



# Satirical Representation of Political Issues in Sinan Antoon Ijaam

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## Abstract

The study discussed the representation of Political Issues in Sinan Antoon Ijaam .It explores how the author used irony in portraying the hypocrisy of Saddam Hussein's government and his political violence. It also provides a clarification of the concept of satire and how it's adopted in Antoon's novel Ijaam. Antoon used heavy irony of the Baath Party institutions and the leader's speech by depicting of what they mean. He uses extreme language and playing with words to show his discontent of Saddam Hussein's regime. The theory of satire is used as a framework in the Iraqi political novel to create awareness of the suffering of Iraqi society during The Baath Party government.

The result indicated the prominent themes that emerged from the satirical representation of political issues in Sinan Antoon's Ijaam: political violence, corruption of Saddam Hussein's regime. Since we do not notice any notion pertaining to the fundamentals of the Baath Party institutions. They are used as a mechanism to use violence over Iraqi people. The finding also showed how the words used in contradictory way to construct realistic picture of the brutality of the Baath Party government.

**Key words:** Antoon's Ijaam, Saddam Hussein's regime, The Baath Party, The theory of satire, political issues

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## I. Authoritarian Regimes

According to Juan Linz (as cited in Gonzalez Anaya, 2001), authoritarian regimes are the very oppressive regimes that have the power of controlling everything. They lack political pluralism and responsibility. In addition, the authoritarian regimes do not have an elaborate and guiding ideology. The leader in such political systems exercises power within "formally ill-defined limits" (p.13). It is noteworthy that the authoritarian personality has emerged in the mid-1930. It emerged as a repressive power in some European countries, such as the Nazis in Germany (Yaseen, 1983). The authoritarian regimes do not have a defined ideology, and why they are not easily distinguished from totalitarian regimes. However, they are characterized by their indifference towards the people that they rule( Gonzalez Anaya, 2001). Linz (2000) pointed out that the totalitarian

system is characterized by having a specific ideology managed by a single party that is tied to this ideology. The dictator is a term that is used to refer to the person who runs this totalitarian regime. Minxin (1991) also distinguishes between these two kinds of regimes: authoritarian and totalitarian. The authoritarian regimes do have the ability to practice democracy, whilst the totalitarian system attempts to control all social, political, and economic aspects of the people. What the authoritarian regimes intend to do is to "depoliticize and demobilize the masses" (Gonzalez Anaya, 2001, p. 14). The authoritarian regimes also resort to any means to stay in power. Thus, both positive and negative mechanisms are used to reinforce such kind of regimes. Finnell (2018) further explains about the authoritarian regimes when he argues that these regimes have control over the media and elections to ensure their sustainability. The



concept of authoritarian regimes is not identified by using a single term, but rather these regimes can be referred to as hybrid regimes, electoral authoritarianism, and hegemonic authoritarian regimes. Each one is centered on authoritarian regimes. Yaseen (1983) also noted that several expressions can describe and define the phenomenon of authoritarianism, such as tyranny, autocracy, dictatorship, and totalitarianism. In the same vein, Minxin (1991) showed the influence of authoritarian regimes on the economy, especially the Middle Eastern countries. The lack and failure of economic growth seem to be a common problem in such authoritarian regimes. Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett (2001) pointed out that the economic situation in Iraq deteriorated during the period of survived with their food until the end of the month. Such difficult circumstances affected Iraqis very much and thus caused three million Iraqis to choose to migrate. In the Arab world, authoritarian regimes were dominant, especially in the latter half of the 20th century.

During this period, there was no longer a serious role for the opposition groups because the authoritarian violence of the ruling regimes suppressed all resistance at the time (Helfont, 2015). As regards Iraq, Helfont argues that the government of the Baath party is an authoritarian regime which hypocritically used Islamic religion as a strategy to graft its ideology onto the Islamic landscape. In fact, this strategy helped Saddam Hussein's regime to strengthen his rule by employing Islamic leaders and institutions to overcome oppositions. One of the most famous novels that addressed themes of oppression during dictatorship regimes was Ijaam (2004). The researcher finds the selected novel provides a comprehensive review of the Iraqi people during the Saddam Hussein era.condition.

