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# War Poetry: A Comparative Study of Selected Poems in Saadi Youssef's and Brian Turner's Poetry

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**Abstract:** Throughout history, poets and fiction writers have written about the profound impact of warfare, a subject that has always attracted the minds of literary figures. It was the emergence of young soldier poets during the First World War that truly solidified war poetry as a distinct genre within the realm of literature. War poetry does not exclusively take an 'anti-war' stance. However, it seeks to answer the profound existential inquiries including issues such as identity, guilt, loyalty, courage, compassion, humanity, death. It explicates the connection between personal encounters during times of national and global turmoil, offering insights into these complex questions. This paper adopts a qualitative content analysis to examine the poems of Saadi Youssef and Brian Turner. This study is dedicated to analyze and investigate two postmodern poets of different cultures. An Iraqi poet, Saadi Youssef's "A Tourist Advertisement for Hajj Omran" and "America, America" are selected to be examples of war poetry, and an American poet, Brian Turner's "Here, Bullet" and "Soldier's Arabic" are chosen to depict vivid and realistic images of war from the trenches in Iraqi cities like Basrah. The study concludes that Youssef relies heavily on his homeland, cultural and civilizational reservoir to remind Iraqis of their history and civilization to stand against war and its effects. However, Turner tries to reformulate war fabrics in Iraq by using certain Arabic diction as in soldier Arabic to address Arabic readers and to gain solidarity and empathy of readers. Turner stresses the sense of challenge and courage that this land refuses invaders. In short, Youssef and Turner don't believe in violence and wars. Wars bring destruction upon all.

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## 1. Introduction

In the realm of literature, war often serves as a backdrop for writers to explore the cruelty of humans, the decay of values, and the darkness of the human experience. Saadi Youssef's words, "American helicopters bomb the poor neighborhoods, and mercenary newspapers in Baghdad tell indistinct readers about an earth that will turn into heaven," capture the brutal images that poetry can convey about conflict and its impact on both the land and its people. This verse vividly portrays war-torn Iraq and challenges readers to confront the harsh realities of military aggression and its aftermath. Iraq and war are closely connected in the poetry of Youssef and Turner, revealing the cruelties of war on the ground and in the individual's psyche.

The inevitability of conflict, deeply ingrained in human nature, has been a recurring theme throughout history. The Latin proverb 'Homo homini lupus', meaning 'man is a wolf to man', aptly illustrates this perpetual cycle of human strife. This metaphor of

predation and survival underscores the somber reality of our existence, where survival often requires confrontation, even to the point of taking another life.

Literary works throughout history have reflected these arguments. Epics such as Homer's 'Iliad' and the 'Epic of Gilgamesh' not only recount stories of heroism and bravery but also delve into the harsh realities and moral complexities of war. These timeless narratives provide insights into the human mind and the societal dynamics of conflict. The line between ancient and modern warfare becomes blurred in these texts, revealing universal truths about humans' inclination towards violence and division. This contrast fosters a prevalent 'Us versus Them' mentality, often reducing individuals to mere symbols of their geographic or cultural backgrounds.

This research aims to delve into how Saadi Youssef's and Brian Turner's evocative poetry captures and conveys the essence of war's impact on Iraq and its people. By exploring their works, we aim to understand how poetry serves as a powerful medium to reflect on the complexities of war, its dehumanizing consequences, and the challenge of simplistic narratives often associated with conflict. The study examines how Youssef and Turner's poetry transcends mere descriptions of war, offering profound insights into the human condition amidst the backdrop of conflict.

### **Saadi Youssef: As a Man and as a Writer**

This slender, young man hails from the southern region of Iraq, specifically the Basra Governorate, in the village of Hamdan. Little did he anticipate that his tranquil existence would be upended, mirroring the tumultuous state of affairs in his once-thriving nation. His life became intertwined with the unfolding events, as he found himself impacted by the ramifications stemming from political developments, loyalties, and affiliations. These factors collectively shaped the trajectory of his life. Identifying as a member of the working class, he proudly proclaims himself as the last remaining communist in post-occupation Iraq, much to the chagrin of those who were content with and even supported the occupation, including those who assumed positions of power within the newly-formed government under the banner of the Communist Party.

Saadi Youssef (1934-2021) passed away at the age of 87 in the Harefield district on the outskirts of London, United Kingdom, after a prolonged battle with illness. In accordance with his last wishes, his body was cremated at Highgate Cemetery. Throughout his lifetime, Youssef bore witness to significant historical events, including upheavals, coups, and wars. He emerged as a poignant voice capturing the pain and ideological convictions of the people, a stance that exacted a heavy toll on him. Following his graduation from the High Teachers' House (College of Education), he pursued a career as an Arabic language instructor. However, due to the hostility of the regime and the ruling party towards the Communist Party, Youssef and other Communist Party members faced persecution and arrest following the collapse of the National Front. Tragically, some members were even executed. Youssef was given an ultimatum by the Baathists: abandon the Communist Party and join their ranks or leave the country. Opting for exile, he embarked on a journey that would span nearly three decades.

