



## **Promoting Peace by Althusserian and Foucauldian Reading of Literature: Sinan Antoon's *I'jaam***

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### **Abstract**

This study seeks to investigate Sinan Antoon's *I'jaam* (2004) through applying different theoretical frameworks including those of Althusser (1971) and Foucault (1978). Antoon, considered as one of the most internationally recognized Iraqi writers, wrote this dystopian, war novel in Arabic and translated it to English. Antoon's emphasis placed on literature acting as an oppositional political voice has, in turn, created its own form of censorship inside the fictional world and outside the actual state censorship during Saddam Hossein reign. Thus, particular political messages within literary texts, like *I'jaam*, have been received with critical attention. The writing culture in Iraq has established an atmosphere in which literary critics and authors have valued specific types of texts that deal with social and political themes. *I'jaam's* background reveals how in the twentieth century, the world has become an ever more violent place; the growth of ethnic and sectarian conflicts, the rise of extremist movements and censorship have increasingly trapped people in an unending chaos and violence. For numerous generations, Iraq has been suffering from a long history of war and violence.



Accordingly, this paper aims to establish a bond between Althusserian and Foucauldian frameworks in order to analyze war and peace dichotomy and to reflect on such themes that shape the backbone of *I'jaam*. It is concluded that fulfilling basic human needs such as the sense of justice, freedom of speech and physical and financial security will serve to mitigate desires for revenge among victims and will help to diffuse inter-community tensions.

**Keywords:** Althusserian Views, Foucauldian Concepts, Peace/War, Sinan Antoon's *I'jaam*

## 1. Introduction

The significant link between Althusser and Foucault in their theorization of subjects represent these two important issues, war and peace, leading to Althusser's concept because of his totalizing view of ideological apparatuses. There are major methodological differences as well as similarities. Althusser investigated problematics and the underpinning ideology in the context of the real. Conversely, Foucault looked at statements of resistance (Miller, 1994, p. 99). Hole (2007) has examined totalitarianism by applying Foucauldian and Althusserian concepts to Orwell's *1984*, and considered it as a panoptic society where the individuals are observed and disciplined to act according to the party ideologies (pp. 15-17). Al-Mezirawi (2020) asserts that a number

of Foucauldian concepts have been used as a tool to analyse the obtained results in details focusing on the role of the power that totalitarian regimes wield to discipline the



body. In addition, as Foucault (1980) has argued, power exists in every relationship; it is practiced by some individuals and resisted by others.

Thus, resistance is the natural reaction towards power, and this study has used it as a means for exploring the way many individuals behave towards totalitarian regimes (p. 91). Another Foucauldian concept, which is the “panoptic on,” has been applied to analyze how totalitarian regimes turn the whole society into a panoptic environment, the citizens of which are controlled through the techniques of propaganda and telescreens by Big Brother and Little Brother (Foucault, 1980, p. 92).

The analysis of *I'jaam* by Ghandour (2012) in his conference paper “Sinan Antoon’s *I'jaam*,” deals with how Iraqi literature often copes with such themes as hatred towards the disaster of war, especially by those writers who leave the country and criticize the political system. *I'jaam* is a novel by a contemporary novelist, the backdrop of which is the time of “Iran-Iraq war” (1980-1988), and Furat as its chief character is in a conflict with the hegemonic discourse by the domineering police of Iraq (Ghandour, 2012, p. 16).

In addition, one of the basic strategies in a utopia and what most writers try to conceptualize in their works is peace. Sayyed (1977) argues, all individuals can only attain this through a friendly, compassionate and co-operative attitude. This is because it Provides a sanction for the principles of morality like justice, honesty, righteousness, brotherhood, equality, virtuousness, tolerance, sacrifice, help to the needy and other kindred virtues. These are the sources sustaining humanity until today (p. 34).



Many writers in the world are worried about the freedom of individuality, whether they are English, Arabic, Muslim, or Christian, and they try to promote the peaceful living as an important issue in the individuals' life. In addition, the focus of every literature is human life, this is because, and it is part of a people's cultural body that represents both instruction and entertainment.

