**“We Yearn for the Sun Like a Baby Yearns for Its Mother's Milk” –**

**an Ecocritical Reading of Iraqi Literature of Exiles**

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**Abstract**

Ghaʾib Ṭuʿma Farmān’s novel *al-Murtajā wa-l-muʾajjal* (*The Yearned for and the Postponed,* 1986) depicts the lives of Iraqi exiles in Russia. By using a new ecocritical analytical approach – a combination of Georg Lukács’s theory (1974) regarding the connection between longing and form, Mas‛ud Hamdan’s description of art as a means of expressing the complexities of human life (2009), and Theodor Adorno’s view of exile as a mutilating experience (2000) – this article aims to explore how Farmānuses ecological landscapes to reflect the exilic experience. The analysis, coupling environmental studies with migration studies and contributing to both, reveals this novel as relevant to the depiction of exile as it was experienced at the time of its publication. In addition, it shows how Farmān adds to the existing knowledge of historical events by artistically documenting horrific chapters in Iraqi political history from the victims’ point of view in a way that transcends the scope of the above-mentioned theories.

**Keywords:** Baghdad, exile, Moscow, ecocriticism, Ghaʾib Ṭuʿma Farmān

**Introduction**

Novelist and journalist Ghaʾib Ṭuʿma Farmān is considered the first Iraqi novelist to have succeeded in writing a mature novel, *al-Nakhla wa-l-jīrān* (1965).[[1]](#footnote-1) Born into a poor family in Baghdad, where he also attended school, Farmān wrote extensively about the Iraqi working class and about Iraqi intellectuals. In his writing, he broaches cultural taboos, such as relations between the sexes, religious conventions, and criticism of the regime. After being exiled from Iraq due to his leftist and Communist leanings, he first went to Egypt to study. He then moved to Syria and Lebanon, where he worked as a teacher, before eventually settling in Moscow. There, he married a Russian woman and raised a family, worked as a translator, and died in 1990.[[2]](#footnote-2) In his novel *al-Murtajā wa-l-muʾajjal* from 1986, Farmān attaches great significance to climatological elements and the climatic differences between Moscow and Baghdad, and the way he connects them to the exilic experience will be ecocritically analyzed in the current paper.

The theoretical framework draws upon the work of the Marxist Hungarian philosopher and critic Georg Lukács (1885–1971), who, in his discussion of 19th century literature, explained the connection between longing and form. Lukács argues that the landscape of various places in Europe and the feelings they evoke in writers influence the nature of these writers’ works. Lukács explains that the nostalgic and melancholic German forests, for example, give rise to a different kind of writing than the harsh and sometimes violent Tuscan landscape.[[3]](#footnote-3) Lukács’s view remains relevant to today, with huge waves of refugees and immigrants continually occurring throughout the world. It is relevant to exilic literature in general and Iraqi literature in particular, since many Iraqi writers and artists were exiled from Iraq for various reasons, as will be explained below. Exploring the connections between landscape and longing can shed light on the exilic experience. Therefore, this article proposes to extend Lukács’s view regarding the connections between landscape and literature to that of the connection between climate and literature. Through this lens, the mutual relations between literature written in exile and the manner in which climate is presented will be examined. In his essay, Lukács defines “longing” as various ways in which a person tries to construct his or her fatherland through dreams while in “ultimate exile.”[[4]](#footnote-4) He clarifies that “one never longs for what is foreign to one and never for what is already one’s own”; therefore, the fact that the homeland is familiar to the exile and at the same time no longer belongs to him, for the exile had been distanced from it, induces longing. This paper will examine how exiles who literally had to leave their countries construct this very memory of the fatherland through depictions of the climate, as the differences between the climate in the homeland and that in the host country transcend meteorological boundaries and extend to differences in the political and social climates. Although Lukács refers only to men in his essay, the question of whether climate affected men and women differently in the novel will also be explored.

In his work on texts, interpretation literature, and drama, scholar Masʿud Hamdan maintains that art, myth, and science are the three fundamental lenses through which to perceive reality. He further explains how art differs from myth and science. In his work, he explains that art is constructed by chronotope and characters, reflecting them via imagination. As opposed to myth and science, which have their own inner consistency, art can reflect the finer complexities of a changing human experience, a personality, an epoch, and a people’s culture. As an example, Hamdan compares ballet with oriental dance; each represents the relation of the dancers with their cultural surroundings – the former flighty, the latter sensual and earthy.[[5]](#footnote-5) Just as Hamdan views art as a medium for perceiving reality, including the reflection of the character’s surroundings, this paper considers climate as a significant constituent of the characters’ surroundings and explores the ways in which it expresses the state of exile.