What sets apart his poetic experience is his significant collection of poems, "51 Poems," which was published in the mid-1960s. He establishes a fresh form of poetic modernity that is rooted in everyday life events, the familiar, and the popular. This is evident in both the events he addresses and his use of simple poetic language that carries social and artistic connotations. His poems are concise, focused, and straightforward, containing only elements that can elevate the ordinary to the legendary. As his journey progresses through subsequent collections, his experience deepens. Algeria, as vast as Africa, serves as a refuge for him, allowing him to create a style of poetry that combines the essence of desert landscapes with revolutionary depth. He writes to enhance the focus on the everyday and the familiar in poetry. In the mid-1970s, he returns to Iraq and

immerses himself in cultural and political endeavors. He becomes a mentor and companion to young poets, who find in him a source of inspiration and guidance for their own artistic and intellectual pursuits. Saadi Youssef's poetry resonates deeply with all young poets, reflecting their ambitions in both the artistic and intellectual realms (Al-Naseer, 2002). In an interview posted on YouTube with Muhammad Reda Nasrallah, Saadi Youssef says:

*I looked at 14 centuries of Arabic poetry to realize an important point, which is the interest in the individual, because I noticed that Arabic poetry in general does not give importance to the individual and does not give importance to his movement in the home and in the street. This importance, which we certainly find in the poetry of other nations, is something I grabbed and said, "I must start with this simple individual. (Saadi Youssef's Interview with Mohamed Reda Nasrallah on the "This Is It" Program, 1997).*

A significant aspect of Youssef's poetry that has been briefly mentioned, but not thoroughly examined, by critics is his exceptional combination of standard Arabic (al-Lugha al-Fusha) with the Iraqi vernacular (al-Lahja al-'Ammiyya). Simawe argues that Youssef's ability to "poetize the familiar and the everyday," as Ghazoul aptly stated ("The Poetics of the Political Poem," 117), is largely due to his skill in creating his own poetic language—a linguistic fusion that merges al-Fusha and al-'Ammiyya. Youssef's innovative poetic language reflects both his Marxist politics and his poetic style. Although he often aligned himself with the Iraqi Communist Party, his aesthetics occasionally rebelled against the party's ideological mandates. Nevertheless, his allegiance to his aesthetics and to the ordinary, vulnerable individual remained unwavering throughout his extensive journey (Simawe and Weissbort, 2003).

From the outset of his career, Youssef demonstrated a keen interest in not only capturing the poetic essence of the everyday and mundane, but also in depicting the seemingly insignificant. A significant portion of his literary creations revolve around characters who occupy a lower rung in society; those who exist on the fringes and margins. These individuals include vulnerable children struggling to survive, women facing the dual burden of sexism and classism, as well as impoverished farmers and menial workers. The scenes and moments that serve as a wellspring for Youssef's finest poetry often go unnoticed and remain concealed from view. This unique perspective on the ordinary is reflected in Youssef's language, which serves to suggest rather than oppress or stifle the poetic beauty inherent in the commonplace. As many critics have astutely noted, when reading Youssef's poetry, one cannot help but perceive the striking proximity between his standard Arabic and the vernacular language (Gale Engage Learner, 2009).

### **Brian Turner' Life and Works**

Brian Turner was born in Visalia in 1967 and was raised in the rain shadow of California's Coast Range, specifically in the arid San Joaquin Valley. During his early childhood, he constantly moved around the vast agricultural hinterlands of the Central Valley and the Sierra Nevada foothills. At the age of ten, Turner relocated once again and settled in a rural area outside Madera. He recalls that his memories of this stark yet stunning landscape are often haunted by images of "coyotes hunting calves in the nearby cattle rangeland." Turner explained that growing up in this geographically extreme region, known for its limited rainfall, high crop yields, and desolate winter days extending into weeks of dense tule fog, compelled him to develop a keen eye, akin to that of a raptor, for discerning signs of life amid the valley's barren dirt floor (G. Mcguire, 2015).

He has had a diverse range of occupations, including working as a farming laborer, pickler, machinist, circuit board maker, dishwasher, and bass guitar instructor. These early experiences exposed him to the challenges of low-paying jobs, which inspired him to write a collection of poetry focusing on the hardships faced by the working class. In the late 1980s, Turner began his study of poetry at Fresno City College, where he had the

opportunity to work with poet Ernesto Trejo. He later obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in English literature from Fresno State University, studying under the guidance of Phil Levine, Connie Hales, Chuck Hanzlicek, and Steve Yarbrough. Nearly ten years later, Turner achieved a Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Oregon, where he had the privilege of working with T.R. Hummer, Dorianne Laux, and Garrett Hongo. Subsequently, he taught English in Korea and then joined the Army in 1998, serving multiple tours of duty over the span of seven years. During his time as an infantry team leader with the 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, he spent a year in Iraq. Prior to that, he was deployed to Bosnia-Herzegovina with the 10th Mountain Division from 1999 to 2000. His experiences as a soldier were instrumental in shaping his artistic expression and voice.

Turner's inaugural collection of poetry, titled "Here, Bullet," was awarded the esteemed Beatrice Hawley Poetry Prize in 2005. Since then, the collection has achieved widespread commercial success, attaining best-seller status on numerous occasions. Turner's contributions to literature have solidified his position as an influential and highly recognizable figure within the realm of war-related writings, particularly those centered around the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

### **The Purpose of the Study**

This paper aims to provide an academic interpretation of war poetry in order to uncover the colonial project of the United States, the pretext of freedom, and the destructive nature of capitalism as depicted in the poetry of Saadi Youssif and Brian Turner. In his poetry, Saadi Youssif skillfully incorporates historical elements to create a vivid depiction of reality and transform it into a work of art. He presents a poetic character that moves through cities and villages, acting as a cameraman to document the harrowing reality of bombings and the profound impact of war on its people. Through his work, he reveals a more authentic perspective of Iraq and war, asserting that Iraq is destined to be invaded and subjected to warfare. He stands as a defiant and resistant voice amidst the chaos. In contrast, Brian Turner, a soldier poet, writes about war from personal experience. He strongly condemns war in all its forms and is a grounded writer of postmodernism who believes that wars are waged to annihilate people, rather than for noble reasons. He critiques the war propaganda promoted by the United States and denounces the ceaseless cycle of wars and the destructive nature of the military-industrial complex. This is reflected in the title of his first collection, "Here, Bullet."

