has determined before the action in the novel is narrated. According to him, a terrorist novel with a similar theme or genre will tend to describe the dilemma of a terrorist's life and the reasons why he commits terror. Therefore, according to him, terrorism theme novels often ignore the victim rather than the act of terror itself.¹⁷ The paper entitled "*Amplifications of religious fundamentalism in Fiction: al-Saqqaf's Qissat Irhabi vs. Updike's Terrorist*," compares terrorism among Jews and terrorism in Islam by comparing two works, namely *Terrorist* (in English) by Updike and *Qissat Irhabi* (in Arabic) by al-Saqqaf. This paper concludes that terrorism is a phenomenon of all religions and is only carried out by a particular group. Thus, terrorism is not a representation of the adherents of most of the religion itself.¹⁸

⁸ Robert Appelbaum and Alexis Paknadel, "Terrorism and the Novel, 1970-2001," *Poetics Today* 29, no. 3 (September 1, 2008): 387-436.

⁹ Peter C Herman, "Terrorism and the Critique of American Culture: John Updike's *Terrorist*," *Modern Philology* 112, no. 4 (2015): 691-712.

¹⁰ Mubarak Abdullah Altwaiji, "Issues Related to Arab Muslim Identity, Nationalism and Projection of Islam in Post 9/11 American Novel" (India, Goa University, 2013).

¹¹ Eva Bellin, "A Modest Transformation: Political Change in the Arab World after the 'Arab Spring,'" in *The Arab Spring* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 33-48; Ahmad Sahide, Yoyo Yoyo, and Ali Muhammad, "Tunisia's Success in Consolidating Its Democracy One Decade Post-the Arab Spring," *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Ilmu Politik* 26, no. 1 (n.d.): 49-62.

¹² Sahide, Yoyo, and Muhammad, "Tunisia's Success in Consolidating Its Democracy One Decade Post-the Arab Spring"; Yoyo Yoyo, "Critical Voices and the Burden of Free Expression among Arab Intellectuals," *Islam Transformatif: Journal of Islamic Studies* 7, no. 1 (2023): 28-40; Yoyo, "Sociology of Failure in the Contemporary Arab Thought (Reading on Syauqi Jalal's Work on the Arab Left) | Sociologia Eşecului În Gândirea Arabă Contemporană (Citind Lucrările Lui Syauqi Jalal Despre Stânga Arabă).," *Codrul Cosminului* 26, no. 1 (2020): 45-56.

¹³ Khaldoun Khashanah, "The Syrian Crisis: A Systemic Framework," *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 7, no. 1 (January 2, 2014): 1-21.

¹⁴ Erich Auerbach and Edward W Said, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature-New and Expanded Edition*, vol. 78 (Princeton University Press, 2013).

¹⁵ Samuel Thomas, "Outtakes and Outrage: The Means and Ends of Suicide Terror," *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 57, no. 3 (2011): 425-49.

¹⁶ M M Badawi, "Islam in Modern Egyptian Literature," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 2 (May 29, 1971): 154-77.

¹⁷ Francis Blessington, "Politics and the Terrorist Novel," *The Sewanee Review* 116, no. 1 (February 2, 2008): 116-24.

¹⁸ Riyad Manqoush, Noraini Md Yusof, and Ruzy Suliza Hashim, "Amplifications of Religious Fundamentalism in Fiction: Al-Saqqaf's *Qissat Irhabi* vs. Updike's *Terrorist*," *Middle East Studies Online Journal* 3, no. 6 (2011): 297-317.