## **2. Althusser's Vision and his Concepts**

Louis Althusser (1918-1990) is regarded as a French Marxist philosopher who created various methods of looking at Marx's writings from other perspectives, as his goal was to identify the troublesome pieces that hindered the material understanding of Marx's writings and thereby to clarify them by historical facts that are real. When the name of Althusser is mentioned, it would immediately evoke his essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1970), that has become an important text of contemporary theory since it deals with the question of ideology in a far more entirely reliant way than Marx's writings did.

Marxist critics believe and claim that a text is the result of their culture. No text can then stop displaying the context in which it is being written. This assertion leads to a number of questions such as: what is the culture? What are the rules that control society? Who governs those laws? In addition, what are the purposes of these rules? Sasani and Davari (2015) argue, society is a set of rules or programs characterized by the capitalist culture and those in power to which the people of that society must subscribe, moreover, the reason why some people consider such capitalist ideology good is because these rules are internalized in them and they do not recognize them as



oppressive rules (p. 2). Gramsci (1998) as another Marxist critic describes the apparatus of state as having coercive power, which ‘legally’ enforces discipline on what he calls “civil society,” the society that does not consent either actively or passively. This apparatus is, however, constituted for the whole society in anticipation of moments of crisis of commanding a direction when spontaneous consent fails (Gramsci, 1998, p. 277).

For a more comprehensive understanding of Althusser’s ideas, the next section is going to deal with the concepts that Althusser created in order to analyse the totalitarian regimes and the strategies of their leaders. Some concepts of Althusser include “Ideological State Apparatuses” (ISAs) and “Repressive State Apparatus” (RSAs). Althusser would believe that the dominant hegemony or prevailing ideology forms the attitudes of people through a process he calls interpellation or hailing the subject, which is an ideology’s power to give individuals identity by the structure and prevailing forces of society (Bressler, 2012, 173).

“Ideology and ideological state apparatuses” elaborates four interrelated theses; ideology has no history, ideology represents the imaginary relation of individuals to their real conditions of existence; ideology has a material existence and the central thesis; ideology interpellates individuals as subjects (Eldridge, 1993, p. 190). Moreover, Althusser refers to another state apparatuses as repressive because they have the power to act with violence, whether physical or symbolic. In contrast, the “ideological state apparatuses” (ISAs) consist of cultural functionaries such as media institutions, the church, and the family, and operate primarily through ideology. Althusser refers to this

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process as a “double functioning” because one apparatus functions “predominately” and the other “secondarily.” Therefore, the repressive state apparatus functions predominantly by repression and secondarily by ideology while the ideological state apparatus works predominately through ideology and secondarily by repression. Both the repressive state apparatus and the ideological state apparatus illustrate the role of state power in subject formation. Althusser’s theory of interpellation argues that individuals gain subjectivity through a process of linguistic hailing (Swenson, 2011, p. 4).

For Althusser both the ISA and the RSA function to reproduce the social relations that allow for their existing mode of capitalism. The effective state apparatus (ASA) is deployed to account for the contemporary mode of capitalism that increasingly relies on affective relationships and their reproduction. Following Spinoza’s understanding of immanent causality, the relationship between the effective state apparatus and contemporary capitalism is not a linear one; rather, in Althusser’s language it is overdetermined (Althusser, 1969, 102). Althusser’s concept of over determination, as J. K. Gibson-Graham and Wolff (2000) note, “does not assign causal or constitutive privilege to any social instance or process;” rather, “each identity or event can be understood as constituted by the entire complex of natural, social, economic, cultural, political, and other process that comprise its conditions or existence” (pp.6-7). Likewise, the effective state apparatus is not a determining apparatus, but it is an overdetermined one. Althusser’s over determination is important because it recognizes the contingency and historicity of subjectivities and events. An





effective state apparatus speaks of a particular historical moment and a particular form of capitalist subjectivity (Althusser, 1969, p. 105).

