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Cultural satire in the literature of novelist Azhar Jargis

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Abstract

Culture constitutes one of the fundamental pillars of social existence, shaping collective consciousness, individual behavior, and societal continuity. Cultural sociology plays a vital role in uncovering the mechanisms through which cultural values, beliefs, and orientations manifest in social practices, while also examining phenomena such as cultural alienation, dependency, penetration, and resistance. This study explores the concept of culture and cultural crisis through the lens of cultural satire in contemporary Arab narrative discourse, with a particular focus on the works of Iraqi novelist Azhar Jirjis. Drawing on sociological and critical frameworks, the paper highlights how cultural satire functions as a critical tool to expose contradictions between intellectual awareness and lived reality, especially under conditions of political oppression, economic hardship, war, and displacement. Jirjis's narratives portray the suffering of Arab intellectuals, the erosion of cultural institutions, and the distortion of values caused by sectarianism, exile, and false consciousness. Through characters such as Aziz, Umm Yasser, and Hanna, the novelist critiques both Arab and Western societies without privileging one over the other, offering a dual critique that transcends ideological allegiance. The study concludes that cultural satire in Jirjis's work is not merely a literary device but a form of cultural resistance, revealing the ongoing struggle of the intellectual to preserve meaning, awareness, and human dignity amid social and cultural disintegration.

Keywords: Cultural sociology; Cultural satire; Arab intellectual; Cultural crisis; Iraqi narrative; Exile and diaspora; False consciousness; Cultural identity; Post-war society; Azhar Jirjis

Introduction

Culture is considered one of the important details of societies, as each society has its own cultures, orientations, and unique characteristics, according to the level of awareness built upon its individuals and what aligns with their inclinations, visions, and aspirations that contribute to the creation of cultural sociology. Given its importance to humans, their surroundings, existence, and continuity, cultural sociology helps uncover concepts among humans manifested in the form of social behaviors. Therefore, no society can do without cultural sociology, as this discipline studies everything related to culture, including civilization, and also addresses a set of concepts such as cultural penetration, cultural invasion, cultural dependency, cultural alienation, cultural development, and cultural independence, and it examines the causes of these changes in society.

No society, or even a specific group within a society, can be described as cultured in absolute terms; because culture means the highest qualities of those who possess it. Each individual in that society has their own unique culture and cultural level, depending on their intellectual maturity and personal inclinations. "If people describe someone as cultured, it means they are polite or well-versed in modern knowledge with a mature and deep understanding." (3) Therefore, social culture is specific to each society individually and to each individual within that society in particular.

Culture can be considered one of the most prominent advantages of both the individual and society, those advantages related to thought, a living conscience, knowledge, and orientations toward the highest realms of thinking, and the abandonment of self-desires to embrace all forms of thinking that stem from the individual's level of knowledge and awareness.

It can be said: "The social culture of a nation is like the personality of an individual." Just as every individual has their own unique personality, distinguishing them from any other individual, so too does every nation possess a specific social culture that is unlike any other

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culture in any other nation.

As for satire, culture can generally be considered encompassed by satire, although literature is specifically included within it. Therefore, culture involves societal issues because it encompasses the ideas and beliefs that manifest in every individual's case.

Cultural satire sheds light on the disparity between the intellectual, scientific, or literary level that the intellectual enjoys and his political subservience, which leads him to be a classical dependent, submissive, and bound to certain entities, not liberated from religious and sectarian fanaticism, possibly to achieve his own interests. Gramsci, in his social analysis of the intellectual, goes on to say that all people are intellectuals, but not all of them can perform the role of the intellectual in society. He classifies intellectuals, according to their intellectual function in society, into two types: traditional and organic. The first includes those who continue to perform the same work from generation to generation, such as religious leaders, teachers, and administrators. The second type, organic, includes users by commercial and political groups or institutions to organize interests, gain more power, and increase control.

And it can be said: "There is a crisis that Arab culture is experiencing, but it is not a cultural crisis as much as it is a crisis of us as cultured Arabs. However, Arab culture is in a state of constant labor and birth, and it does not stop being born, despite all circumstances. The crisis is a crisis of Arab intellectuals, as the Arab intellectual started with great dreams, but due to several factors, the most prominent of which are backwardness, oppression, the absence of freedom, and the silencing of voices, the intellectual could not program himself to achieve those dreams, so his writings often emerged as a reaction."