The most significant work that provides a complete picture of an Arab novel about radicalism, including the issue of terrorism, is Mark Knight's *"Imagining Islamism: Representations of Fundamentalism in the Twenty-First Century Arabic Novel"* (2016). This work is a sub-chapter of *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Religion*. In this paper, Mark analyzes an Arabic novel about Islamism with two main sub-topics: one that discusses Islamist groups and the latter about jihadist groups. Mark's study begins by mapping the post-9/11 Arab novels that tell the story of Islamism. According to him, there are two main camps of Arab novels regarding Islamist groups: pro-Islamist Arabic novels and anti-Islamist Arabic novels. However, the study carried out by Mark mainly stopped at the Arabic novels of the 2010s.¹⁹

Other research tends to be broad, namely the feud between Arab writers and Islamist groups. This study, for example, mentions that Islamists see several works by Arab novelists as insulting religion or having pornographic nuances.²⁰ For example, Najib Mahfouz—an Arab novelist from Egypt—was attacked and intimidated by Islamists because his novel, *Auladu Haritna*, was considered to have insulted the Prophet Muhammad.²¹ In addition, there was a study that revealed the dimensions of Islamic teachings within Arabic novels.²²

In contrary to previous studies, which tend to examine Islamism and terrorism in an Arabic novel more on theoretical and ideological aspects of the novel, this paper will specifically examine how acts of terrorism are narrated in an Arabic novel by emphasizing the elements of acts of terrorism consisting of acts of terror, actors, victims, and the impact of terrorism on socio-political life in Iraq.

Research Method

The study uses literature reviews by mapping and investigating all Arabic novels on terrorism. The search for Arabic novels on terrorism prioritizes the novels published in the 2000s to 2020s, both in e-book and printed formats. After an extensive search and classification of Arabic novels on terrorism in Iraq, the author chose three novels that represent this study. The three novels are: 1) *Yā Maryam* by [O...Maryam] Sinan Antoon (2012), 2) *Al-Kāfirah* [The Disbeliever., fem.] by Ali Badr (2015), and *Frankenstein fī Baghdad* [Frankenstein in Baghdad] by Ahmad Sa'dawi (2013). The year's order does not determine the significance of the novel; the order is based on the discovery of the initial data and the completion time of reading the novel. Furthermore, the novels are read and analyzed with the main objective of identifying to which extent in the novel terrorism is narrated in Iraq. This critical reading aims to see that a novel is not only a fictional work but also represents a real particular social and cultural context.

Brief Definition of Terrorism

In Arabic, the equivalent of the word terrorism is *irhāb*; it derives from the word *rahība*, which has the same meaning as *khāfa*, namely, fear. The transitive form of *rahība* is *rahhaba* or *arhaba*, which means to frighten.²³ Meanwhile, people who spread fear are called *irhābiyyūn* or terrorists. Based on its history, the term terrorism was first used in the 1790s during the French Revolution by the revolutionaries against their enemies.²⁴ In Latin, terrorism comes from *terrere*, which means sending someone into extreme fear. The suffix -ism added to the word terror leads to the meaning of a systemic character of terror, or at a theoretical level, the suffix refers to political philosophy such as liberalism, socialism, and others. In addition, adding the suffix -ism on a practical level refers to a way of acting or behaving like a fanatic to fanaticism.²⁵

¹⁹ Mark Knight, "Imagining Islamism: Representations of Fundamentalism in the Twenty-First Century Arabic Novel," in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Religion* (Routledge, 2016), 462–72.

²⁰ Reuven Snir, "Modern Arabic Literature and Islamist Discourse: 'Do Not Be Coolness, Do Not Flutter Safety'," *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* (2003): 78–123.

²¹ Yoyo, *Pemikiran Arab: Dinamika Intelektual, Ideologi, Dan Gerakan [Arab Thought: The Dynamic of Intellectual, Ideology, and Movement]* (Sociality, 2017).

²² Elham T Hussein, Mohammed A Al-Badawi, and Fatima M Muhaidat, "The Relationship Between Naguib Mahfouz and the Islamists: The Real, the Exaggerated and the Fabricated," *English Language and Literature Studies* 3, no. 4 (2013): 28.

²³ Atabik Ali and Ahmad Zuhdi Muhdlor, "Kamus Kontemporer Arab-Indonesia" (Yayasan Ali Maksum, 1996).