## II. Political Violence and Oppression

The topic of political violence has received increasing interest in describing the dictatorial regimes in literature. According to political theorists, the topic of political violence goes hand in hand with political matters, and therefore, most studies that discuss the topic of dictatorship should study the topic of violence. Violence and dictatorship are two conjoining

concepts that have been covered with many discussions. Machiavelli (as cited in Gonzalez Anaya, 2001), examined the role of political violence in dictatorship regimes and he found that the tyrannical regimes use political violence to sustain their power. His philosophy of political violence divides into three types: "bad, acceptable, and useless" (p.109). The practices of political violence are not confined to a specific period because are still used until today.

Similarly, Ronald Wintrobe (1990) pointed out that political violence can include the criticism of the government that restricts and undermines the right of its citizens, including the freedom of the press and the freedom of opposition. It is quite notable that these totalitarian regimes resort to the use of violence even after their opposers were killed or in prison. Notonly are these innocent victims affected, but they also are their loyal supporters. Historically, political violence is considered one of the main problems in most societies, especially after the Cold War, since the world witnessed intrastate bloodletting that has shocked many observers of world politics (Morgan, 2004). In their book entitled *Violent Geographies: Fear, Terror, and Political Violence* Gregory and Pred (2007) traced the history of political violence politically and showed how the state power of violence in the early 19th century was abused to generate an environment of fear amongst the people. The authors also examined how the terrorist use violent power against the government to spread fear among the populace. There is ambiguity in the precise definition of the word violence and its types, but physical violence is considered the most obvious type (Moore 2008). Violence, as mentioned earlier, has different types: domestic violence, political violence, social violence, economic violence, religious violence and so on. Violence is defined as the "use of physical force and is generally evinced by the destruction of property, the killing or wounding of people" (Hibbs, 1973. p.8). Mansouri and Parvaneh (2017) pointed out that there are three types of violence: a) symbolic violence, which is a type of violence that makes of language the primary mean of achieving goals; b) subjective violence, which is the most obvious and common form of violence that has acts of terrorism or crime, and c) the systemic violence, which is one of the most dangerous types of violence in which deceptive means and illusions are used to

control the economic and political systems. So violence is not a fixed form, but it depends on how people use it suffer it and defy it (Nordstrom & Robben, 1995.) Violence is not only found in Third-World countries, but it is an inescapable case that may inflict any country, directly or indirectly. Researching violence is not a simple work, as the subject is covered with "assumptions, presuppositions, and contradictions. Like power, violence is essentially contested: everyone knows it exists, but no one agrees on what actually constitutes the phenomenon" (Nordstrom& Robben, 1995, p.5.) According to Hoque (2014), political violence is defined as "an alarming growing phenomenon in many parts of the world" (p. 40). In their article Gender And Political Violence In Latin America Concepts, Krook and Sanín (2016) defined political violence as "acts and/or threats of physical, psychological, or sexual violence", used for humiliating, and restricting any event affects against the government (p.129.) Likewise, Eswó (as cited in Ilelah, 2015) defined political violence as "the illegal utilization of power and violence against individuals or properties in order to threaten the government or the individual for achieving political or social objectives" (p.8- .)Ponce and Pasquale (2013) have noted that the main purpose of using political violence (government-directed violence) is usually to support the leaders to stay longer in power. Therefore, repression is not directed to a special group, but it appoint"against opposite groups as well as against civilians (Garcia-Ponce & Pasquale, 2013,p.24) Verba et al. (as cited in Lamprianou, 2013) argued, on the other hand, that the decision-making processes should not be confined to the authorities or leaders, but rather it is a mission that everyone ought to have an equal chance to participate in( Lamprianou, 2013.) From the Iraqi perspective, political violence is further depicted in an article entitled Compliance And Resistance In Iraq Under Saddam Hussein: Evidence From The Files Of the Baath party by Blaydes (2015), in which she explains by analyzing data from documents by the United States during its invasion of Iraq in 2003 how the political violence was adopted and become one of the principles of Saddam Hussein's regime to maintain power. The author also reveals the bias of the regime toward his clan and family members who previously enjoyed prestigious positions in the state.

