

The Fictionalization of History in the Saudi Novel: A Study of the Novel (Safar Barlik)

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Abstract

There is a strong relationship between narration and history, as each borrows techniques from the other; History needs narration by recounting some of its events, and the novel imagines past events in its stories. The Arabic novel has not dispensed with history since its inception, as it has often relied on its events while recounting its past in the present time. The Saudi novel found in some historical events that were recorded with differing opinions, so it resorted to them and employed them in its texts, but this is not an employment to recount historical facts, but rather to show the state of awareness of it in the present time. The incident of (Safar barlik), in which the people of Medina were displaced to the Levant during the time of the Ottoman presence, is one of the harsh social historical events that was recorded with two different opinions, because critical studies have not paid attention to the nature of the new awareness that the Saudi novel highlighted by interrogating history, this study seeks to examine it by employing critical approaches on the imagining of the narrative of history. The research aims to know the historical limits at which the novel stopped and the mechanisms of its employment as it recounts history with a new vision. How did narrative, as a creative space, rewrite history, and what role does narrative structure play in interrogating the past and re-experiencing new meaning?

The research methodologically employed the mechanisms of the critical approach to the theory of historical representation in narrative discourse, as developed by (Paul Ricoeur, Hayden White, and Linda Hitchin) Among the most prominent findings of the study is that narrative is not merely a linear representation of events, but rather a reconstruction of reality with new visions and implications. The study recommends that research and critical studies should engage in methodological and applied analysis of novels that have rewritten history, exploring the significance of narrative discourse within them.

Keywords: Novel, History, Narration, Fictionalization, Narrative Discourse.

Introduction:

If history is always written by the victors, then narration imagines history, moving away from strong elements and focusing on narrative elements that reproduce it with a new awareness, as it works to question it and interrogate its silent images. Historical imagination is the material formed by narration, so the goal is no longer documentation, but rather aesthetic and symbolic.

Since the novel's inception, it has had a good relationship with history, in fact, the Arabic novel began to rely heavily on history in the early beginnings. When the art of the Arab and Saudi novel developed, a huge source was found in history that provided the novel with topics that have a social status in Arab culture and memory. This distinct relationship arose between the novel as a literary art that has been growing since its inception and continues to do so, and between written and oral history. The Saudi novel has sought to present a new awareness of history, bringing back a story that presents a special vision that not only restores the history scattered throughout the books, but also reproduces it after its completion in a preserved blog.

The Saudi novel has taken history and employed it in its texts, where the study attempts to identify it and interrogate its discourse, which was manifested in the way history was told and brought its past back to life. The mortgage on history is not to go beyond its supposed facts, but rather to bring it back, speaking with a new vision in the narrative. The Saudi novel has sought to present a new awareness of history,

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Saudi novels, in their texts, have celebrated and employed the historical dimension, highlighting a state of awareness in recalling collective memory within the narration. They have not presented history as a definitive framework, but rather have questioned it, revealing a new understanding rooted in the present. The novel, as a creative text rather than a historical document, has managed to transcend the hierarchy of history, relying on the elements of its narrative structure to present a fictional discourse that transforms events from historical occurrences into human experiences, thus creating a new meaning for history.

The writer Maqbool Al-Alawi attempted in *Safar Briik* novel⁽¹⁾ to retell the historical event (*Safar barlik*) that the people of Medina were subjected to during the First World War when it was under Turkish rule at that time. The novelist resorted to imagining that human tragedy, where he transcended the elements of power and shaped its emergence, launching into the slopes of the margins with his tormented characters who reimagined history as they lived alongside the world adjacent to the one who controlled the events of history. The novel picks up what was lost from history books and remained stories told orally, or whose appearance was delayed historically for several reasons. This is because the nature of history has gaps that allow the narrative to seep through them towards retelling it with a new vision, or perhaps even rejecting it at times, especially if it is narrated by marginalized classes, this is because the historical material, if it is re-crafted, complies with the conditions of narrative discourse.

This study attempts to determine the state of awareness of imagining history in the Saudi novel, especially that part of history that was written with two different opinions, and because critical studies do not pay attention to the nature of the new awareness that the Saudi novel highlighted by its interrogation of history, this study seeks to determine it, as the study asks about that with a number of questions:

How was the state of awareness of the past formed in the Saudi novel when imagining history?

What is the role of narrative structure in interrogating the past and re-experiencing new meaning?

What narrative discourse did the Saudi novel present when reimagining history?

Hence, the study aims to identify the historical boundaries at which the novel stood and the mechanisms for employing them as it retells history with a new vision.

This study is based on the application of the critical approaches of (Hayden White, Paul Ricoeur, and Linda Hutcheon) in the theories of literature and history and the interrelationship between them in finding common elements between life and discourse. These approaches have moved away from a strict interpretation of history and have found in interpretation fairness to memory, they retell it with a new awareness by revealing the fraught past with the majesty of history and reconciling with it. The goal of the narration is not to replace the historian, but rather to reconstruct him with a new memory and vision, the focus is on the mechanisms of the historical imagination's operation in the novel and how memory has been reproduced as it does not serve to imitate history, but rather rewrites it.

The study came in three topics: topic one is a theoretical review of the concept of imagining history, topic two is about the narrative structure in terms of characters, time, place, and their imagination of history, and topic three is interrogating the narrative discourse presented by the novel as it revives the past of historical facts.

TOPIC ONE

The concept of narrative imagination of history

How does the novel rewrite history? And how is history represented in narrative discourse? Among the most prominent theorists of narrative fiction in history are Hayden White, who focused on "historical fiction"; Paul Ricoeur, whose work centered on "memory and narration"; and Linda Hitchon, who explored its metaphysical dimensions (the metaphysical historical novel).