### **2. Materials and Methods**

This paper adopts a qualitative content analysis to examine the poems of Saadi Yousef and Brian Turner. Four poems are selected to illustrate the poets' literary tradition and their portrayal of war. Specifically, Saadi Youssef's "A Tourist Advertisement for Hajj Omran" and "America, America" are chosen as representative examples of his war poetry. In these poems, Youssef intertwines history with autobiographical details, crafting them in poetic form. He celebrates the rich history of Iraq and its cultural and civilizational contributions, such as Uruk, as a counterpoint to war and its detrimental effects. Similarly, Brian Turner's "Here, Bullet" and "Soldier's Arabic" depict vivid and realistic images of war from the trenches in Iraqi cities like Basrah. Turner expresses his anti-war stance by demonstrating empathy and mutual compassion for the Iraqi people. This is evident through his poetic diction, including terms like *habib* (lover) and *maut* (death), which foster familiarity and empathy towards Iraqi readers. Drawing on a textual analysis approach, this paper examines existing scholarship on the poets, as well as the historical, cultural, and political contexts, to interpret the underlying messages conveyed in the poems.

Relevant journal articles and book chapters are obtained from reliable libraries, then carefully read, analyzed, and cited.

### 3. Results and Discussion

The portrayal of Iraq in the poetry of the Iraqi poet Saadi Youssef is characterized by its depth and diversity. Youssef offers a comprehensive and profound understanding of his country and its people through his various poems. He explores various social, political, cultural, and historical aspects of Iraq, as well as personal and collective conflicts that the country has experienced. Youssef's poetry presents Iraq as a beloved homeland that faces numerous challenges. This is evident in his depiction of landscapes, ancient history, and the harsh reality endured by the Iraqi people, such as wars, conflicts, homelessness, and displacement. Additionally, Youssef emphasizes the rich culture and heritage of Iraq, showcasing images of its ancient civilization and reflecting on its historical and cultural trajectory. Through his poems, Saadi Youssef expresses pain, hope, and faith in the possibility of change and transformation towards a better future for Iraq and its people. Thus, his poetry serves as a reflection of the Iraqi reality and a source of inspiration and contemplation for readers, as it encapsulates universal human experiences within the context of homeland and cultural belonging.

War poetry forms a significant component of the literary oeuvre of Saadi Youssef, an esteemed Iraqi poet. Through his poems, Youssef eloquently captures the profound impacts of wars and conflicts that have plagued Iraq throughout its history. His poetry serves as a poignant reflection of the devastating realities faced by the Iraqi populace, offering a comprehensive depiction of the harrowing consequences endured during decades of prolonged disputes and conflicts. In his poetry, Youssef explores the profound impact of wars and both internal and external conflicts on Iraq. These conflicts span from the Iraqi-Iranian wars in the 1980s to the American-Iraqi war in 2003 and subsequent events. Youssef's depictions are characterized by sharp realism, presenting the destructive outcomes, devastation, and human suffering caused by these wars. Furthermore, he delves into the detrimental psychological and social effects experienced by the Iraqi population.

Through his war poetry, Youssef effectively underscores the unyielding starkness of reality and the profound tragedy of warfare. Moreover, he articulates his unequivocal repudiation of violence and devastation, all the while exploring themes of resilience and optimism in the pursuit of a more promising future. Youssef exhibits unwavering support for his fellow countrymen and fervently advocates for peace, unity, and tolerance as the fundamental pillars for transformative progress.

Furthermore, Saadi Youssef's war poetry is widely regarded as a crucial component of his literary legacy. It effectively captures the lived experiences of the Iraqi populace amidst formidable adversities and trying conditions. Moreover, it serves as a testament to their unwavering commitment and resolute determination in forging a brighter future for Iraq and subsequent generations. Saadi skillfully employs a juxtaposition of extensive and intricate textual passages alongside concise and succinct poetic interludes. He perceives these brief poetic moments as pauses in the larger narrative, akin to rest stops during a prolonged journey. Through his innovative manipulation of temporal elements and his astute utilization of the fragmentation of geographical settings within poetic memory, Saadi effectively deconstructs his manifold worlds and experiences.

His 1983 long poem, titled "A Tourist Advertisement for Hajj Omran," is considered a significant literary work in which he skillfully incorporates the qualities of prose. This poem also represents the pinnacle of his career, establishing him as one of the few Arab poets capable of infusing faith in art by successfully capturing the aesthetic dimension amidst the tragic political reality.

This poem, published after the occupation of Haj Omran by Iranian forces in Northern Iraq, is a broad critical adventure that examines the dangerous aspects of Iraqi reality, both historically and in the present. The poet skillfully uses their knowledge and delicate emotions to navigate through an area that is politically ambiguous and challenging to interpret and research. The main theme of the poem resembles a historical elegy, with the author frequently juxtaposing phrases of praise, condemnation, and mockery. It is possible that the poet intended for it to be an epic work, as their style draws on contemporary methods and utilizes epic rituals. The elegiac design of the poem elevates the narrative to a grand tone, touching on a wide range of historical events while deftly balancing between the two extremes of sublimation and sarcasm. One interpretation is that the epic is founded on the idea of praising and elevating through words.

The poet's voice aligns with a voice that emanates from the depths of history, hence the discernible tone of transcendence in the assertion that he speaks akin to a Sumerian king. However, over time, the discourse shifts from an ancient historical context to a contemporary dialogue, which progressively acquires a more acrimonious quality as he addresses the country over which he mourns:

لو كانت يدي كالجذر لاستوقفتُ ثيرانني مجتحةً، لأوقفنَّ الغزاة  
مُسَمَّرِينَ بسحر آلهتي وأبنائي على أسوار أوروكل.  
ولكن،  
يا بلاداً بين نهريين  
بلاداً بين سيفين  
بلاداً بين حاج عُمران والبصرة  
بين القتل والثورة  
كانت ساعة التوقيت أمضى منك ... أمضى من رضا ساعاتك المائتة. (سعدي يوسف: الأعمال الشعرية، الجزء الثاني،  
(2014)

I'd unleash my Winged Bulls, and with the magic of my Gods and children, stop the invaders at Uruk's gates...