Additionally, they were excluded from taking part in the wars.

### III. Impacts of Political Violence on Iraqi Literature

It is very rare that Iraqi literature not been involved in themes and discussions related to politics. This is because it is considered the most basic means for the populations express themselves (especially the innocent and poor ones) against the political violence that is committed against them by the dictatorial political authorities. In turn, this is why these authorities have imposed a large collar on many Iraqi writers and poets who often suffered tyranny and terror. A lot of them were forced to leave their homeland and to live in exile (Ali, 2008). The Iraqi literature has been influenced by two historical stages. The first one is represented during the establishment of the Iraqi Kingdom in 1921. It banned all the democratic freedoms and threatened to jail anyone that dared express opinions against the ruling class. Despite the severe censorship on the press and freedoms in monarchic Iraq, some opposition journal appeared. For example, Public Opinion and The People were among the journals that were published in 1932 but were banned after a short period of publication. Literature at that time was interested in topics that related to social rather than political issues. This was because class divisions were a key issue during that time. In the 1940s and 1950s, Iraq witnessed the emergence of some secular movements as a result of World War II. However, they suffered at the hands of the Iraqi government and, accordingly, all literature used as a tool for expressing Marxist ideologies was strictly censored. However, political criticism was confined only to satirical journalism. The message was conveyed using the medium of metaphors, jokes, proverbs, word-games. The success of such criticism was because the writers and poets used creative writing to elude government censors. The political criticism magazine of such kind increased. There were more than 31 magazines and journals during the early decades of monarchic Iraq. The number of socio- political cartoonists, for example, also increased to more than 18 well- known artists (Ali, 2008.) The second one is represented during the revolution of July 17th which was led



by the Baath party and lasted until the Anglo-American conquest of Iraq in March 2003. The censorship of that period was different from its corresponding monarchic Iraq in that the authority used all measures and instruments that were available to stress its censorship, not only on literature but for everything.

Tripp (2000) states that Saddam Hussein's regime had access to an apparatus far stronger than that were available to his predecessors, and thus had the potential of turning substantial financial and technical resources into unprecedented levels of raw power. The censorship during his rule was represented by the burning of cultural and historical books, imprisonment and deprivation of the poets and writers. Baram (1991) elaborates that the rationale behind the Baath party censorship was to do "normalization" of Iraqi history (p.515). The Iraqi government at that time claimed that Iraqi history and Arabic history, in general, were written by Persian historians and the motif of rewriting it would be part of the Iraqi future. Although Iraqi literature has been largely influenced by the above two periods, the first period was "less despotic" than the second one. Imprisonment and execution were used to shut down all the mouths that were demanding freedom because the government considered any opposing opinion as a clear threat against it (Ali, 2008, p.214)

#### **IV. Satirical Representation of Political Issues in Sinan Antoon Ijaam**

Ijaam (2004) was the first novel written by Sinan Antoon. It translated in English by Rebecca Johnson and the author. It presents in-depth literary criticism to the ideology of the Baath Party (Saddam's ruling political party). It revolves primarily around one male character named Furat who

put in prison as a result of his manuscript which involves his quibble and opposite opinions to the ideology of Saddam Hussein's regime. Antoon's satirical sense is depicted to the description of the Baath Party members and the government institutions such as prisons, schools and other institutions which have used as strong support to benefit Saddam's brutal regime.

The humour and satirical sense has been described in many situations. First, the narrator

starts with a satirical description of Abu Umar, one of the Baath Party who drove him to General Security building, al Amn al- Amm (one of the five primary agencies that make up Saddam's security apparatus). He states " Ubu Umar's reddish mustache reminded me of the cockroaches that invaded our bathroom at night, thwarting our every eradication campaign" (Antoon, p.1-2). Humour is used as a tool to highlight the theme of political violence during Saddam Hussein's regime. In essence, it seen as a tool that is capable of exposing The Baath Party absurdities in that time. (Robinson ,1981, p.65) explains that "humour is a weapon used to ridicule humanity, especially political leaders in order to address their follies and irrational behaviours, for the betterment of society".