¹ Maqboul Al-Alawi, *Safar Barlek* (Beirut: Dar Al-Saqi, 2019)

Throughout the ages, history has remained a source of inspiration for cultures and a rich wellspring from which novelists draw their works, penetrating the folds and obscurities of history to such an extent that they almost rival the supposed or recorded history, advancing as history itself rather than fiction. Herein lies the power of creation, innovation, and imagination. The relationship between history and the novel is complex, with many threads intertwining and overlapping, especially since they both rely on many shared components such as humanity, time, place, and narrative style. Hayden White argues that the story told in a narrative is an imitation of the lived story in a particular area of historical reality, and because the imitation is accurate, it is considered a true representation of it⁽²⁾ But claims of narrative realism should be disregarded, because the function of narrative is not to represent a scene, but to construct it. Even historical narrative shares this characteristic with narration; the real is nothing more than an unformulated meaning, sheltered behind an all-powerful referent. ⁽³⁾ Every novel, like history, is based on a historical-temporal structure embodied in a spatial setting, extending from the past to the moment of writing and potentially beyond into the future. The same applies to history. There is no history without storytelling. ⁽⁴⁾

History is the recording of all that has happened, while narration is the reproduction of what has happened with a new vision and conscious understanding. According to Paul Ricoeur, they intersect in the narrative plot, where the nature of the narrated time in the novel's text, as it retells the past, forms a narrative identity that rewrites the past with a new awareness: the present is what we live and what fulfills the expectations of the remembered past, and it is inscribed in memory. I remember that I had anticipated what is now happening; the historical past leads to the present through the expectations that constitute the future horizon of the past. In this sense, the present is the actual realization of the future of what is remembered. (⁵) Retelling targets the present in memory and is not merely a narration of the past historical time preserved as a written science. "Although history cannot be considered a certain science, in terms of its methods and results it strongly resembles known sciences." (⁶) Narration remains an aesthetic art that takes from all arts and elevates storytelling, but in general it can be said that "the narrative aspect is common between the novel and history, and they share belonging to the kingdom of narration." (⁷) This reciprocal relationship between history, which presents its facts in a narrative structure, and narration, which takes its events from history, has made each of them uplift the other.

Since narration is regarded as a form of discourse, "what concerns the novelist more than anything else is that which remains unspoken in historical writing: what the historian has neglected and deemed

² Hayden White, *The Content of the Form*, trans. Nayef Al-Yaseen (Manama: Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities, 2017), p. 78.

³ Ibid., p. 104

⁴ Ziyad Al-Ahmad, "The Relationship between the Novel and History," *Al-Jadeed*, January 2020, No. 60, p. 6.

⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative: Narrated Time*, trans. Saeed Al-Ghanimi (Beirut: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Jadid Al-Muttahida, 2006), p. 52.

⁶ Abd al-Salam Aqlamoun, *The Novel and History* (Beirut: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Jadid Al-Muttahida, 2010), p. 19.

⁷ Ibid., p. 18

unnecessary; the marginal, the transient, the erased, the concealed, and the absent for one reason or another, and at times that which is doubtful or uncertain. (⁸) Thus, the novelist seeks to construct a new edifice which, although imaginative, possesses its own revelatory and interrogative authority by reversing roles—presenting the marginalized as narrators of history while relegating historical actors to the position of witnesses to these narration..

The fictionalization of history constitutes a conscious understanding, from the standpoint of the present, of what has occurred in the past. “A novelist who builds a novel upon pre-existing historical material merely because he requires narrative substance is not a novelist indifferent to the material itself; rather, he is concerned with presenting a particular vision of humanity regardless of time.(⁹) It may also be argued that the reader bears the responsibility of comprehending the writer’s vision according to the degree of proximity or distance from the historical material being narrated.

History frequently appears as imaginative material within the novel, a genre that has been described as inherently imperialistic in nature, appropriating and incorporating all artistic forms without hesitation in order to achieve its own objectives. In doing so, it employs the propositions of other discourses—knowledge systems, religions, history, and philosophy—while transcending traditional literary classifications and penetrating all spheres of human experience .(¹⁰) Consequently, narration exercises its colonial authority over history: at times it reconciles with history through the invocation of historical facts, yet at other times it subverts it by advancing its own discourse alongside those facts. While it originates from historical discourse, it does not merely replicate it; rather, it subjects it to various forms of transformation until a new discourse emerges, endowed with its own distinctive characteristics.(¹¹)

The incident of (Safar Barlik) is considered one of the historical incidents that were recorded in two opinions: the Turkish/Ottoman era that ruled the Hijaz and the Levant, and the other was an oral/written recording of the people of the city who lived during this period when they were expelled from their homes and obliged to move to the Levant. This human tragedy was an event with which they chronicled their lives in strange stories of the bereaved, orphans, and families who were scattered by departure, hunger, epidemic, and death. (¹²) The historical discourse proceeded in two approaches: official, written, departing Ottoman/Turkish, and resident oral Arab, relying on land and truth. Narration does not defend history, but rather abuses it, taking what reshapes the past with a new awareness. It is not the historical event that happens, but what can be told, or what has already been told in news and myths. (¹³) The myth of hunger and displacement was narrated with a new plot that reshapes the past through its imagination. Paul

⁸ Saad Mohammed Rahim, *Narrative Torments History* (Damascus: Dar Ninawa, 2017), p. 34

⁹ Said Yaqtin, “Historical Narration and the Historical Novel,” *Al-Jadeed*, January 2020, No. 60, p. 11

¹⁰ Pierre Chartier, *Introduction to the Theory of the Novel*, trans. Abdelkabar Al-Sharqawi (Casablanca: Dar Toubkal, 2001), p. 13.

¹¹ Abdullah Ibrahim, *Historical Imagination*, trans. Adel Salama (Riyadh: Dar Al-Mareekh, 1992), p. 9.