But,

Country born

between river and river

Country torn

between sword and sword,

Country between Hajj Omrane and Basrah,

between Revolution and Death,

the time-bomb was mightier than you, mightier than your contented water clocks.

The irony in this particular situation lies in the utilization of synonyms for individuals, locations, and situations, which serves as proof of a statement that goes against expectations rather than a mere modification of rhetoric. Upon association or recollection, these memories take on a transitory nature. The speaker's tone of melancholy emphasizes the significance of gathering items that are comparable solely in the degree of conveyed affection, as the speaker anticipates their eventual demise. It is in the sequence upon which the poem's structure is founded, rather than in a specific passage, where the integration between the elements of selection occurs:

استسلمت للبدو الألى جاؤوا من الأطراف، من تلك القرى الملقاة بالحرف الكبير على خرائط عسكري العالم القاسي.  
العواصم عبر بحر الروم كانت تُحكم الساعات. والأجلاف يندفعون من تلك القرى المتوحشات إليك. أنتِ البنث في تلك الجرار  
السومرية. أنتِ، أنتِ، البنبة الخزف الجميلة في الجداريات. أنتِ الماء والأسماء... لكن العواصم أحكمت توقيتها... وأتى البداة  
وأنتِ منهكة

مُدْمَاءُ

بلادٌ بين نهريْن.

بلادٌ بين سيفين. (سعدى يوسف: الأعمال الشعرية، الجزء الثاني، 2014).

And you surrendered to the Primitive Bedouins who came from the peripheries, from those villages thrown in capital letters on the military maps of this cruel world. The Metropoles across Marum Bizantium had synchronised their time. And the Barbarian hordes swarmed upon you from their savage villages; you, fair maiden of the Summerian jars; you, beautiful arabesque on the ceramics murals. You water and words.

The text employs a sophisticated poetic language that combines simplicity and profundity, integrating both conventional and contemporary vocabulary. The poet utilizes impactful poetic imagery, such as "the Sumerian jars" and "the beautiful ceramic plant in the murals," which enhance the aesthetic appeal of the text and reflect the historical and cultural heritage of Iraq. The text explores the theme of assaults and invasions that Iraq has endured throughout its history, symbolized by the Bedouin invasions. The poet vividly expresses the anguish and suffering experienced by the nation, while also emphasizing its inherent beauty and prosperous culture. The poet employs the stark contrast between "the capitals that meticulously time themselves" and "the rough ones who come from the savage villages." This contrast embodies the conflict between civilization and barbarism, and between orderly progression and disorder. The use of references to "the Sumerian jars" and "murals" symbolically represents Iraq's ancient history and its civilization. The presence of "the girl" in the text may serve as a metaphor for Iraq itself or its people, characterized by their alluring beauty and fragility, yet subjected to immense pain and destruction. The text evokes a profound sense of sadness and sorrow for the adversities endured by the country, while simultaneously inspiring a deep pride in the reader for Iraq's illustrious history and rich cultural heritage.

لماذا:

حانة البحار. خيل الموصل. ديانا. وحفريات آشور. ملوك «الحضر». السريان. شقلاوة. باب الشيخ. شلالات ببخال. سماء المنتهى الزقورة. البردي في الأهوار. فهد. والعشائر. واللبنينيون. والطيار في المبع. وأهل الكوفة. المنفي في السلطان. والجندي في مقهى بسامراء. والعمال في الميناء -

أمسوا كلهم في غابة للوحش؟

ماذا يفعل الأطفال في أوروك؟ ماذا يرتجي الكاهن؟

والعراف؟ والأسرى الذين استسلموا لله بالألاف؟

والقتلى؟

أياتون بلاداً بين نهريْن

بلاداً بين سيفين؟ (سعدى يوسف: الأعمال الشعرية، الجزء الثاني، 2014)

Why: The sailor's tavern. The horses of Mosul. Diana. And the excavations of Assyria. The kings of "Hatra". The Syriacs. Shaqlawa. Bab Al-Sheikh. Bekhal Falls. The sky of the ziggurat. The papyrus in the marshes. Fahd. And the tribes. The Leninists. And the pilot in the MiG. And the people of Kufa. The exile in Salman. And the soldier in a café in Samarra. And the workers at the port — Have they all become in a forest of monsters? What do the children of "Uruk" do? What does the priest hope for? And the soothsayer? And the prisoners who surrendered to God by the thousands? And the dead? Do they come to a land between two rivers? And the dead? Country torn between sword and sword?

The poet employs rich and intricate language infused with historical and cultural symbols, which lends the text depth and a historical context. The text abounds with poetic imagery that bridges the gap between past and present, such as "the sailor's tavern," "the horses of Mosul," and "the excavations of Assyria." These images establish a connection

between history and the present, giving the text emotional resonance and profound significance. The text conveys the transformation and decline from a once-great civilization to a state of chaos and ruin. The poet questions why these symbols of Iraq's history and culture have transformed into a "forest of monsters." There is a clear juxtaposition between the grandeur of ancient civilizations (such as Assyria and Hatra) and the current reality of chaos and violence. The mentioned locations in the text, such as "Shaqlawah," "Bab Al-Sheikh," and "Bekhal Falls," symbolize Iraq's cultural and geographical diversity and abundance. Characters like "the Leninists," "the pilot in the MiG," and "the exile in Salman" represent the political and social changes that Iraq has experienced. The text elicits a profound sense of loss and sorrow for what once was and what has now become. The poet's recurring questions about the fate of children, priests, and prisoners further contribute to the disorientation and apathy conveyed in the text.