Thus, Furat's satirical description of Abu Umar shows Antoon's resentment towards the ideology of the Baath Party institutions. A metaphor is employed to represent The Baath Party and The Baath Party members or the political readers. Abu Umar enrolled as a student in the English department, but he rarely attended classes and this was a clear sign that he was not an ordinary college student. Another representation of the irony is described when the narrator describing the place in which the car of the security officer was parked, " it was parked beneath the mural erected in honor of the Leader's honorary doctorate in disorder" (Antoon, p.3). The word 'disorder' in the quote above refers to 'law' which is used ironically and intentionally to convey insults or scorn to Saddam's regime. It is an indication to the opposite opinions to the system at that time.

Another situation which highlights the use of irony and which shows Antoon's contempt for Saddam's government is represented when the narrator describing the absurd of carnivals which the Iraqi people witness daily. The people deprived of their privacy and forced to attend the Baath Party rallies and donate everything even their eyes. Furat was frowning when he saw his school was exploited to be an "Eye Donation Centre" (Antoon. (2004, p.7). The act of giving a donation such as blood, money, clothes, etc to the poor, needy is something good but, the term 'Eye Donation' in the quote above is quite confusing as it is impossible to donate eyes. The phrase 'eye Donation center' may be used to refer to the surveillance device which the regime used to keep the Iraqi society under the

constant censorship. The author attempts to show how the people's privacy affected. The regime restricts everything related to the people freedom in Iraq in one hand. The ruling party mysteriously dawdle public funds and resources and subject the citizens to abject poverty despite the country's vast natural and human resources on the other hand. The party is exploited to siphon the country's resources through illegitimate means.

"Write without any concern or hesitation that the government may or maynot be satisfied with what you write" (p. 8). In this statement, Antoon again criticizes Saddam Hussein's regime since the statement carries the false of an appearance of democracy or freedom. Since Furat was jailed and punished severely as a result of his manuscript which includes some criticism and opposite opinions to the ideology of the Baath Party. He even experiences brutal rape by one of the prison guards. The following extract displays some instances in which Furat is tortured and raped:

I feel intense pain in the back of my head from the blow I received when I tried to resist. It becomes aggravated when he pulls my hair or pushes my head, rubbing my nose in that gray cloth that has been colonized by a foul smell- a mixture of sweat, blood, and layers of dirt. The pain surges to my wrists and joints when I try to pry open the wires that cut into my skin. I can feel his sticky fingers on my right thigh as he holds me down. His dirty fingernails dig into my skin. I close my eyes and try to disappear from existence, to flee my body, to abandon it forever (p.21)

Likewise, there are other instances that refute Saddam Hussein's allegation of freedom in which the regime exploits the education as propaganda for it's ideas. And this meaning becomes clear especially when the narrator conveys that the supervisor submitted him "a brilliant topic of translating Saddam's speech and studying them as literary texts" (p.38)

Another instance of irony is also embodied when the author portraying the regime's henchmen contradiction and how they exploits their position for not participating in the battles. He states " I still could not imagine relatives of

important officials fighting on the frontlines, even if they were found to be fit they would most likely be assigned to an administrative unit in their hometown and struggle to show up once a month in order to avoid embarrassing their commanding officer" (12). The statement above also expose and criticize the stupidity and cowardice of the Baath Party henchmen, and how they work to protect themselves. It shows their reality as arrogant and unjust people. Lewis,1989 shows that humor is a type of a play that alleviate people from intensities of stressful life.

## V. Conclusion

The study analysed one selected novel, Ijaa'm (2004) by Sinan Antoon. The focus is on Antoon's use of humor as a way to show how the power was exploited by Saddam's regime to oppress Iraqi people. The researcher

has examined the satirical depiction of political issues as depicted through the characters of Ijaam novel. Basically, humor assists the readers to understand the essence of Iraqi political novel and how it is used to satirize and ridicule politicians.

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