¹² Saeed bin Waleed Tolah, 2nd ed., *Safar Barlek and the Evacuation of the People of Medina* (Medina: Literary Club), p. 13

¹³ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, trans. Saeed Al-Ghanimi and Falah Rahim (Beirut: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Jadid Al-Muttahida, 2006), p. 267

Ricoeur believes that "it is the plot that drives us to neglect defending history as a tangible science." ⁽¹⁴⁾ As a result of the conscious intimacy in the narrati0n and the technique of the internal monologue, which made the characters bolder in expressing what they are experiencing, Stendhal believes that: "The novel claims to tell about everything that happens in the hearts of its heroes." ⁽¹⁵⁾ This characteristic made the novel superior to history, and it was imagination that gave it this advantage.

In his autobiography, Aziz Diaa describes that difficult stage in the lives of the people of the city. He was a child who did not understand what was going on around him except that he was carried with his family on a tin that swung and made sounds, and tongues whispered that they were fleeing from hunger to the Levant, as Fakhri Pasha had ordered. ⁽¹⁶⁾ Indeed, the stories of the famine that spread in Mdinah and were written down in historians' books to force people to emigrate are almost unbelievable and stranger than fiction. ⁽¹⁷⁾

The interweaving of narration and history gives rise to a new construct that expresses people's lives more effectively than either history or narration can when considered separately. Human life is more readily and engagingly understood when represented through historical imagination.⁽¹⁸⁾

The novel engages with history through two approaches: one that writes and recounts history by relying on its fundamental elements—events, characters, time, and place—and another imaginative approach that stands alongside these fundamental elements and bears witness to them through fictional characters and imagined events grounded in diverse historical facts. This latter approach is the focus of the present study, for narrati0n seeks to reconstruct a period of the past in an imaginative manner, wherein historical figures intermingle with fictional characters,^(19) while replacing narrators beyond their previously established social status.

The formulation of human experience through narration, by representing historical temporal experience and reimagining it through the poetics of narration, cannot be accomplished without the operation of interpretation. On the one hand, historical experience is represented as a "real" past; on the other hand, meaning functions to endow narrative discourse with significance when it connects the world of the text with the world of the reader ⁽²⁰⁾ Thus, a reciprocal relationship exists between narration and history in their deep structures, whether ontological or epistemological, as both rely upon imagination in narration and

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 268

¹⁵ Jean-Louis Chrétien, *Consciousness and the Novel* (Beirut: Arab Organization for Translation, 2016), p. 57

¹⁶ Aziz Dia, *My Life with Hunger, Love, and War*, Vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Al-Tanweer, 2012), pp. 17–18.

¹⁷ Ahmad Amin Murshid, *Taibah and Memories of Loved Ones* (n.p., n.p., 1993), p. 182

¹⁸ *Historical Imagination*, op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁹ Said Yaqtin, "The Historical Novel and Issues of Literary Genre," in *The Novel and History*, ed. Abdullah Ibrahim (Doha: National Council for Culture, Heritage and Arts, 2005), p. 144

²⁰ *Time and Narrative: Narrated Time*, op. cit., p. 211

share the same challenges. The act of reading creates a common space for exchange between them, as maintained by Paul Ricoeur.⁽²¹⁾

History cannot be conceived without storytelling and narration, regardless of the efforts exerted by historians in their historical representations. Through the convergence of the imaginary and the possible, narration penetrates and mediates between them by retelling events, thereby restoring the hypothesis of confirmed imagination and narrative possibility. Between the reality of the past and the unreality of storytelling, contrast and divergence reach completion, giving rise to a new, conscious discourse in the representation of historical reality.

Time, as a philosophically ambiguous concept and a narrative structure that shapes events and reimagines them, is constructed within the present as a perceptible and genuine dimension, the temporal structure establishes a new condition by moving present time toward the past, whereby all events may be historicized through contemporary temporal frameworks. Consequently, the past becomes a series of immediate moments experienced emotionally by characters as they interact with unfolding events.

TOPIC TWO

The Narrative Structure of the Novel

Is the novelist the historian of the present? For no matter how deeply a novel attempts to penetrate the past, it remains closely connected to the present, Linda Hutcheon argues that knowledge can be represented through narrative representation, as it constitutes an effective explanatory model, and that the importance of the writer is no less than that of the historian. Labeling a work as literary does not diminish its cognitive value.⁽²²⁾ Historians are aware that they establish a relationship between the past they write about and the present in which they engage in the act of writing.⁽²³⁾ This is likewise understood by novelists. However, as Paul Ricoeur observes, the narrator—who should not be confused with the author—is liberated from the obligation imposed upon the historian when dealing with historical time.⁽²⁴⁾

How, then, did Maqbool Al-Alawi reimagine the Safar Barlik incident both historically and narratively?

The construction of the plot tends to privilege the boundaries and fluctuations of history over the divergent implications of the narrated events⁽²⁵⁾ The novel proceeds from a historical caution reflected in the secondary title of the novel, *Safar Barlik* (The Tale of the Mixed-Race Boy Dhib). The character of the boy is endowed with symbolic significance through his association with a youth no older than sixteen, who was abducted from Mecca and sold in the slave quarters of Medina to one of its distinguished residents—a man devoted to culture, scholarship, and the recording of history—namely, the notable Sheikh Abdulrahman Al-Madani.

The novel documents a historical era during which various ethnic groups ruled the Hijaz, subsequent political developments, transfers of power, and the establishment of a new and enduring state would alter

²¹ Ibid., p. 272.

²² Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (Beirut: Arab Organization for Translation, 2009), p. 167.

²³ Ibid., p. 171

²⁴ Ricoeur, *Time and Narration*, Vol. 3, op. cit., p. 188

²⁵ *Historical Imagination*, op. cit., p. 7.

perceptions of the historical past and consequently reshape its narration and imaginative reconstruction, particularly within a society that was largely resentful of the former Turkish presence in the Hijaz.⁽²⁶⁾

The text of the novel identifies the reason for the siege imposed upon Medina as a consequence of the Arab Revolt led by Sharif Hussein in Mecca, this is conveyed through a narrative structure in which events develop progressively from the moment of the abduction, through and happy life in Medina, followed by forced displacement, and ultimately return to the land of the Hijaz with the caravans of pilgrims toward Mecca.