Given that the novel was written in exile and reflects longing and absence, it will be interesting to examine the German philosopher and sociologist Theodor Adorno’s (1903–1969) view of exile as a mutilating, although sometimes unavoidable, experience, for example, in times of persecution. Adorno, himself an exile during the Second World War, argued that the loss of one’s home, homeland, and mother tongue creates symptoms of illness.[[6]](#footnote-6) In the novel, too, dwelling in a foreign country is associated with physical illness, a head injury, and memory loss. Exploring an exiled writer’s work through a close ecocritical reading focused on the relations between climate and time as manifestations of longing may help shed light on life in exile and the meaning of longing for those in exile. Since longing somehow unites people longing for the same things,[[7]](#footnote-7) we may be able to use the novel discussed in this paper to also learn about the work and lives of other writers and artists who have had similar experiences and felt similar longing. Using Hamdan’s point of view to treat the novel as an artistic medium through which the exilic experience is transmitted, Lukács’s insights into what the connections between the environment and longing to learn about life outside one’s homeland, Adorno’s views, we can identify when exile correlates with illness and dysfunction.

**The home(land) from afar**

Because they view things from afar, exiles are able to criticize both their homelands and their new places of habitation, as demonstrated by Orit Bashkin in her article on two of Iraq’s prominent writers from the generation preceding that of Farmān, Maḥmūd Aḥmad al-Sayyid (1901–1937) and Dhū al-Nūn Ayyūb (1908–1996). Bashkin shows that being an “outsider” makes one better equipped to think about and discuss political change. The protagonist of Dhū al-Nūn Ayyūb draws on images of Iraq, its blazing sun and clear skies, to highlight the differences between East and West.[[8]](#footnote-8) Farmān uses the characters’ foreignness to contrast Baghdad and Moscow by comparing their climates in order to express the exilic experience; this will be described in detail below in the context of the influence of the climate on the way people dress and on how secure they feel. In *The Ecopoetics of Entanglement in Contemporary Turkish and American Literatures*, Meliz Ergin demonstrates how the Turkish novelist Latife Tekin “combines socio-political readings of ecological problems with ecological readings of social issues” using representations more metaphorical than realistic.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Although ecology is not Farmān's main theme (in contrast to Tekin’s work), he does use ecology, in the form of the climate, together with politics and the language, to frame his social experience of exile. He even uses metaphors from the animal world to convey his messages. For example, Farmān employs depictions of the climate to discuss real historical instances of political persecution, such as referencing “*qitar al-mawt,”* an attempt by the Iraqi regime in 1963 to eliminate its political opponents, wherein the climate played a crucial role,[[10]](#footnote-10) and touching on the way the climate influences the feelings of self-esteem and security in Moscow.[[11]](#footnote-11) The environment is a metonymic extension of the individual who resides in it, attributable to the fact that an individual's life is, to a great extent, shaped by the social and cultural surroundings and his or her way of life.[[12]](#footnote-12)

In light of how Lukács and Hamdan view the influence of the environment, it is worthwhile examining the novel in question through the ecocritical prism of the image of the climate, to better understand how it reflects the characters’ attitudes towards exile. Writers, especially leftists, have used climate to express their discontent with social norms. The Sudanese writer al-Tayyib Ṣāliḥ’s (1929–2009) *Mawsim al-hijra ilā al-shamāl* (*Season of Migration to the North*), for example, explores this theme.[[13]](#footnote-13) According to Birtā Khalīl al-Nabr's analysis of Ṣāliḥ’s novel, the warmth of the south, in this case Sudan, represents a calm, easy and peaceful life, while the northern cold of Western Europe symbolizes both violent rhetoric and physical violence.[[14]](#footnote-14) Communist writers (and writers who were close to Communism), as well as socialist writers, paid particular attention to ecological issues. ‛Abd al-Mālik Nūrī (1921–1992) for example, who wrote for *al-Thaqāfa al-jadīda* (which later came to be identified with the Iraqi Communist Party), dealt with the climate in “Rīḥ al-janūb” (South Wind), where the heat of the Iraqi desert eventually condemns a blind girl to eternal blindness.[[15]](#footnote-15)

We employ Lukács’s, Adorno’s, and Hamdan’s ideas to explore climate in the novel *al-Murtajā wa-l-muʾajjal*, by the Iraqi exile Ghaʾib Ṭuʿma Farmān (1927, Baghdad–1990, Moscow) to decipher the means through which this prolific writer expressed his longing for Iraq. It is worth noting that although this is the only novel by Farmān not set in Baghdad, it is rife with references to love and longing for the city.