²⁴ "Terrorism | Definition, History, & Facts | Britannica," accessed February 8, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/terrorism#ref217761>.

²⁵ Alex P Schmid, *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research* (Taylor & Francis, 2011).

As an operational definition, terrorism in this study was adopted from the definition put forward by Adam L. Silverman as follows:

...terrorism is the systematic use of violence by actors who have a subcultural identity attachment –either subjective or objective. Terrorism is the attempt to bring about social and political change through fear and intimidation. Terrorism is one way that subcultural actors attempt to resolve the disputes between themselves and the larger culture or between themselves and other subcultures. Terrorism is an attempt to assert the constitutive and regulatory subcultural norms of the actors onto the larger culture and/or other subcultures...²⁶

The subcultures show that terrorism is carried out by a particular sub-culture and not the entire existing sub-culture. If some Muslim groups carry out terrorism, then that group is a sub-culture that commits terrorism and not the whole sub-culture in a very diverse Islamic community. In addition, looking at acts of terrorism should focus on what and why terrorism occurs, not who the terrorists are and how terrorism is carried out.²⁷ This perspective is critical to show that anyone can carry out terrorism.

Terrorism consists of three main aspects: the actors or so-called terrorists, the acts of terrorism, and the victims of terrorism. In the Arab World context, certain Islamist groups such as Jemaah Al-Jihad, Jema'ah Al-Islamiyyah, and recent radical groups such as ISIS often carry out acts of terrorism.²⁸ The acts of terror in the Arab world include terror against foreign tourists in Egypt, the killing of secular figures, and suicide bombings in places of worship.²⁹ Meanwhile, in the aspect of victims from a religious perspective, the victims can be Muslims or non-Muslims. The three components of terrorism above will outline the narratives of terrorism in the novel studied. In each story, the author will analyze the narratives of the actors of terrorism, the acts of terrorism, and the victims.

Narrative Theory

When the term *narratologie* (French) was first used by Tzvetan Todorov in his book entitled *Grammaire du "De'came'ron"* in 1969, the term marked a new science that was on par with other sciences, such as biology and sociology, as an immature discipline.³⁰ The main point of narrative theory is that it tells a story. The narrative approach looks at the story to the story itself (what the history told or what happened) and how it is said. Therefore, in narrative theory, there will be an interaction between the author, the text, and the reader. This interaction process will bring a new text as a new discourse.³¹

There are four types of narratives in terms of the theme being told. The first is the ontological narrative or self-narrative. The kind of narrative about a person's life story in social life, where he must exist in that life. An ontological story such as an Iraqi-Jewish family who is forced to leave their homeland for the new state of Israel. Second, the public narrative which is a story elaborated by public and rotates between social and institutional institutions such as educational, religious, media, and state institutions. Public narrative stories include Western democracy, fundamentalism in Islam or Christianity, stories about minority rights, and other general issues that attracts more serious limelight. The third conceptual narrative is about the concept of a particular discipline that emerged from the research. Lastly, meta-narratives, namely narratives about global issues such as Industrialization, Enlightenment, Capitalism vs. Communism, and other global issues.³²

Of the four types of narrative, terrorism is a type of public narrative because it generally gets public attention in different contexts. The assumption is that the narratives of terrorism in the American novel will be different from the narratives of terrorism in the Arab novel because it has different social and cultural context. Therefore, in analyzing the following Arabic novels, the authors will always focus on

²⁶ Adam L Silverman, "Just War, Jihad, and Terrorism: A Comparison of Western and Islamic Norms for the Use of Political Violence," *Journal of Church and State* 44, no. 1 (January 1, 2002): 84.

²⁷ Hani A Faris, "The American and Arab Perspectives on Terrorism," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (1987): 149–54.

²⁸ Omar Ashour, "De-Radicalization of Jihad? The Impact of Egyptian Islamist Revisionists on Al-Qaeda," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 2, no. 5 (2008): 11; J.A. Nedorosic, "Extremist Groups in Egypt," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 14, no. 2 (June 1, 2002): 49.