One of the famous poems, which might be categorized under the title of war poetry, is "America America." The poem is heavily influenced by the historical and political backdrop of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, encompassing significant events such as the Gulf Wars, the invasion of Iraq, and the broader spectrum of American involvement in the Middle East. Youssef's work serves as a platform for his critical analysis of American foreign policy, and its consequential effects on other nations, with a specific focus on the Middle East. Through his verses, Youssef portrays America's interventions as manifestations of contemporary imperialism, which not only disrupt but also exploit other countries:

الجنرال الفرنسي، الذي رفع الراية مثلثة الألوان  
على " نقرة السلطان " حيث كنتُ سجيناً  
قبل ثلاثين عاماً ...  
في منتصف الإستدارة تلك  
التي قصمت ظهر الجيش العراقي،  
الجنرال الذي يحب نبيذ سانت إميليون  
سمى "نقرة السلطان" حصناً ...  
الجنرالون لا يعرفون من أديم الأرض سوى بُعدين:  
ما نتأ، حصناً  
وما انبسط، ساحة.  
يا لجهل الجنرال!  
لكن " ليبراسيون " كانت أعرف بالتضاريس  
فالفتى العراقي الذي احتل صفحتها الأولى  
كان متفجماً وراء مقود الشاحنة  
على طريق الكويت \_ سفوان  
بينما أجهزة التلفزيون: غنيمته المهزوم وهويته  
كانت سليمة في الشاحنة، كأنها في واجهة مخزن  
بشارع ريفولي. (سعدي يوسف: الأعمال الشعرية، الجزء الرابع، 2014)

The French general who raised his tricolor  
over Nuqrat al-Salman where I was a prisoner  
thirty years ago . . .  
in the middle of that U-turn  
that split the back of the Iraqi army,  
the general who loved Saint Emilion wines  
called Nuqrat al-Salman a fort ----



Of the surface of the earth, generals know only two dimensions :  
 whatever rises is a fort,  
 whatever spreads is a battlefield.  
 How ignorant the general was!  
 But Liberation was better versed in topography.  
 The Iraqi boy who conquered her front page  
 sat carbonized behind a steering wheel  
 on the Kuwait-Safwan highway  
 while television cameras  
 (the booty of the defeated and their identity)  
 were safe in a truck like a storefront  
 on Rivoli Street.  
 The neutron bomb is highly intelligent.  
 It distinguishes between  
 an "I" and an "Identity."

Saadi Youssef's poem commences by evoking a memory from his time as a prisoner, accused of being affiliated with the Communist Party. Employing poetic finesse, Youssef assumes the role of a skilled director, skillfully capturing and describing what he witnessed and continues to witness to future readers who will engage with this documentary or visual video. The poet's imagination remains unaltered. The Iraqi individual is being ruthlessly murdered, and various circumstances and nations collaborate against him, not due to any transgression on his part, but rather because he resides under the rule of a dictatorial regime that demonstrates no regard for its populace and makes irrational decisions. Youssef then proceeds to depict the prison, Naqrat al-Salman, one of Iraq's oldest penitentiaries. Situated in the Al-Muthanna Governorate, in the Salman district of Samawah, this correctional facility lies within a Bedouin desert area near the Iraqi-Saudi border. The prison, which stood during the occupation, also bore witness to the French flag, symbolizing colonialism, against which Youssef defiantly stands. War commanders and generals possess a limited perspective, perceiving the land from only two dimensions and attributing either detention or fortification purposes to it, or viewing it as a stage for exerting their influence and mobilizing troops. Meanwhile, the renowned French newspaper Liberation prominently features an article on its front pages, most notably describing the events that unfolded at the Safwan-Kuwait road turnaround between Iraq and Kuwait. Of particular significance is the graphic depiction of a charred body of a young Iraqi boy, whose presence in occupied Kuwait was an unfortunate outcome of fate, leading him to engage in theft. This boy became the target of bombings by Allied planes that had been dispatched to liberate Kuwait. The truck driven by the young man was laden with stolen electrical appliances, including televisions pillaged from Kuwait. With his exceptional brilliance, Youssef characterizes these items as spoils belonging to the vanquished and integral to their identity. Regrettably, the young man himself was unrecognizable by the electronic bomb employed by the Allies, which solely targeted objects, disregarding the inherent worth and identity of the boy, who stood helpless against the destructive might of war (Ferial,2003).

أنا أيضاً أحبُّ الجينز والجاز وجزيرة الكنز  
 وبيعاء جون سيلفر ونوافذ نيو أورليانز  
 أحبُّ مارك توين ومراكب المسيسي وكلاب ابراهام لنكولن  
 احب حقول القمح والذرة ورائحة التبغ الفرجينى

لكني لستُ بأميركيّ أيكفي أنني لستُ بأميركيّ حتى يعيدني طيارُ  
الفانتوم إلى العصر الحجريّ؟

Back to stone age!

لا البترولُ أريدُ ولا "أميركا" لا الفيلُ أريدُ ولا الحمار  
اترك لي أيها الطيار بيتي المسقوف بالسعف وقطرة الجذوع  
أريد القرية لا نيويورك لماذا جئتني من صحراء نيفادا  
أيها الجندي المسلح حتى الأسنان؟ لماذا جئت إلى البصرة  
البعيدة حيث السمك يبلغ عتبات البيوت؟  
الخنازير لا ترعى هنا لدي فقط تلك الجواميس التي  
تمضغ كسلى نيلوفر الماء اتركني أيها الجندي اترك لي  
كوخ القصب الطافي وحرية الصيد اترك لي طيور  
المهاجرة وخضرة الريش خذ طيور الحديد المزمجرة  
وصواريخ توماهوك لستُ الخصيم  
أنا المخوض حتى ركبتي في مناقع الرز  
اتركني ولعنتي  
لا أريدُ قيامتك . (سعدي يوسف: الأعمال الشعرية، الجزء الرابع، 2014)

I too love jeans and jazz and Treasure Island  
and John Silver's parrot and the balconies of New Orleans.  
I love Mark Twain and the Mississippi steamboats and Abraham Lincoln's dogs.  
I love the fields of wheat and corn and the smell of Virginia tobacco.  
But I am not American.  
Is that enough for the Phantom pilot to turn me back to the Stone  
Age?  
I need neither oil nor America herself, neither the elephant nor the  
donkey.  
Leave me, pilot, leave my house roofed with palm fronds and this  
wooden bridge.  
I need neither your Golden Gate nor your skyscrapers.  
I need the village, not New York.  
Why did you come to me from your Nevada desert, soldier armed to  
the teeth?  
Why did you come all the way to distant Basra, where fish used to  
swim by our doorsteps?  
Pigs do not forage here.  
I only have these water buffaloes lazily chewing on water lilies.  
Leave me alone, soldier.  
Leave me my floating cane hut and my fishing spear.  
Leave me my migrating birds and the green plumes.  
Take your roaring iron birds and your Tomahawk missiles. I am not  
your foe.  
I am the one who wades up to the knees in rice paddies.  
Leave me to my curse.  
I do not need your day of doom.