### **3. Foucauldian Concepts**

#### ***3.1. Power/Knowledge***

Power is based on knowledge, and its use happens through knowledge, as is shown by Foucault's interpretation of power and by constructing knowledge according to its unverified motivations, power reproduces knowledge (Mills, 2003, p. 34). Foucault sees power/knowledge as an overarching structure that defines what is to be learned, because instead of thinking, individual thinkers grow ideas and knowledge (Deleuze & Hand, 1988, p. 39). Foucault (1991) suggests that in addition to who that knows the objects to be identified, the forms of knowledge should all be seen as the effects of the fundamental consequences of power-knowledge and their historical transitions (p. 27). In other words, the structure of knowledge is often not produced by the behaviour of a specific subject of knowledge; however, it is the question of supportive or resistant to power, power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that transcend it, and from which it is constructed that describe the mechanisms and the appropriate knowledge disciplines (Foucault, 1991, pp. 27-28). Hence, power/knowledge produces the facts and scholars just convey them (Smart, 2002, p. 35).

#### ***3.2 Power/Body***

Contrary to the theories, stating that power of a group is dominated by another, bio-power is a term invented by Michel Foucault to signify the circumstances through



which power expresses itself within the shape of regular daily activities and exercises within which people participate in self- monitoring and personality-discipline oppressing themselves (Smart, 2002, p. 51). Foucault (1991) argued for its power, its capacity coding, the extortion of its powers, the continuous trying to boost of its effectiveness as well as their docility (p. 54). The power processes that differentiate the disciplines in its integration into successful and economic monitoring systems guaranteed all of this (Foucault, 1978, p. 139). In *Discipline and Punish* (1991), Foucault portrayed his most clear vision of the nature and relationship of power and body stating that throughout the history, power is exercised on body as a strategy through two different ways. The first way is to discipline the body through physical pain “the punishment-body relation,” and the second strategy is to discipline the soul or mind that is also done by practicing power over the body (Foucault, 1991, p. 11).

### **3.3 Power/Resistance**

Foucault (1978) has probed into the effect of different institutions on groups of people and the role that people in return play for accepting or resisting these effects in order to change the view of power as the repression of the powerless by the powerful showing how power is active in everyday relations between people and institutions (p. 112). In *The History of Sexuality* (1978), Foucault argues that power in some contexts is productive; it creates new forms of behavior by the interaction of power and resistance, because “[i]f power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it” (p. 119). In addition, Foucault (1978) analyzes the supposition that power is always and





oppressive demonstrating how power can also be positive in such a manner that it can generate elements of satisfaction, knowledge systems, goods and discourse and not only operating unfavorably, by refusing to accept, limiting, preventing and trying to suppress individuals (p. 155).

Power is something that cannot be possessed, or something that is located within particular institutions, instead “power is everywhere” (Foucault, 1978, p. 93). On the contrary, to Marxist’s view of power that analyses it as top-down model, Foucault believes in the bottom-up model of power stating that power diffuses in the social body (Mills, 2003, p. 81). Power has to be considered as something that spreads, or perhaps more as something that only acts as a network. It is not possible to consider power as something located here or there, never in the hands of anyone, never appropriated as a commodity or wealth piece (Foucault, 1980, p. 97).

### ***3.4 Panopticism***

According to Foucault (1991), the panopticon can provide a tool to control its own process by the apparatus (p. 201). The director will spy on all the staff he has under his orders in this central tower: nurses, doctors, supervisors, teachers, warders, and by doing so he will be able to continually judge them, change their attitude, enforce on them the methods that he believes is the best, and even the supervisor himself can be observed (Foucault, 1991, p. 203). Consequently, the panopticon will be the device of discipline for both the observer and the observed (Foucault, 1991, p. 204).

Foucault has discussed two kinds of power that include on the one hand repressive power, which forces people to do what they do not want to, and on the other



hand normalizing power that makes people willing do what they have to do anyway (Sheridan, 2016, p. 48). Normalizing power turns people automatically and by their own will to act according to the norms of society. It also determines what people see as normal, and can construct people's view about the world and themselves by shaping their beliefs, desires, and decisions (Sheridan, 2016, pp. 48-51). Foucault (1994) argues that investigation blends watching hierarchical structure techniques with standardizing judgment techniques such as a standardizing gaze, a monitoring that intends to identify, qualify and punish once necessary (p. 183). It also introduces a visibility over individuals through which they are differentiated and judged; hence, the test is hierarchically organized in all the systems of discipline (Foucault, 1994, p. 184).