**The social background of *al-Murtajā wa-l-muʾajjal***

*Ghurba*, or exile, is a recurring theme in Farmān’s works, since he and many of his Iraqi contemporaries in the 1950s and 1960s, especially fellow leftists, became victims of the Iraqi regime which closed down their workplaces, stripped them of their Iraqi citizenship, and exiled them. Many of these individuals, Farmān included, fled first to a Muslim country before eventually moving to the West or the Eastern bloc. The novel under discussion here thus belongs to a subgenre of Iraqi literature written in Cold War Eastern Europe. Some of the writers were political exiles like Farmān, while others emigrated in search of work, education, or medical treatment. The opening paragraph of the novel, which takes place at the beginning of the 1970s,[[16]](#footnote-16) exemplifies this complex situation of young Iraqis seeking refuge in an Eastern Bloc city, most probably Moscow, as told by Thābit to his son, who was suffering from a head injury:

I am going to tell you, Hassān, about people from your country who traveled in search of knowledge or livelihood or to escape harsh circumstances. They said ‘this is only for a few years, and we will return full of health and knowledge.’ But their exile persisted and, in this way, they began weaving their stories and tales, falling into the snares of waiting. I will tell you about a story directed by a director of comedies named *Qadar Ghāshim* [literally: unjust fate] and performed by a group of those who continued to wait for the train. And life goes on.[[17]](#footnote-17)

This is once again related to Adorno’s description of symptoms of illness suffered by exiles.[[18]](#footnote-18) The protagonists are Thābit Husayn and his son Hassān, who is being treated in Moscow for a severe head injury he sustained in Baghdad. The other characters include a translator, Yahyā Salīm, who went to Russia in search of a new life and career, Ṣāliḥ Jamīl, who initially went to Russia to study and remained there for twenty years, and ʿAlwān Shākir, who is trying to complete his Ph.D. on the Qarāmita sect.[[19]](#footnote-19) The theme of exile versus the homeland features heavily in this novel, and the differences between the two are emphasized by minor characters who challenge the protagonists, their standpoints, and the obstacles preventing them from returning home. Differences between the place of exile and the homeland will be examined by comparing the climate of the host country with that of Iraq. Family relations (including gender issues that relate to the climate in both places) as perceived by the characters will also be examined. The stories that constitute the novel are relayed through dialogues, monologues, and as a series of stories told by the father to his injured son in an attempt to revive his memory. All of these stories will be included in the analysis, each in the relevant section. Namely, gender issues and family relations will be discussed in the context of the climate; the injured son and his recovery will be discussed from the perspective of memories and rehabilitation of the image of the homeland, while the political persecution of the father will be discussed in the dimension of the ecological question and the temporary (or continuous) stay in exile, highlighting Farmān’s unique and original use of the climate to express the exilic experience of himself and of his generation (i.e., the individual and the collective). This will be conducted using the approaches of Hamdan, Lukács, and Adorno, which will help to highlight fragments of everyday life in Moscow. This paper also draws on memories from the past in Iraq, showing how they sometimes clash, but at other times merge to construct a new understanding of exile.

**The Ecological: The climate as a feature of longing**

As explained by Hamdan, art mirrors human beings, their spirit, and their surroundings.[[20]](#footnote-20) Exploring the ecological surroundings of the characters may help us to penetrate the text's “external layers” and consequently better understand the characters’ underlying complexities. Moscow’s climate is frequently associated with cold and winter, while Baghdad's is mostly associated with the desert, dryness, and heat.[[21]](#footnote-21) The contrast between the two gives rise to longing: the Iraqi characters in the novel long for the Iraqi sun, although some of them chose to live in Russia.