²⁹ Tamer ZF Mohamed and Tamer S Elseyoufi, "Terrorism in the Middle East: Implications on Egyptian Travel and Tourism," *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage* 6, no. 3 (2018): 87.

³⁰ James Phelan and Peter J Rabinowitz, *A Companion to Narrative Theory* (John Wiley & Sons, 2008).

³¹ Patrick O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse: Reading Narrative Theory* (University of Toronto Press, 1994).

³² Mona Baker, *Translation and Conflict: A Narrative Account* (Routledge, 2018).

how the Arabic novels represent the public narrative of terrorism in the Iraq context that is generally understood by the public.

Three Arabic Novels on Terrorism in Iraq

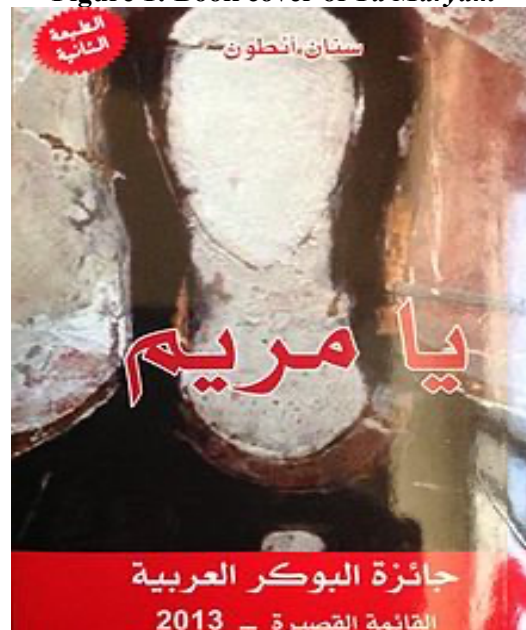
Iraq is one of the Arab countries that is still in a prolonged crisis. After the 2003 American invasion and the fall of Saddam Hussein's rule, Iraq's social and political stability became increasingly uncertain.³³ The fall of Saddam Hussein's power has triggered the birth of various social and religious groups and has resulted in multiple endless conflicts.³⁴ The main characters in the dispute involved the Iraqi government and Americans, Shiites, Sunnis, and Kurds. The Sunnis were struggling to drive the United States out and regain power. On the other hand, the Shiite militias seek to defend Shiites from the Sunni insurgents.³⁵

The tensions and conflicts between the groups had given rise to acts of terror in various forms, such as suicide bombings and shootings. The act of terror in Iraq is an essential theme in Arabic novels. Based on the study results and the stories' selection, three stories describe the horrors and acts of terrorism in Iraq. The three stories are: 1) *Yā Maryam* [O...Maryam] by Sinan Antoon (2012); 2) *Al-Kāfira* [The Disbeliever., fem.] by Ali Badr (2015); and *Frankenstein fī Baghdad* [Frankenstein in Baghdad] by Ahmad Sa'dawi (2013).

Yā Maryam

The novel *Yā Maryam* tells the victims of a suicide bombing attack by terrorists on a church in Iraq. In this novel, the victim in discussion is an elderly woman from a devout Catholic Christian family. The woman became the victim of a suicide bombing while she was on her usual duty to provide services to the Christian congregation who prayed in the Church. Terrorist attacks within the novel are narrated in the following text: "...when the Christians were doing prayer within the Church, they heard there was gunfire and also an explosion in front of the Church..."³⁶ It is reported that before the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and succeeded in toppling Saddam Hussein, 1.5 million Christians lived in the country. They enjoyed protection and enjoyed almost equal rights with the Muslim majority but then became the most targeted group during the conflict, including a terrifying attack on the Church.³⁷

Figure 1: Book cover of *Yā Maryam*



³³ Raymond Hinnebusch, "American Invasion of Iraq: Causes and Consequences," *PERCEPTIONS: Journal of International Affairs* 12, no. 1 (2007): 17–18.