After exchanging pictures, Saadi clarifies that he does not harbor any fanaticism against America. On the contrary, he holds an appreciation for their customs and possesses an understanding of the intricacies of their society, which encompass clothing, food, cigarettes, nature, and people. However, he emphatically asserts that he is not an American. Will this be sufficient to exempt him from being subjected to the devastating Phantom plane, as was the case with the boy targeted at the onset of the poem? In an impassioned plea to the pilot of this horrific war machine, the poet draws upon all his memories and life experiences, beseeching the pilot to allow him to live his life without becoming a target. He firmly states, "I do not desire your resurrection," thereby highlighting the fallacy of liberating nations and their supposed resurrection toward a better life.

The encounter between two opposing worlds: the first of which is Iraq, which is a world that embodies harmony between man and nature and nothing in it disturbs the serenity of life. It is a world of abundance, simplicity, and splendor. "The houses are made of reeds roofed with palm leaves, the fish reach the doorsteps of the houses, the buffaloes are lazy and chew the water, and the migratory birds inhabit it with the green of their feathers." The second personifies America and is referred to as "pigs," "the soldier armed to the teeth," and "tomahawk missiles". (Gale Engage Learner, 2009).

أميركا !  
لنستبدل هداياك  
خذي سجائر المهربة  
وأعطينا البطاطا .  
خذي مسدس جيمس بوند الذهب  
وأعطينا كركرة مارلين مونرو .  
خذي حقنة المخدر المرمية تحت شجرة  
وأعطينا زجاجة المصل .  
خذي خرائط السجون النموذجية  
وأعطينا بيوت القرى .  
خذي كتب ميشريك  
وأعطينا ورقاً للقصاصد التي تهجرك .  
خذي ما لا تملكين  
وأعطينا ما نملك .  
خذي أشرطة البيرق  
وأعطينا النجوم .  
خذي اللحية الأفغانية  
وأعطينا " لحيّة والت ويطمان الملاى بالفراشات " .  
خذي لا صدام حسين  
وأعطينا ابراهام لنكولن !  
أو تعطينا أحداً . (سعدي يوسف: الأعمال الشعرية، الجزء الرابع، 2014)

America:

let's exchange gifts.

Take your smuggled cigarettes

and give us potatoes.

Take James Bond's golden pistol

and give us Marilyn Monroe's giggle.

Take the heroin syringe under the tree  
 and give us vaccines.  
 Take your blueprints for model penitentiaries  
 and give us village homes.  
 Take the books of your missionaries  
 and give us paper for poems to defame you.  
 Take what you do not have  
 and give us what we have.  
 Take the stripes of your flag  
 and give us the stars.  
 Take the Afghani mujahideen beard  
 and give us Walt Whitman's beard filled with butterflies.  
 Take Saddam Hussein  
 and give us Abraham Lincoln  
 or give us no one.

In a direct address to America, the future occupying nation of his land, Saadi endeavors to procure something more compassionate and personal than the globalist rhetoric and propaganda imposed upon the conquered peoples. Instead of receiving gifts such as Tomahawk missiles and ostentatious displays, Saadi yearns for the simplicity of a potato to eat, eschewing the violence symbolized by James Bond, in exchange for the joyous laughter of the enchanting Marilyn Monroe. He desires the medicine that America and its society employ, which counteracts the havoc wreaked by drugs, and the construction of cities in colonies that do not resemble prisons for the populace, while cherishing the tranquil abodes in his own country. As writers who depict the realities of his nation as freedom, he seeks to swap these notions with poems and perspectives that capture the dark face of America and its impact on the people. Saadi contemplates the terrorism exported by America, orchestrated through its encounters with Lantin and Leggett, or its ostensibly peaceful and beautiful vision symbolized by butterflies, ultimately attributing all of these to the accountability of Saddam Hussein. He implores America to yield figures akin to Abraham Lincoln, who built their nation and liberated them from savagery and oppression – a desire shared by the poet for his own country (Gale Engage Learner 2009).

لكنّا لسنا أسرى، يا أميركا  
 وجنودك ليسوا جنّد الله ...  
 نحنُ ، الفقراء ، لنا أرضُ الآلهةِ العرقي  
 آلهةُ الثيران  
 آلهةُ النيران  
 آلهةُ الأحزانِ المجلولةِ صلصالاً ودماً في أغنيةٍ ...  
 نحن ، الفقراء ، لنا ربُّ الفقراء  
 الطالعُ من أضلاعِ الفلاحين  
 الجائع  
 والناصح  
 والرافعُ كلَّ جبين ...  
 نحن الموتى، يا أميركا  
 فليأتِ جنودك !  
 من يقتلُ مَيتاً يبعثُهُ ...

ونحنُ الغرقى بإسبِدتي

نحنُ الغرقى

فَلْيَأْتِ الماء... (سعدى يوسف: الأعمال الشعرية، الجزء الرابع، 2014)

We are not hostages, America,

and your soldiers are not God's soldiers...

We are the poor ones, ours is the earth of the drowned gods,

the gods of bulls,

the gods of fires,

the gods of sorrows that intertwine clay and blood in a song...