The novelist (Azhar Jirjis) began his critique of societies on the cultural and academic fronts in a subtle, indirect, and non-obvious manner. The reader sees that he does not directly address cultural institutions; rather, he sheds light on the extent of cultural contradictions in both Arab and Western societies, and what these societies have reached in terms of cultural and intellectual levels that are unsuitable for their intended functions. Since cultural institutions represent the bright aspects of their societies, every society, despite having certain cultures that distinguish it from other societies according to its values, customs, traditions, and beliefs, must have cultures that align with the necessities of building an ideal society, regardless of the intellectual foundations it has grown up with that do not harmonize with the demands of the era. The intellectual is responsible for building and influencing his society to become a society distinguished from others, striving for ideal ideals. ... etc., but it is necessary for it to adopt cultures that align with the necessities of building a society that aspires to be ideal, regardless of the intellectual foundations it has grown up with that do not harmonize with the demands of the era. The intellectual is responsible for building and influencing their society to make it distinct from other societies, striving for the highest ideals.

(George) addressed the cultural and intellectual aspects in his stories and novels; since "the society did not achieve logical cultural development, but rather experienced a significant upheaval in its perception of its own civilization, in proposing a method for civilizational revival, and entering the horizon of modernity. There was much talk about industrialization and economic growth, as well as

about democracy, and before them about sovereignty. All of this is certainly commendable; however, there is no economy or democracy without a cultural revolution, and culture necessarily relies on freedom of expression, freedom of consumption, and the society's openness to different intellectual currents." In the novel "Valley of Butterflies," specifically, the (novelist) depicted very sad images of intellectuals in Iraq and their suffering, which indicates that he touched upon cultural issues in Iraq in one way or another. Which has suffered and continues to suffer from the aftermath of wars one after another, as (Aziz) says: "My uncle Jibran knows my opinion; I will not share his livelihood no matter what happens." Since the morning, he hasn't sold a single book, that's what slipped out of his mouth. People have refrained from entering libraries, and reading has become a luxury. No one sacrifices their daily sustenance for a book. If someone says reading is food for the mind, they would respond, "Shut your mouth, we are hungry." This was the situation during the years of the siege. It is clear here that the narrator used the expression of his community ("we are hungry") to convey their suffering from poverty and destitution. As for the novelist, he distanced himself from the character of the hero; because if he belonged to the educated class, it would have been an artificial and unstable ideal that is not originally applied. What the novelist wants is for the audience to feel the authenticity of this hero (Aziz) thru his lived reality. This conversation is indeed a sincere one, as he spoke about opportunities that were presented to him but he did not invest in them correctly. He says: "Until now, I do not know if God will forgive us for what we put into the stomachs of soldiers and travelers, a drink that has nothing to do with Pepsi!"

The frustrating thing is that despite all our efforts to provide counterfeit goods, we didn't profit. The competition was greater than we had imagined, so we were forced to sell the machine, the mixes, and the cups.

"All your projects are failures," Uncle Jibran repeats. "Come work with me in the library before you lose yourself." And despite my love for the library, I vowed not to share the man's livelihood, especially since the book market has also been hit by recession and struck by the hurricane of copying and forgery. 10) Here, he mocks the character's realistic handling of the opportunities available to him, in addition to his ridicule of the lack of cultural engagement, including books, and their imitation by men in power, as well as the general public's lack of interest in reading, knowledge, and awareness.

Those who possess culture bear the great responsibility of spreading awareness among their fellow countrymen thru ideas, teachings, and ethics. They are the enlightened minds and the hearts that beat for the nation. They are the ones who reveal, analyze, and address phenomena. If they are expatriates, especially in the diaspora, the matter becomes imperative; the youth there need to love and respect their motherland (Iraq). On the other hand, there are those who are disconnected from their nation's consciousness and civilization level. We find them not inheriting or learning from it, except for being labeled as intellectuals, rushing after their personal interests. The storyteller of "Dar Dour... Allahu Ahad, Allahu Samad" mocks these negative traits when he expresses his astonishment at the stance of the elderly woman (Um Yasser), who denigrated her country (Iraq) while in the diaspora (Norway). He says: "In fact, my

words were not accepted by the elderly woman Um Yasser, so she rejected them entirely and said: 'No, my dear, what Iraq?'" God is One, God is Eternal) from these negative behaviors when he is astonished by the stance of the elderly woman (Umm Yasser) who described her country (Iraq) while in the diaspora (Norway), as he says: "In fact, my words were not accepted by the elderly woman Umm Yasser, so she completely rejected them and said: 'No, my dear, what Iraq?'" "We have become Norwegians," she laughed and then added, "What are we going to teach them about Iraq?" What kind of country is this, full of garbage and thieves? My dear, we want to raise our children with a religious upbringing and teach them: "The house is a cycle, play until the eternal play." 1), he mocks the state's stance toward those who emigrate and leave the country, and how the state grants them rights that those who stayed in the country and bore various burdens from wars, endured the tyranny and oppression of the authority, stood against the occupier, and preserved their land do not enjoy the most basic elements of a decent living.