³⁴ Ho Won Jeong, *Understanding Conflict and Conflict Analysis, Understanding Conflict and Conflict Analysis* (Sage, 2008).

³⁵ James D Fearon, "Iraq's Civil War," *Foreign Aff.* 86 (2007): 2.

³⁶ Sinan Antoon, *Ya Maryam* (Dar al-Jamal, 2012), 146.

³⁷ "Bomb Explodes Outside Catholic Church in Baghdad - BBC News," accessed December 7, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-13183215>.

The Christian family portrayed in this novel is a Christian family with good access to education. In addition, some of these members are also active in political activities, although not many have succeeded in occupying certain strategic political positions. This Christian family does not understand the situation in Iraq and feels that the political system in Iraq does not offer explicit protection for minority groups, exposing them to terrorist attacks. Some Christian family members are forced to travel abroad, namely the United States, to seek a better life and avoid uncertain socio-political situations.³⁸ It is also relevant to note that many Christian families migrated from the Middle East and lived in European countries as a diaspora.³⁹

In this novel, terrorism is narrated as one part of Iraq's uncertain social and political conditions. Terrorism is seen as having caused the lives of the Christian minority to be increasingly threatened and forced to leave Iraq in search of a better life abroad. The author of *Yā Maryam* does not mention any specific terrorist group. The author focused more on the victims of terrorism instead of the terrorist group. However, one of the characters narrated as the leading cause of the chaos in Iraq was the Baath partisans: "...although the Ba'ath partisans have already gone to jail, they are still the main cause of the chaos..."⁴⁰

Since the program of De-Baathification under the Bush administration, it was reported that about 30,000 to 50,000 Baathists were forced to go underground.⁴¹ It is common knowledge that the Baath is a secular party left behind by Saddam Hussein, so could it be possible for them to be a terrorist group? McBride opined that since the fall of Saddam's government, the leaders of terrorist movements in Iraq, such as Al Qaeda and ISIS, have recruited former Baathists.⁴² It is the reason why many Baathists were involved in acts of terrorism in Iraq, as narrated in the novel of *Yā Maryam*.

Al-Kāfirah

The novel *Al-Kāfirah* narrates the story of the changing lives in a city in Baghdad caused by the arrival of a radical armed group, *al-musallahīn*. The story tells the life of a family consisting of a father, a mother, and a daughter. The novel's central figure narrates that poverty is the leading motivation for the father's joining a radical group: "...poverty is the reason. That is, without a doubt. I say this with confidence. It is something obvious; it does not need any proof..."⁴³

Some researchers believe poverty is one of the driving factors for someone's involvement in radicalism movements.⁴⁴ This paradigm comes from the crisis theory pioneered by R. Hrair Dekmejian.⁴⁵ He has conducted extensive research on radical movements in the Middle East and concluded that the emergence of Islamic radicalism movements in the Middle East was caused by poverty due to the economic crisis that occurred. The theory is weak since it cannot reveal the ideological factor as an essential factor in the emergence of religious radicalism movements.⁴⁶ A study shows, for example, that even people with high levels of education and a stable economy can also be involved in acts of terrorism or at least become sympathizers to acts of terrorism.⁴⁷ However, the novel above shows that one of the leading causes of one of the characters' involvement in terrorist actions is poverty.

³⁸ Mehdi Bahmani and Javad Etaat, "Diaspora Identity: A Profile of Iraqi Immigrants in the USA," *Journal of World Sociopolitical Studies* 4, no. 1 (2020): 95–132.

³⁹ Marta Wozniak, "Far from Aram-Nahrin: The Suryoye Diaspora Experience," in *Border Terrains: World Diasporas in the 21st Century* (Brill, 2020), 73–83.

⁴⁰ Antoon, *Ya Maryam*, 21.

⁴¹ James P. Pfiffner, "US Blunders in Iraq: De-Baathification and Disbanding the Army," *Intelligence and National Security* 25, no. 1 (2010): 76–85.