We are the poor, ours is the god of the poor,

who emerges out of farmers' ribs,

hungry

and bright,

and raises heads up high...

America, we are the dead.

Let your soldiers come.

Whoever kills a man, let him resurrect him.

We are the drowned ones, dear lady.

We are the drowned.

Let the water come.

The poet attains the realization, subsequent to emerging from the coma and being overwhelmed by emotions, that the pursuit of righteousness is unattainable as long as we acquiesce to the governance of an irrational leader such as Saddam. We are not captives of any authority, O American military, and we shall not rely on your troops to bestow upon us the aid we seek. Our homeland embodies a legacy of desolation and oppression, a form of oppression that finds expression in both melodies and the countenances of the destitute and rural populace. We are the ones who perished long ago, with our sentiments extinguished under the yoke of such a ruler! The poet effectively uses deep and meaningful poetic images, such as "the gods of bulls" and "the gods of fire," to establish a connection between the cultural and religious heritage of the people being described and the criticism directed at America. By doing so, the poem conveys a strong rejection of American interventions and a defense of the cultural and religious identity of the oppressed. The poet suggests that Americans lack sincerity and are not justified in imposing their control on those they regard as poor and oppressed. Furthermore, the poet emphasizes pride in the identity of their people and their god, who is associated with suffering and poverty, appealing to them through the noble figure of the god of the poor. The symbols of "the gods of bulls" and "the gods of fire" allude to ancient civilizations, underscoring the strength of the history and cultural heritage of the people in question. "The God of the Poor" symbolizes the deity or force that protects the poor, while "the dead" represent a state of oppression and neglect. The text elicits feelings of anger and frustration towards foreign interventions and injustice. Expressions like "Let your soldiers come!" serve as a challenge and rejection of oppressive power dynamics. The repetition of phrases like "we the poor" and "we the drowned" effectively emphasizes the poem's message. In sum, this poetic text aptly expresses a rejection of foreign interventions and a sense of pride in the cultural identity of oppressed peoples (Jennifer, 2009).

Throughout "America, America," the speaker discusses war both in general terms and in relation to his people and his country. The speaker holds a negative view of war as a solution to his country's problems. The poem begins with the portrayal of a military leader who supervised a prison in the desert. The speaker perceives the general as naive, unable to comprehend the cruelty and reality of the prison because he only sees forts and battlefields in the world. As the camp is a structure that rises from the ground, the speaker only sees it as a fort. In the same section, the speaker criticizes the foreign press for exploiting the tragedy caused by the military. A French newspaper prominently features a photograph of a bomb victim on its front page. The media's awareness of the war leads them to find a secure place to park their trucks (away from the threat of neutron bombs), resulting in a disconnection between the media and the real suffering of the Iraqi people (Gale Engage Learner 2009).

### **Brian Turner: War Poetry**

Turner's work digs deeper into various aspects of the Iraqi landscapes, shedding light on both the daily experiences of soldiers and civilians as well as the glaring prevalence of violence. Through his dialogues, Turner provides us with insights into the perspectives of the Iraqi people, who, while being engaged in a state of war, harbor the same sense of mistrust and caution towards us. In his poetry, Turner sincerely endeavors to persuade us that the individuals on the other end of the gun barrels are human beings, not monsters. His poetic range emerges from his firsthand encounters in combat and evolves to encompass broader themes, such as the profound impact of war on people's lives and the poet's own personal history with conflict. Turner skillfully employs contrasts, such as moments of tranquility juxtaposed with times of strife, to underscore how war serves as a divisive force among people.

Writing about war and humanity are not mutually exclusive, as exemplified by Turner's poetry. The preservation of humanity during times of conflict, as well as in the aftermath, constitutes a global endeavor. Turner astutely recognizes that violence and strife serve to divide individuals, prompting his poetry to emphasize periods of harmony rather than catastrophic events.

In an interview with James Gleason Bishop, Turner responds to Bishop's inquiry about one of Turner's poems, "Illumination Rounds," and the sentiment the poem delivers on the human cost of warfare:

So many have died. So many have lost those they love. So many wounded, with trauma to be lived with for the decades to come. The very, very least we can do is to recognize the wide distribution of pain to which we are all connected.

In his initial volume, "Here, Bullet" (2014), the examination of the poet's war experience and its impact on his creative process is undertaken. The collection encompasses poems written during the poet's service in the American army, as well as those composed upon his return home. Undoubtedly, the fear engendered by warfare serves as a catalyst for such artistic expression; however, the poet's status as a soldier within the American forces stationed in Iraq introduces additional complexities, stemming from the distinct political, social, and cultural environment prevalent in that particular context.

In the inaugural poem of his debut poetry anthology, "Here Bullet," Turner consciously opts for a diminutive armament from modern warfare as a vehicle for self-annihilation. The protagonist within the poem is depicted defiantly confronting the bullet as it impinges upon him, symbolizing the malevolence inherent in warfare. By personifying the weapon, the poem delves into the broader concept of brutality in times of war. The speaker's resilience and determination remain unyielding despite the detailed explanation of the myriad physical consequences brought about by a bullet. In the poem,

the speaker offers a medical account of a bullet wound, precisely enumerating the bodily structures that are affected as the bullet seeks to terminate its intended victim. By referring to his physical form as "gristle," the speaker deliberately distances himself from his own body, for this term evokes the remains of an animal after slaughter. Through this portrayal, the speaker elucidates how the bullet's trajectory traverses their collarbone, aorta, spine, and brain, ultimately leading to their demise.