Then, the narrator mocks the reality of intellectuals, how they glorify those who claim to be scientific and educated, and those with superficial religiosity, saying: "By chance, I came across something I never expected to see!" I saw a large billboard for an election campaign, about five meters tall, with a picture of Hajja Umm Yasser printed on it, and in bold letters it said: "Vote for your candidate, the Mujahida Hajja Umm Yasser..." "Iraq First" Yes, indeed, this is what I saw and this is what was written: Mujahida, Iraq First! 11) , what amazes and astonishes him is how that candidate (the fighter) is being promoted. ((I closed the computer at that moment and said to myself: "Um Yasser receives a salary here because she emigrated from Iraq, and a salary there because she returned to Iraq, and with all that, she calls it the Iraq of garbage and thieves. Truly, it is ideological indoctrination... The cycle continues... "Entertainment to the limit of the ultimate entertainment." 12) This is a mockery of the false consciousness among cultural and even religious classes. Those who claim to be religious and cultured become glorified and revered, even if it is just a pretense, and society, in all its classes, makes them its first facade and the most deserving representative of its trust.

Then, after that, he mocks the irony between the reality of the ambitious intellectual striving to achieve his dream and what he did not expect, or what he would become later. He says in the story "The Candy Maker": "Hanna Al-Iraqi never thought that one day he would take up the profession of making candy." He had dreamed, since his childhood, of becoming a film director who makes movies and tells stories, for the death reel had been spinning in his mind since the first severed head he saw at the door. That was his father's head placed in a black bag, bound with a cloth inscribed with the word: "Infidel." (13), and here he recoils from existence; due to the contradiction between what (Hanna) dreamed of being—a film director—and his reality of becoming a candy maker. He also critiques society culturally for the mixing of religions with political aspects; as a person is often killed based on their religious affiliation, their blood is shed, which has led to the destruction of their children's dreams and the distortion of their consciousness as a form of sectarianism, and the violation of culture in particular. The novelist's cultural satire continues in light of (Hanna)'s life reality even after his decision to emigrate to (Holland)

to become a director. He says: "Hanna decided to turn his father's ruins into art, so he set off on foot, and the borders fell under his feet like dominoes until he reached Holland." But in the Netherlands, in order to become a director, they imposed on him not to approach the cinema of death, as discussions of death are unwelcome among the Dutch... Happy people don't prefer stories of death!

- What am I talking about then?! He said, expressing his disapproval of the committee's decision to exclude his film from the competition.

- About love, about the sea, about the nightingales, the head of the committee replied with a deadly coldness.

- No, you nightingales, Hanaa muttered in a low voice as he left the hall. 14) Here, Jirjis's cultural sarcasm becomes clear, not just as a satirist but also as a critic, albeit a neutral one, liberated from allegiance to the West. It is seen that he aligns with Abdullah Ibrahim's perspective, as he states: "I practiced a dual critique of both Western culture and Arab-Islamic culture with the same level of vigilance and the same analytical concepts, and I followed the same methodology in critiquing both." (15)

This is because the psychological warfare of the culture of ambition (Hanna) is not only in Iraq, but also in the country of immigration (the Netherlands), where escaping from the reality on which (Hanna) built his hopes, believing that Western countries are characterized by openness, democracy, and rationality, as some critics see it. "We find that the West looks at all these matters from another perspective, that is, a rational one far from emotion, or what is called (Cartesian doubt)." However, this is not the true and recent reality of the West, but rather a clear distortion evident in (Jorge's) texts, and what its hero (Hanna) faced. It also becomes clear that the West has no connection to humanity and rationality; they merely claim to have it, pretending as such, just as happens in our time today

The novelist is fully aware of the cultural war being waged in various parts of the world in general, so he does not favor one component over another, or one country over another, nor does he describe any particular society with absolute idealism, unlike other novelists and critics. It becomes clear that he is both a novelist and a critic at the same time, as evidenced by his stance in mocking cultural arenas and what their hero (Hanna) faced. It also becomes clear that the West does not belong to humanity, as he does not claim that the injustice in Iraq fell on one component over another. He does not grant the character, or even the characters of the heroes, the attributes of integrity, idealism, or absolute negativity, nor does he draw a clear line between good and evil. Thus, his writing language has become a blend of awareness, philosophy, seriousness, and sarcasm

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