⁴² Megan K. McBride, "Unforced Errors: ISIS, The Baath Party, And The Reconciliation of The Religious and The Secular," *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 20, no. 2 (April 3, 2019): 173–74.

⁴³ Ali Bader, *Al-Kāfira* (Al-Mutawassit, 2015), 64.

⁴⁴ Ömer Taşpınar, "Fighting Radicalism, Not" Terrorism": Root Causes of an International Actor Redefined," *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 29, no. 2 (2009): 75.

⁴⁵ R Hrair Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World* (Syracuse University Press, 1995).

⁴⁶ Michaelle Browsers, *Political Ideology in the Arab World: Accommodation and Transformation* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁴⁷ K Bhui, N Warfa, and E Jones, "Is Violent Radicalisation Associated with Poverty," *Migration* 9, no. 3 (2014).

Figure 2: Book Cover of *Al-Kāfirah*



The family members were also required to wear the veil (this also applies to all women in the village after being controlled by armed groups). In addition to the father's involvement in the activities of these radicals, the mother and daughter were asked to work at the headquarters of the armed group.⁴⁸ Here, the girl - as the main character in the novel - gradually begins to observe the activities carried out by the armed groups. In the headquarters, there are many women from various countries.⁴⁹ Even though they live in the same base, these women are prohibited from communicating with one another. In general, several studies show that women are often depicted as victims of the conflict. Many women lose their family members and then become hostages of armed groups.⁵⁰ In the novel, women are narrated as coming from various countries; this means that in this context, women are assumed not only to be victims but also to be actively motivated to join terrorist groups.

The girl also began to recognize some terms that she had rarely heard in her life, such as the term *kāfirah*⁵¹ (addressed to women who are seen as not applying Islamic law even though they are Muslim). This new interpretation of the concept of *kāfir* (male) or *kāfirah* (female) was inspired by the concept of *takfir* introduced by Sayyid Qutb and was adopted by the radical groups.⁵² In addition, she has also witnessed the stoning of women who are considered to have committed adultery. She also knew that a husband was deliberately accused of being an infidel so that when he was divorced from his wife, the wife would then be married by one of the armed group members.⁵³

It is said that the girl married a village youth and lived happily. Then, following to the passing of her mother in law, a significant and drastic change happened to her husband. The husband continued to be gloomy, and on one occasion, he told his wife that he had agreed with an armed group to carry out a suicide bombing in the market. The husband further told her not to be sad because he would get 70 beautiful girls if the husband died. He also left the money that he received from the armed group. When she heard the statement, the wife was furious and said sarcastically: "So, you want to do a suicide bombing for 70 beautiful girls? What are you going to do with the 70 girls? You can't even serve me twice a day."⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Bader, *Al-Kāfira*, 87.

⁴⁹ Bader, *Al-Kāfira*, 88.

⁵⁰ Lere Amusan, Adebawale Idowu Adeyeye, and Samuel Oyewole, "Women as Agents of Terror: Women Resources and Gender Discourse in Terrorism and Insurgency," *Politikon* 46, no. 3 (2019): 345–59.

⁵¹ Bader, *Al-Kāfira*, 89.

⁵² Anthony Bubalo and Gregory Fealy, "Joining the Caravan? The Middle East, Islamism and Indonesia," 2005, 19; Nafiu Ahmed Arikewuyo, "Madkhali's Criticism of Sayyid Qutb: A Critique of the Critique," *IJISH (International Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities)* 6, no. 2 (2023): 132.

⁵³ Bader, *Al-Kāfira*, 95.

⁵⁴ Bader, *Al-Kāfira*, 126.