Historical fiction does not refer to, affirm, or promote the factual truths of the past; rather, it draws inspiration from them as interpretive foundations for its events.⁽²⁷⁾ The novel, as the volatile literary genre that has responded to all social conditions, has nevertheless continually eluded critical frameworks through its intricate techniques, narrative interweaving's, and diverse plot structures. It has succeeded in narrating history without confronting it directly, thereby transforming it into a new discourse through a unifying plot that accommodates its varied and divergent dimensions. As has been observed, "it is an integrative dynamic that forms a unified and complete story from diverse events."⁽²⁸⁾ Narrative, therefore, is not merely a linear representation of events; rather, it is a reconstruction of reality through diverse ideological and political perspectives and meanings.

From all of this emerges narrative identity within the fictionalization of history, as it retransmits preserved knowledge in collective memory through the circulation of human experiences recorded in stories, in doing so, it revisits the past through narrated present moments that reveal states of consciousness, for consciousness, by its very nature, perceives things and beings only when they are embodied.⁽²⁹⁾ Consequently, the role of narration lies in revealing the temporal character of human experience. Time, therefore, can exist only when narrated, and temporal experience attains its fullness through narrative representation, which breathes life into what stories convey while simultaneously reshaping the identities of communities through moments of engagement with their past.

Narrative Characters between History and Fictionalization

The presence of a character in a novelistic text is never arbitrary; rather, characters frequently embody a vision that the author articulates through their details and experiences, in the novel, fictional characters emerge from the depths of the margins, symbolizing the impartial witness who interrogates history and bears testimony to it, by contrast, historical figures are marginalized in their presence, such as Fakhri Pasha, who ordered the deportation of Madina's inhabitants to Levant . The novel's discourse adopts a critical and condemnatory stance toward Fakhri Pasha, portraying him as reckless for transferring weapons into the Prophet's Mosque:

²⁶ Some historical sources have mentioned the significant contributions made by the Ottoman State to Medina and the spread of education therein (Muhammad Hussein Zaydan, *Memories of the Three Eras*).

²⁷ *Historical Imagination*, op. cit., p. 5

²⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narration*, Vol. 2, trans. Falah Rahim (Beirut: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Jadid Al-Muttahida, 2006), p. 28.

²⁹ Saeed Benkrad, *Narrative Identity: Narrative between Fiction and History* (Casablanca: Cultural Center for the Book, 2023), p. 24.

He murmured to himself, saying: Could anyone truly dare to bomb the Mosque of the Messenger of God? His body trembled the moment he contemplated the answer. War is blind; it crushes everything in its path, heedless of danger or suffering. Yet he made up his mind: he would move his weapons into the Prophet's Mosque, come what may... The people's eyes were drawn to him, and they quickly realized what this foolish ruler was contemplating."

They wondered: How could this infidel defile the Prophet's Mosque with weapons and dynamite and expose it to such danger?⁽³⁰⁾ The narration highlights his stern military character, and its discourse adopts a historical perspective that condemns and resents him, holding him responsible for all the calamities of the forced displacement of Madina's inhabitants. The gloating over this historical leader is achieved by showcasing the humiliation he suffered after rebelling against the directives of Istanbul, the appointment of his successor, and his subsequent surrender: "Fakhri Pasha remained silent, biting his lower lip, and did not answer! After three days of negotiations and being placed under house arrest, he asked to bid farewell to the Prophet's Mosque, and they immediately agreed." He went there at dawn... He performed the last dawn prayer there, then wept... He put on his military uniform, adorned himself with his medals, and took up his weapon... (³¹) He was then taken to Yanbu, from where he was transported as a prisoner by an English ship to Cairo via Suez. The author's choice in reimagining historical figures, especially figures like Fakhri Pasha, who has been portrayed in various ways—some seeing him as a hero, others as a tyrant—is noteworthy. The author's perspective leans towards the view that Fakhri Pasha was a tyrannical military leader. The purpose of the novel is not to record historical facts, but rather to re-examine the past in the present by organizing it within a narrative structure that evokes a memory that refuses to relinquish it, unable to transcend its harshness and struggling against oblivion.

Among the historical figures featured in the novel is Naji Kashif Kajman, Fakhri Pasha's assistant and executor of his orders, who later wrote his memoirs, his memoirs represent the realistic historical account favored by many researchers seeking to understand the nature of that era. (³²) However, it appears that the novel's discourse did not adopted the Turkish historical narrative surrounding this tragedy is characterized by a spirit of rejection and resentment, as he was spread the force that plundered Madina's resources and deprived it of all kinds of food, leaving Madina's inhabitants in a state of shock at the horrific actions of the Ottoman soldiers.⁽³³⁾

The narration doesn't simply recount the past, but rather portrays it through imagined characters who witness historical figures, yet are prevented from approaching them directly. One such character is Dhib al-Khalasi, kidnapped from Mecca to be sold as a slave in Medina ,I was second in line. The auctioneer gestured for me to come closer. I hesitated to approach the platform. If I yielded to them, I would become a slave without a doubt. I thought of shouting at the top of my lungs, telling them I am not a slave, that I am a free man kidnapped from the desert to be sold like other slaves.⁽³⁴⁾ the storyteller presents of the tragedy of the (Safar Barlik), a man who was not born or raised in Mecca, but rather an expression of the cruelty and injustice he witnessed. He is merely a marginalized figure who experienced and felt this

³⁰ *Safar Barlik*, p. 85

³¹ *Safar Barlik*, p137

³² He wrote his memoirs under the title *Memoirs of Naji Kashif Kijman*, which were translated into Arabic by Adib Abd al-Mannan