#### **4. Antoon's *Ijaam* and the Contribution to the War/Peace Issues**

To further the present understanding, this study draws on the novel *I'jaam: An Iraqi Rhapsody* (2004), which is a short novel written by Sinan Antoon (1967- ) the Iraqi author, novelist, translator, and scholar. Accordingly, the emphasis placed on literature acting as an oppositional political voice has, in turn, created its own form of censorship outside the actual state censorship, since particular political messages within literary texts have been received with critical attention (Chandler, 2012, p. 22). The writing culture in Iraq has established an atmosphere in which literary critics and authors have valued specific types of texts that intend to deal with specific social and political themes (Chandler, 2012, p. 24).

In the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries, the world has become an ever more violent place; the growth of ethnic and sectarian conflicts and the rise of extremist



movements have increasingly trapped people in an unending chaos and violence. For numerous generations, Iraq has been suffering from a long history of war and violence. In *Refractions of Violence* (2003), Martin Jay asserted that violence has become “a constitutive function of today’s world, structuring and sustaining our way of existence and of socio-political and transnational intelligibility” (p. 3). Michael Hardt and Antonio Nergi (2004) have also argued that contemporary warfare and violence have become “a permanent condition,” “the primary organizing principle of society” and “the general matrix for all relations of power and techniques of domination” (pp. 12-13). In *On Violence* (1970), Hannah Arendt as a political theorist stated that war is the most severe form of violence. Likewise, Scarry (1985) defined war as “a form of human brutality where the main activity is injuring and the ultimate goal is to out-injure the opponent” (p. 12).

Throughout the human civilizations, war and violence have been amongst the major themes of literature. War literature analyses the effects of war on the human psyche, the different attitudes towards war and the interpretations of human nature and human violence. In Iraqi literature, the theme of war plays a prominent role. Writers repeatedly express their personal experiences with the horrors of war and delve deeply into how the repercussions of war and the unhealed war wounds have coloured their lives. They create narratives that cast war as destructive, perverse and traumatic. Furthermore, in analysing *I’jaam: An Iraqi Rhapsody* (2004) that deals with the historical background of Iraq, which contains a lot of wars for this time, the most important issues are the sequence of tensions that the world has experienced and their



destructive outcomes. The first of these is the struggle between Iran and Iraq (1980–1988), and the second, starting in 1991, was the Iraq-Kuwait war or the Gulf War, which started with the United Nations’ imposing stern economic sanctions against Iraq (Habeeb, 2015, p. 42).

### **5. Conceptualization of Peace and its Role in the Writings of the Middle East.**

In Miller’s (2003) attitude, peace is “a political condition that makes justice possible” (as cited in Ariye, 2014, p. 13). The point is that societies where people can get easy access to justice for their mistakes are said to be in a state of peace. David Francis (2006) has provided six explanations for a condition of peace in the following order: “Peace as the absence of war; peace as justice and as development; peace as respect and tolerance between and amongst people, a balance in and with the ecosphere; peace as inner peace – spiritual peace; and, peace as wholeness and making whole” (as cited in Ariye, 2014, p. 26). For Udoh and Umoh, peace lacks a universal denominator, hence peace to one society may be different from peace in another society, emphasizing that, for example, “a society fragmented and polarized by perpetual war and armed conflicts will interpret peace as the absence of war (as cited in Ariye, 2014, p. 26).

As such, writers in the Middle East in general and in Iraq in particular believe that multiple forces will be one way of establishing a large local force; still this should also involve training and the development of a proper command system. Now it is the time to develop the capacity of the local population about security, as this is not only intrinsic to the liberation operation, but is also an essential factor in ensuring peace and stability (O’Driscoll, 2014, p. 26).



## 6. Concluding Remarks

Many of the aspects addressed in this study contribute to the fact that war is the most powerful cause of conflict in the world. War is known to be the most catastrophic manifestation of the urges of aggression that are inherent to human nature. As such, there needs to be a constitutional consensus between local policymakers for the governing system and the broader province (including one between the former governor and the regional council); moreover, the relationship and patterns of influence between the central state and the province need to be negotiated with the central government, and the relationship between the province and the surrounding areas needs to be developed. Fulfilling basic human needs such as the sense of justice and both physical and financial security will serve to mitigate desires for revenge among victims, which helps to diffuse inter-community tensions. Therefore, the elements discussed in this section are essentially the most important, as they are intrinsic to the future and they allow people to move past from conflicts.



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