However, because the husband had a contract with an armed group, he still carried out a suicide bombing in a public market targeting ordinary civilians. Even the novel described that the victims of terror were ordinary people who worked in the market, selling vegetables, etc.⁵⁵ With the passing of her parents, she was left alone. It offers feeling of freedom and accessible to do anything, however circumstances of women without anyone's protection will attract the attention of the armed groups. The situation triggers her to look for a solution, by going abroad. She left for Belgium and obtained a refugee visa via an intermediary. There, the female character feels she has found her freedom and identity as a real woman.

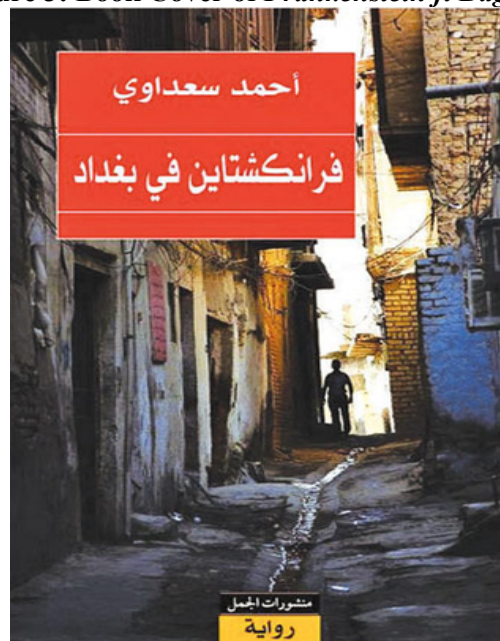
This novel narrates a terrorist group as a fragment from an Islamic group that has applied religious law unilaterally. The application of *shari'ah* carried out by armed groups is more of *shari'ah* formalism and ignores the essence of the actual religious teachings. Consequently, people become victims and feel estranged from the spiritual practices exemplified by these armed groups. In addition, the presence of armed groups in Iraq has once again triggered some people to seek refuge abroad, namely to Europe, in search of a better life.

The novel portrays women as the most affected group by the collapse of Saddam Hussein. Without any safeguard, most women fell prey to the terrorist movement.⁵⁶ The complex political situation and the division of social groups in Iraq, the dichotomy between the self-proclaimed Islamist group and the secular, has victimized the women at large.

Frankenstein fi Baghdād

This novel discusses various terror attacks in Iraq, especially in the Bataween area, an area in which a mix of Christians, Muslims, Jews and other religions lived for more than a hundred years.⁵⁷ The district was narrated as one of the destroyed areas due to various battles and suicide bomb attacks. Several bomb explosions took place in the middle of residential areas, such as the explosion at the Bridge of the Imams (*Jisrul-A'immah*), Tayaran Square, Sadeer Novotel Hotel, and the Sadriya market. The acts of terror in the novel were allegedly carried out by terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda. All these acts of terror affected many major cities in Iraq.

Figure 3: Book Cover of *Frankenstein fi Baghdād*



Unlike the two novels, Frankenstein's novel specifies some of the terrorists in Iraq. The terrorist at the Sadeer Novotel Hotel, for example, was identified as a citizen of Sudanese descent: "...what caused the

⁵⁵ Bader, *Al-Kāfirā*, 127.

⁵⁶ Nadjé Sadig Al-Ali and Nicola CHRISTINE Pratt, "Women in Iraq: Beyond the Rhetoric," *Middle East Reports*, no. 239 (2006): 5–6.

⁵⁷ Sinan Mahmoud and Aymen Al-Ameri, "Restoring Al Bataween - a Symbol of Baghdad's Lost Diversity," *The National*, accessed December 10, 2024, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/news/mena/2024/06/21/restoring-al-bataween-a-symbol-of-baghdads-lost-diversity/>.

incident [bomb explosion and death toll] was a Sudanese suicide bomber driving a trash car stolen from multidisciplinary Baghdad, where the vehicle was filled with dynamite...”⁵⁸

Although some texts specifically describe the terrorists in Baghdad, the novel generally explains that terrorist groups oppose both the Iraqi government and American troops. Although the novel is an imaginary work, several facts were factually narrated. The terrorists attacked several hotels since most Western people resided at hotels. Even some hotels were labelled by the terrorists as “hotels of the Jews.”⁵⁹