³³ *Safar Barlik*, p 80-81

³⁴ *Safar Barlik*, p 9

injustice. How much more so, then, for those who were from Mecca, whose families were killed and who were separated by forced displacement, This character also symbolizes the unity of the Hijaz in their shared grief and stance regarding this event. The literacy that Dhib possessed saved his fate after his abduction and sale. He became like a son to his master, who bought him to grant him freedom. He worked as an employee for him and remained comfortable in the house of the notable Abdul Rahman al-Madani until he was captured and forcibly displaced to Levant during the historical "Safar Barlik" incident, which afflicted many of Madina's inhabitants. His work consisted of transporting manuscripts to and from Arif Hikmat's library and summarizing pages from books.⁽³⁵⁾ His literacy allowed him to narrate his experiences and express the reality of his tragedy, as his voice is the one to whom the story is attributed, recounting its events. "This group of soldiers was carefully selected to carry out a single mission: the forced displacement of the inhabitants of Medina, from which no one was exempt, not even children and women."⁽³⁶⁾

As for the character of the notable Abdul Rahman al-Madani, he represents the people of Medina, the educated individuals who dedicated themselves to knowledge. The historian of Medina, Mohammed Hussein Zaidan, recounts that in that era, Medina was the first city in the Hijaz where education was widespread. and widespread, where the character is present, symbolizing that era, how could it have gone hungry were it not for the treachery of the Ottoman governor there? A man who performs his prayers in the Prophet's Mosque and works with manuscripts and writing, well-off and calm in temperament, resembling all the dignified men of Medina: "The work of Mr. Abdul Rahman Al-Madani was not merely going to the library of Arif Hikmat or other libraries of Medina, but he held a weekly meeting in the courtyard of his house in which scholars, dignitaries, and jurists would meet, and some of the notables and merchants of Medina would also attend. This weekly meeting took place every Thursday of the week. Those evenings were rich and enjoyable, and all matters were discussed" (³⁷) Yet he slipped away fleeing from Medina when the people of Medina were ordered to be displaced, and his scholarly status did not grant him an exception or appreciation.

Its presence in the text serves as a sheltering framework for the marginalized character who narrates the tragedy of displacement, revealing a narrative vision in which this tragedy is mirrored by the ordeal of Dhib, who was abducted from Mecca to become the narrator of the displacement of all the people of Medina. He could not have fully experienced the horror of the catastrophe had he not lived in the household of his master, Abdulrahman, a distinguished notable, whose residence was among the most prominent homes of the city's noble families and had stood as a witness to the prosperity that preceded the tragedy of displacement. Thus, he narrated the life he had personally witnessed and experienced.

The characters are fictionalized, yet they constitute the foundation of the narrative structure and play a significant role in representing collective memory. Historical heroes are replaced by the masses whose voices have been suppressed, for life is always understood through the stories we tell about it.⁽³⁸⁾ The novel, in narrating "the story of the marginalized, not merely as a daily reality but as a historical and cultural structure that summons time itself to contemplate existence—an existence that is necessarily existence with

³⁵ *Safar Barlik*, p 62

³⁶ *Safar Barlik*, p 91

³⁷ *Safar Barlik*, p 71

³⁸ *Existence Time and Narrative: The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, trans. and introduced . Saeed Al-Ghanimi (Beirut/Casablanca, 1999), p. 32.

others, that is, within the world,⁽³⁹⁾ thereby transforms its characters into embodiments of a particular vision of history, which is nothing more than a re-creation of the past through the lens of the present.

Temporal and Spatial Structure and Historical Fictionalization

The title of the novel, *Safar Barlik*, itself signifies and denotes a specific historical period. The narration focuses on the places in which this temporal event unfolds, while the recollection of events is presented without an explicit specification of the story's overall timeframe, since "time is determined by place and remains subordinate to it."⁽⁴⁰⁾ The time of the story, directly associated with the protagonist appears with chronological precision in two instances: the beginning of the story in 1915 and the return from displacement in 1918. Between these two dates, the narration depicts a period of prosperity in Medina, followed by famine and forced displacement to the Levant.

Within this temporal span, time is further defined by the protagonist's residence in the house of Sayyid Abdulrahman al-Madani and by the portrayal of the nature of life and material comfort therein. Describing the place upon seeing it for the first time, he states:

"We passed by numerous libraries, Ribats, public fountains, alleyways, and courtyards, while I remained absorbed in contemplating the surroundings. Medina appeared to me bustling with people, vibrant with movement, and full of life. One could observe on the faces of its inhabitants and visitors every type of person arriving from different backgrounds and countries. People could be heard speaking various languages as they hurried along, their features marked by tranquility and dignity, reflected in their faces adorned with contented smiles. Their houses were well constructed, some consisting of multiple stories and crowned with intricately carved wooden Rawasheen of burnt-brown color."⁽⁴¹⁾

As for narration time, it begins before the entry into Madina and continues until the moment of his sale, thereafter, the recollection of the past—particularly his arrest in Mecca—occupies his memory before he gradually comes to coexist with the society of Medina.

The novel focuses on place rather than on confided time, the narration retelling neglected, fragmented, or distorted history—a history not told by the people of the place. The character quickly becomes familiar with the place, as if he were one of its inhabitants. He says, after being brought to Madina in chains to be sold in the slave market: "In the Al-Anbariya neighborhood, relatively close to the Prophet's Mosque, the crowds increased after the Maghrib prayer. I saw a large square at its western end, containing large numbers of camels and horses: caravan camels, horses, and other animals. Black slaves were feeding them and providing them with water in large, full troughs. At the other end was a huge cauldron with large copper pots on top, their sides stained with soot, from which steam rose. They finally untied me, and I collapsed to the ground, exhausted."⁽⁴²⁾ How, then, will the writer convince the reader that the strange, young character is familiar with the place he is seeing for the first time, without the reader colluding with the writer by assuming that the narration was delayed, after the character had become familiar with the place through frequent visits? The novelist is not considered a historian, but rather a reader of a historical period from a personal perspective,

³⁹ Yumna Al-Eid, *The Arab Novel: Imagination and Structure* (Beirut: Dar Al-Farabi, 2011), p. 21.