If a body is what you want,  
 then here is bone and gristle and flesh.  
 Here is the clavicle-snapped wish,  
 the aorta's opened valves, the leap  
 thought makes at the synaptic gap. (Turner, 2014)

This bullet is a profoundly austere, impersonal, and devoid of emotion tool. Even in its sheer horror, it is personified as a representation of a violent criminal. The initial lines of the poem, which depict the bullet's trajectory as an "inexorable flight," elucidate that weapons are purposefully crafted with the specific objective of ending human life. It hisses, reminiscent of a snake, as it traverses "through the air," diligently seeking out "the bone, gristle, and flesh." Regardless of whether the target is an inanimate object or a living being, each bullet is meticulously manufactured and intended for its discharge towards it. Consequently, the bullet becomes an embodiment of malevolence, emerging as the primary adversary. Thus, once the bullet is unleashed, its relentless momentum persists until it forcefully collides with a solid surface. Upon striking a particular body, its velocity punctures the vessel of "heat and blood" within it:

Here is the adrenaline rush you crave,  
 that inexorable flight, that insane puncture  
 into heat and blood. And I dare you to finish  
 what you've started. Because here, Bullet,  
 here is where I complete the word you bring  
 hissing through the air, here is where I moan (Turner, 2014)

He will be the final speaker, resolute in not allowing the bullet to claim his life. In other words, the bullet is openly and unequivocally contested. The speaker mocks the bullet, asserting that its power will diminish just as the strength of soldiers wanes, emphasizing that his ultimate words and breaths belong exclusively to him, not to the bullet. The concluding word of the poem serves as a somber reminder of the futility of conflict, while simultaneously serving as a compelling testament to the speaker's unwavering determination. The soldier's world concludes with triumph, rather than enduring suffering and defeat:

the barrel's cold esophagus, triggering  
 my tongue's explosives for the rifling I have  
 inside of me, each twist of the round  
 spun deeper, because here, Bullet,  
 here is where the world ends, every time. (Turner, 2014)

Another poem from Here, Bullet (2014) titled "Soldier's Arabic" serves as a language lesson. In his note accompanying the poem, Turner explains that it heavily relies on an Arabic-English/English-Arabic phrasebook gifted to him by an Iraqi soldier:

The word for love, *habib*, is written from right  
to left, starting where we would end it  
and ending where we might begin.

Where we would end a war  
another might take as a beginning,  
or as an echo of history, recited again.  
Speak the word for death, *maut*,  
and you will hear the cursives of the wind  
driven into the veil of the unknown. (Turner, 2014)

The poem effectively employs juxtaposition to explore the cyclical nature of warfare in contrast to the linear progression of language and love. It posits that the resolution of a conflict in one culture may be interpreted as a fresh start by another culture, thereby underscoring the enduring and repetitive essence of human conflict. Turner introduces two crucial concepts to the reader, namely the terms for love (*habib*) and death (*maut*). These terms are fundamental and should be familiar to students of almost any language from an early age. Love is a recurring theme in Turner's works and takes on various forms. For his fellow Americans, love encompasses a profound sense of patriotism and camaraderie among soldiers, as well as affection for those left behind. Additionally, one may discern a growing affection for both the people being fought against and protected, and their culture.

It is worth noting that the Arabic term for love stands in stark contrast to its American English counterpart in Turner's writings. Understanding the concept of love provides the potential to decipher the world in reverse, while the constant fear of mortality serves as a constant reminder to novice military fighters that they inhabit an alternate reality. In this reality, language bears "the cursives of the wind / driven into the veil of the unknown."

This is a language made of blood.  
It is made of sand, and time.  
To be spoken, it must be earned. (Turner, 2014)

The desert landscape, which is unfamiliar to the majority of Americans, evokes a powerful image of sand. This image symbolizes a material and temporal environment that can engulf all futile human endeavors. Additionally, the language spoken in this region imparts profound lessons, mirroring the challenging nature of the surroundings. Through words such as "blood," "sand," and "time," Arabic conveys both the brutalities of contemporary violence and the remarkable achievements of a once-glorious and ancient civilization.

#### 4. Conclusion

It is evident from an analysis of the nexus between poetry, war, and historical experiences that these themes converge to yield profound insights into the human



condition. Notably, writers such as Saadi Yousef and Brian Turner imbue the harrowing realities of conflict with sincere candor and emotional profundity. Yousef's poetry, which originates from his personal encounters and ideological convictions, effectively captures the hardships of exile and displacement amidst the tumultuous backdrop of Iraq's history. His verses are prose poems mingled with history and autobiography exposing the suffering experienced by individuals and serve as a reflection of a nation grappling with the ramifications of political conflicts and unrest. He goes back to Iraqi history and Mesopotamian civilization like Uruk to withstand wars and remind Iraqis of their history and civilization to never bend down to the modern challenges. Conversely, Turner offers a distinct perspective as both a soldier and a poet, presenting firsthand narratives of the battlefield and the profound impact of warfare on the human psyche. Turner is focused on using poetic diction that evoke a sense of empathy and solidarity with Iraqi people by using words like 'habib' (حبيب) 'maut.' (موت).

Through their literary works, authors shed light on the stark realities of conflict, human cruelty, the erosion of morality, as well as the enduring feelings of alienation and displacement experienced by those entangled in such circumstances. The authors compel us to confront the intricate complexities of human strife and its enduring impact on individuals and communities, exemplified by Brian Turner's chilling portrayal of battle and Saadi Youssef's poignant reflections on war and exile. Through their poetry, they offer a glimpse into the human condition amidst the chaos of war, serving as a reminder of literature's timeless capacity to capture the essence of our shared humanity. Youssef and Turner call for ending wars to stop the vicious circle of hatred among individuals and nations. While Youssef relies heavily on his homeland, cultural and civilizational reservoir to remind Iraqis of their history and civilization, Turner tries to reformulate war fabrics in Iraq by using certain Arabic diction as in soldier Arabic to address Arabic readers and to gain solidarity and empathy of readers and reflect the horror of war and dead bodies. Turner speaks of Arabic symbols of sand, desert, and blood to show the sense of courage and challenge towards the foreign invaders to their homeland. He believes that this land refuses to acquiesce to death and foreigners who threaten them with death. In short, Youssef and Turner don't believe in violence and wars. Wars bring destruction upon all.

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