On another occasion, the novel *Frankenstein* also narrated in detail a bombing plan against a government office: “... there will be a car bomb attack at eleven in the morning in front of the Minister of Finance’s office. The car bomb will move quickly and stop suddenly in front of the Minister’s office and explode...”⁶⁰

The novel narrates at least there were two groups in Iraq were at war. The first group is various paramilitary and terrorist while the second group is the Iraqi Government and the Americans. In this background, anyone opposing the government of Iraq and America will be labelled as a terrorist. Meanwhile, the victims of terrorist attacks are Shia groups⁶¹, Christians,⁶² and the Muslim community. In addition, the novel also narrates a once peaceful region, the Assyrian district in al-Dura city, the largest concentration of Assyrian Christians in southern Baghdad, became a battlefield between three large camps, namely The Iraqi and American armies, the Sunni, and the Shiites militias.⁶³

Like the two previous novels, this novel narrates several Iraqi residents, especially Christians, who were forced to leave the country for a Western country, namely Australia. The success of Iraqi Christians in fleeing for Australia is inevitable without the help of the Church Pastor in Iraq in the migration process.⁶⁴ In addition, Frakeinstein's novel has succeeded in narrating the complexity of the transformation impact of the government system in Iraq from the dictatorial leadership under Saddam Hussein to the era of democratization, which did not meet expectations, including acts of terrorism that occurred in various regions of Iraq. This has changed the religious attitudes of some people. In the novel, the chaos and uncertainty of life and the attitude of religious people who are deemed to violate religious values have turned people into atheists. At some instant, some atheists eventually become believers after witnessing the positive aspects of religion.⁶⁵

Conclusion

The three novels, *Yā Maryam* by Sinan Antoon (2012), 2) *Al-Kāfirah* by Ali Bader (2015), and *Frankenstein fī Baghdad* by Ahmed Saadawi (2013), narrate various acts of terror in Iraq. Each novel has its narrative of terrorism in Iraq. *Yā Maryam* describes the impacts of terrorism on the Christian minority as being increasingly excluded and marginalized in various social and political contests. These uncertain socio-political conditions in Iraq forced some Christian families to flee abroad. Meanwhile, *Al-Kāfirah* criticizes the implementation of sharia carried out by the terrorist group in a particular area in Iraq. The novel sees that the implementation of shari'ah law is perceived as deviated from Islamic teachings and essence. The novel also portrays the women as the primary victims after the collapse of Saddam Hussein and were trapped among terrorist groups. *Frankenstein fī Baghdad* is a novel that explains various acts of terror in more detail, starting from the perpetrators, actions, and victims of terrorism. The novel illustrates the destruction of the city of Baghdad caused by the feud of various militia groups, including terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda. Thus, the three novels represent the same narratives on terrorism as detrimental and destroying the state. The three novels confirmed that the actions of terrorism resulted from misinterpretation of religious doctrines.

⁵⁸ Ahmed Saadawi, *Frankenstein Fī Bagdād* (Mansyūrāt Al-Jamal, 2013), 43.

⁵⁹ “Truck Bomber Kills 3, Wounds 30 American Contractors in Baghdad,” *Deseret News*, March 9, 2005, <https://www.deseret.com/2005/3/9/19881183/truck-bomber-kills-3-wounds-30-american-contractors-in-baghdad/>.

⁶⁰ Saadawi, *Frankenstein Fī Bagdād*, 256.

⁶¹ Saadawi, *Frankenstein Fī Bagdād*, 73.

⁶² Saadawi, *Frankenstein Fī Bagdād*, 28.

⁶³ Saadawi, *Frankenstein Fī Bagdād*, 158.

⁶⁴ Saadawi, *Frankenstein Fī Bagdād*, 244–45.

⁶⁵ Saadawi, *Frankenstein Fī Bagdād*, 284.

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