⁴⁰ Salem Yafout, *Historical Time* (Beirut: Dar Al-Tali'a, 1991), p. 41

⁴¹ *Safar Barlik*, p 49

⁴² *Safar Barlik*, p

because his historical vision will be in accordance with the requirements of the novelistic work and the imagination he employs. ⁽⁴³⁾

The role of the historian and narrator is to transform past events into facts, since the style in which matters are presented is a conscious historical paradox. Knowing the past becomes a matter of representation, that is, creation and interpretation, and not a matter of objective recording. ⁽⁴⁴⁾ Describing the state of Madina's inhabitants as famine began to strike, he says: "The terrifying face of famine emerged, and provisions dwindled and disappeared, the people's stores of wheat, barley, and dates, which they had saved for the dark days that befell them sooner than they expected, vanished, amidst these painful events, I would go out with my master, Abdul Rahman, to Arif Hikmat's library or Mahmudiyya Library. We would see the hungry filling Madina and its neighborhoods, fighting over a piece of bread or a date lying on the ground. ⁽⁴⁵⁾ Linda Hitchon believes that retelling history by re-presenting historical knowledge emphasizes the narrative nature of that knowledge, the Story remains the essential way in which we represent knowledge. ⁽⁴⁶⁾ If the historian's task requires him to tell plausible stories, the novelist is more free from this constraint, and therefore rewriting history with illogical and fantastical stories is acceptable and fulfills the experience of a new meaning of the past.

Heartbreaking stories, recounted by Madina's historians, depict the days of forced displacement, one man, after being arrested by Ottoman soldiers and taken to the train station for deportation, said: "I screamed in terror when I remembered what had happened to me two years prior. I kept asking them, 'What do you want from me? Leave me alone!'

But they didn't understand a word I said. They only responded by shouting two words in my face: 'Safar Barlik... Safar Barlik!' I heard my master mention these words when he was talking to his friends, but he would accompany them with something understandable, like, 'They kidnap people and send them to Levant in Safar Barlik.'

When I remembered these words and connected them to their meaning, I realized how unfortunate I was. Oh God! Will my fate be like that of Madina's inhabitants: forced displacement to Levant by train? ⁽⁴⁷⁾

The story is narrated by the grandson, on the authority of his grandfather, Dhib, and recounted by his friend, who was also his colleague, this temporal structure is what Paul Ricoeur calls the concept of the semi-past, whereby "the narrative is semi-historical insofar as the unreal events recounted are past occurrences for the narrative voice addressing the reader. ⁽⁴⁸⁾ This temporal dimension lends a vital quality to the narrated story, the tale, which spans a considerable period, concludes with the end to which the characters of the story met their fate: "Dhib returned to Mecca after the death of his mother and buried her near his father's grave in the desert, beneath a jujube tree." It was said that he worked as a guide for pilgrims

⁴³ Osama Ghanem, *Hermeneutics of Narrative: Imagination, History, and Narrative* (Cairo: Egyptian General Book Organization, 2020), p. 8.

⁴⁴ *The Politics of Postmodernism*, op. cit., pp. 175–176

⁴⁵ *Safar Barlik*, p 92

⁴⁶ *The Politics of Postmodernism*, op. cit., pp. 166–167.

⁴⁷ *Safar Barlik*, p 109

⁴⁸ *Time and Narration*, Vol. 3, op. cit., p. 287.

performing Hajj and Umrah in the Holy Mosque in Mecca, and he remained in this profession until his death in 1955, he was buried in the Al-Mu'alla cemetery near the Holy Mosque in Mecca. ⁽⁴⁹⁾ The narration resembles history in recording the history of its imagined characters, emphasizing that the events it narrates belong to the past of this voice, "where there is an overlap and exchange between the quasi-historical moment of the story and the quasi-narrative moment of history, and human time is rooted through this overlap. ⁽⁵⁰⁾

Place represents an enduring, indelible memory unless touched by human hands. The new novel has made place a fundamental organizer of the narrative structure." ⁽⁵¹⁾

Therefore, place appears as the starting point for each event in the novel, and its appearance in the novel serves the purpose of direct connection and the impossibility of distorting its reality. Specific places appear: (Bab al-Anbariya, Hawsh al-Khazindar, Hawsh al-Abeed, Zuqaq al-Tayyar, Arif Hikmat Library, the Ottoman Citadel, al-Qishla, the Prophet's Mosque, Hawsh al-Qashashi, the train station – Bab al-Anbariya), all of which are in Medina. As for (Wadi al-Fara' and Bir Darwish near Medina, the train station in Tabuk, Khan al-Mahatta in Damascus, Daraa south of Damascus, and Batha Quraish south of Mecca), all this documentation of place connects the person to the roots of the place and his identity and the extension of the temporal event (Safar Barlik) specifically in Medina, the remaining places came to help build the narrative story outside of it; In order to grant it a unique identity that does not accept plurality, "it is the place that establishes the memory of the place inhabited by humankind and what they left in its corners, thus establishing the equation of humankind and place, which represents a necessary condition for good writing. ⁽⁵²⁾ The duality of place and time is emphasized by the novel in its narrative structure due to their historical interdependence and their presence in the worlds of narration.

TOPIC THREE

The Discourse of Imagining History in the Novel

The narration transfer of history is not always welcomed by historians because they believe that the meaning of events was not always amenable to being represented in narrative form. The discourse of the novel transforms the event into a narration ; it is a discourse that pretends to make the world speak for itself and speak for itself as a story. ⁽⁵³⁾ When examining the mechanisms of historical imagination in the Saudi novel and its role in reproducing memory, we observe that the narration , as an imaginative discourse, has given the imagined narrative history questioning semantic dimensions that do not aim to recount the past, but rather to understand it, narration, by its very nature, carries this characteristic because "the narrative plot is a structure inherent to events at all stages. ⁽⁵⁴⁾ Narration reveals a hidden world, highlighted by the nature of reimagining history and the writer's tools and techniques. It draws from forgotten historical realms, analyzing the nature of the historical achievement of the event, Historical narration reveals a finished, completed world, one that has passed but has not disintegrated or

⁴⁹ *Safar Barlik*, p 109

⁵⁰ *Time and Narration*, Vol. 3, op. cit., p. 289

⁵¹ *Narrative Torments History*, op. cit., p. 153.

⁵² *Narrative Torments History*, op. cit., p. 155

⁵³ *The Content of the Form*, op. cit., p. 30.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.64

disintegrated." (⁵⁵) Thus, the narration emerges fragmented and playful in its structure, having transcended the priority of the victor and the secondary status of the vanquished, reconstructing it with a new vision, narration itself is "a form of verbal representation naturally linked to human consciousness" (⁵⁶) Since historical studies disapprove of narrative texts that merely retell history, they are viewed as fiction rather than reproduction through a form of discourse presented by the narration, depending on the primary objective: describing a situation, analyzing a historical process, or telling a story, this leads to variations in its scope and the differences in its function. (⁵⁷) Through narration, society aesthetically reproduces itself. The margin is present with the character of Dhib as a witness to the state of emptying Madina of its historical and religious value and carrying people to the Levant, all under the pretext of protection and fear for them. The narrative discourse highlighted the state of awareness of its rejection of all Turkish discourse, which was unable to convince the people of Madina of its opinion, so the method of force, violence, and hunger was inevitable.

The discourse of the Ottoman arrogant novel shows its tight control over Madina through the civilized means of the train, which facilitated the arrival of everything from Istanbul and the carrying of anything to it in a quick time. The beginning was with sending soldiers to Madina after the Sharif of Mecca announced the Arab Revolt against Ottoman rule: "The train carried for us on successive trips hundreds of Othman soldiers who got off at the station or Al-Astioun ", their faces were ugly and harsh looks appeared from their eyes They carry their weapons and are on high alert. (⁵⁸) The narrative discourse emphasizes granting him the names train station/ and Al-Astioun, as the Ottomans call him, indicating the rejection of the name, and that this is the only right that the Ottomans have in Madina and ended with their departure from Madina, so they returned again from the Levant with the caravan of pilgrims on camels, so the narrative discourse gave every right holder has his right, and the people of Madina still call what remains of it Al-Astioun .

The forced deportation of Madin's inhabitants by train represented a profound weariness with this supposedly civilized mode of transport, which, in reality, was a source of harm to Madinat's people. The train journey was suffocating, filled with foul odors. "The stench became even stronger than before. ,from time to time , I would glimpse a ghost emerging from somewhere on the train, dragging its feet with difficulty to the bathroom near me. It would enter, and I would hear the sounds of it relieving itself, and I would choke even more on the stench. (⁵⁹) The train became a symbol of slavery, a place of confinement and humiliation, where the living were crammed in with the dead, who would not be buried until it stopped at a future station. "We approached Tabuk station, which was a mandatory main stop for changing carriages, replenishing its stores with provisions and water, and burying those who had passed away while the train was on route. (⁶⁰) The fictionalization of novel disclosure of this historical journey, depicting the

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.65

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.75

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.77

⁵⁸ *Safar Barlik*, p 75-76

⁵⁹ *Safar Barlik*, p 115

⁶⁰ *Safar Barlik*, p 119

deportation of Madina's inhabitants to the Levant, is one of rejection, resentment, and suffocation at this historic decision by Fakhri Pasha.

The people of Madina refused this, and voices calling for jihad began to emerge⁽⁶¹⁾ as the soldiers began to harass the people of Madina, clash with them, and steal their livelihoods, many battles took place between the people and the soldiers, which often ended with the killing of some of the protesters or their imprisonment. ⁽⁶²⁾ In the face of political tensions, Madina's inhabitants were advised to leave for the Levant after they were deprived of the means of life, but they persevered and fled. Those who could not escape were sentenced to forced displacement to the Levant after famine spread in Madina. The Ottoman view says that (Fakhri Pasha), by this action, protected Madina from death, but the narrative view does not accept this portrayal. The discourse came to blame Fakhri Pasha and the Ottoman state, which was defeated and torn apart in the First World War, and that it wanted to control Madina by any means, so it committed military follies by hiding weapons in the Prophet's Mosque, which the people of Madina did not accept at first, then they submitted out of fear for their lives. Despite this, Madina's condition changed from a comfortable life to a bad situation to the point of hunger and fear. Not only that, but the contents of the Prophet's chamber were transferred by train, whose carriages took sixty days to be transported to Istanbul, and thus Medina was emptied of its religious and intellectual heritage.

The collective memory, in recounting the tragic history of the Safar Barlik incident, carries a discourse that interrogates the past and resists the state of oblivion that may afflict memory. Accordingly, the narrative discourse portrays historical fiction as a space for critiquing the past and understanding the present. Indeed, "history, as a utilitarian discourse, seeks to uncover the laws governing the succession of events, whereas the novel is an aesthetic discourse in which the aesthetic function takes precedence over reference."⁽⁶³⁾ The narration does not depart from its imaginative reflections; thus, its engagement with writing history remains selective, respecting the accomplished historical act while preserving its aesthetic dimension, which opens the way for interpretative activity.

The period of exile from Medina is not prolonged in the story of the young boy Dhib, lasting only six months, whereas historical records indicate that the deportees returned only after the end of the Second World War and the surrender of the Ottoman forces in 1919. Dhib returns to Medina during the Hajj season of 1917, stating:

"I remained in Damascus for half a year, and each time I encountered the yearning of the deportees to return to Medina... One of the men advised us to wait until the Hajj season, when we would depart with the Syrian Hajj caravan as part of a large convoy"⁽⁶⁴⁾

The temporal dimension of the novelistic discourse does not provide a precise historical chronology; rather, it highlights a temporal consciousness of history. The character is unable to endure a prolonged separation from his homeland and therefore pursues every available opportunity to return. The novel's discourse thus

⁶¹ Muhammad Hussein Zaydan mentioned that the call for jihad was intended to expel the British from Suez; however, the novel employed it in relation to the Safar Barlik incident after Fakhri Pasha had become hostile to every tribesman (*Memories of the Three Eras*, p. 93).

⁶² *Safar Barlik*, p 76

⁶³ Mohamed Al-Qadi, *The Novel and History: A Study in the Fictionalization of the Referential* (Tunis: Dar Al-Ma'rifa Publishing, 2008), pp. 23–24

⁶⁴ *Safar Barlik*, p 140

bypasses historical facts, protected by the pilgrimage journey, which continued despite the deportation of Medina's inhabitants, although it had become arduous and fraught with numerous dangers.

The novelistic discourse also presents an ending for its fictional characters, while history documents the fate of the historical figure Fakhri Pasha. The narrator states:

"The story has not ended, at least for me, after searching for the destinies of the characters in this story, I obtained unconfirmed information regarding what happened to them, with the exception of the Military Governor of Medina, Fakhri Pasha, history books have informed us of what happened to him after his release from imprisonment on the Island of Malta until his death, nevertheless, I find myself obliged to recount it to you at the conclusion of this story."⁶⁵

The novel's discourse juxtaposes history and imagination, suggesting that the characters who revived the past have the right to verify their historical fate, just as the historical figures themselves did, this indicates that the narrative reimagines history with a fresh reading and a contemporary awareness of a human tragedy whose events these characters embodied. The novel introduces the reader to the information they have gathered about: the notable Abdul Rahman al-Madani, the slave girl Marjana, his uncle Mane', Ibrahim Effendi, and Dhib, the protagonist of the story. The narrator leaves the story open to the possibility that he was acquainted with Dhib's grandson, who recounted his grandfather's tale to him (emphasizing that this is a pseudonym for narrative necessity and personal considerations). Thus, the narrative's imagination intertwines with historical facts, with the narrator stressing that the story is merely a part of the history of the Safar Barlik tragedy, a history not devoid of imagination even after its transmission across three generations.

The novel's title, "Safar Barlik," carries a specific historical dimension that admits no interpretation or deviation. Therefore, the researcher can consider the novel a work of historical fiction imbued with a narrative discourse whose purpose is not historical accuracy. Rather, it imbues the past with a unique meaning through the present. The imaginative value in historical narrative does not aim to recount events, but to record a cognitive awareness of them—that is, to reproduce meaning through narrative imagination, producing a discourse through the specific use of language in a history that is neither stable nor definitive.

Conclusion

The study on the narrative fictionalization of history in the Saudi novel reached the following findings:

- Narration is not merely a linear representation of events; rather, it is a reconstruction of reality through diverse ideological and political perspectives and implications.
- The narrative fictionalization of history constitutes a form of consciousness of the past. The presence of history within narrative discourse is not interpreted in the same manner as by historians; instead, it is subject to the requirements and conventions of narrative construction.
- The new narrative discourse that emerges through the fictionalization of history is shaped by the interplay between the reality of the past and the unreality of fiction, narration penetrates historical events and mediates between the two by retelling them, thereby restoring the premise of imaginative certainty and narrative possibility.
- Narrative mechanisms revealed how the novel gives voice to the silent dimensions of history, compensating for what historians neglected to record.
- Marginalized characters assumed a dominant role in recalling the past, sidelining historical figures; they narrated, selected, and interpreted events while relegating historical personalities to a peripheral presence.

⁶⁵ nnn *Safar Barlik*, p 155

- The historical character of Fakhri Pasha was portrayed in a documentary-like manner consistent with accounts recorded in certain historical sources, albeit from a critical and condemnatory perspective.
- The story's time frame was narrated by the protagonist, Dhib, who served as the direct narrator of events, recounting his own story without external intervention until its conclusion.
- The temporal structure of the novel *Safar Barlik* directly signifies the period of the forced displacement tragedy experienced by the inhabitants of Medina during that historical era.
- The novel places considerable emphasis on spatial structure, as the events concern the city of Medina. Numerous historical landmarks are represented through imaginative descriptions rich in detail.
- Place functions as a defining element at the beginning of each event in the novel. Its presentation serves the purpose of establishing a direct connection to historical reality and minimizing the possibility of distortion, as specific locations delineate the boundaries of the narrative through their spatial significance.
- The novel's discourse relies on the recovery of collective memory through forgotten and marginalized social groups.
- Narrative fictionalization, as a discourse, serves as a tool for resisting oblivion within a society marked by displacement and suffering.
- The discourse of the novel emphasizes the authenticity of the fictionalized events and the reality of its characters, indicating the interrelationship between history and imagination, and between the historical and the narrative.
- The narrative discourse preserves Ottoman-era terminology such as *Al-Astioun*, *Osmanli* ('*Aṣmalī*), and *Safar Barlik*, signifying the restoration of historical authenticity while symbolizing the oppression associated with that period.
- The retelling of history through a narrative perspective demonstrates the value of a renewed experience of meaning when historical facts are transformed into the possibilities of narrative storytelling.
- The study recommends that future scholarly and critical research undertake methodological and applied analyses of novels that rewrite history and explore the implications of narrative discourse, given its significance as a mode of consciousness and engagement with the past.

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