What the city of Baghdad and the sun symbolized for Farmān was described by the Jordanian-born Saudi novelist ʿAbd al-Rahmān Munīf[[22]](#footnote-22) (1933–2004) after Farmān's death as follows: “this Baghdadi who carries his Baghdad with him wherever he goes, and who never tires of looking at it just as a child looks at its toy, in need of Baghdad’s smell and sun.”[[23]](#footnote-23) With this sentence, Munīf sums up the importance of Baghdad and the climate for Farmān the exile: Baghdad and its sun represent his emotional baggage. Munīf’s description is very accurate, as Baghdad and its sun accompany the characters and feature prominently in Farmān's writing. This observation is particularly apt in the case of *al-Murtajā wa-l-muʾajjal*, as the story takes place in a far colder country, and the cold climate affects the characters’ lives. Munīf also notes the figurative coldness and harshness associated with exile, and with Moscow in particular, in a way that links climate, language, and the feelings experienced during exile.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Munīf maintains that writers who live in exile in cold countries become accustomed to the long winters and short summers, and that they yearn for the sun like a baby yearns for its mother’s milk, as Farmān himself once said.[[25]](#footnote-25) In line with Munīf's remarks, the climate (and the sun, in particular) serves as a literary device to convey the experience of exile, specifically, living in exile in Russia.[[26]](#footnote-26) Thus, this novel enables Farmān to compare ecologies, comparing and contrasting the two cities, Moscow and Baghdad, through their climate, smells, and colors.

In one of the scenes, the golden morning light of a Moscow spring enters Yahyā Salīm’s room.[[27]](#footnote-27) The smooth light is contrasted with Yahyā’s monotonous work as a translator, an autobiographical reference to Farmān's own experience as a translator from Russian into Arabic. Although words are supposed to act as a bridge to the homeland and symbolize one’s connection to one’s mother tongue, according to the Iraqi-Jewish scholar Sasson Somekh (1933–2019),[[28]](#footnote-28) Yahyā’s dictionaries fill him with boredom,[[29]](#footnote-29) and amplify his discontentment with his place of exile. Being outside of Iraq makes the characters examine their relations with their homelands and host countries through the theme of language in a certain climate. While Yahyā struggles with shifting between languages as a translator, the sick child is struggling to remember his past through the words of his father’s stories. Language plays a role in remembering, including remembering the Iraqi climate. The characters, Iraqis who had travelled to Moscow for various reasons – medical treatment, work, and studies – talk among themselves in Arabic, reminding one another of Iraq’s climate and ecological surroundings, as will be discussed in more depth below.

Before traveling to Moscow, but after having met the doctor who claimed he could save Ḥassān’s life,[[30]](#footnote-30) the father left the Iraqi hospital on a warm and sunny winter day. The father was so happy to have found a physician who could save his son Hassān, that “he saw the trees dancing with joy.”[[31]](#footnote-31) Nature and the climate are thus employed here to express the father's happiness; when the father is happy, the climate in the city in general is happy, and nature dances in solidarity with the father and his son. A similar depiction of the world dancing joyfully is found when Yahyā Salīm goes out to the street with his son Farīd.[[32]](#footnote-32)

The Russian spring sun warming the city is compared with Baghdad’s winter sun: “the sun warmed one to sleepiness, exactly like Baghdad’s sun in winter,”[[33]](#footnote-33) highlighting the climate in Baghdad. Thābit tries to jog his son’s memory using the image of the sun: “Do you remember that shiny copper-colored golden sun in Sūq al-Ṣafāfīr, how it would warm your body as if it was your mother embracing you when you had gotten out of school?”[[34]](#footnote-34) Baghdad’s warm sun is mentioned in the same breath as the mother, as two necessary identifiers of a person, two inseparable parts of a human being. While trying to remind his son of the past, Thābit tells him: “Don't tell me that you do not remember your mother who breastfed you, and the city, the street and the house in which you were born. If a person forgets these things, he forgets everything.”[[35]](#footnote-35) The Iraqi sun is once again mentioned in proximity to Hassān’s mother[[36]](#footnote-36) and to Baghdad, the city in which he was born. The city, the Iraqi sun, and the mother all bear a similar significance. When the son expresses his fear that his absence might make his mother forget him, his father tries to calm him.[[37]](#footnote-37)

In contrast to the Iraqi sun, which is mentioned often, Russia is depicted as a cold land, except for certain times when the sun appears. When it does, it pleases Yahyā, as it “kisses his left shoulder with its warm yellow tongue,”[[38]](#footnote-38) in an almost erotic description. Together with the trees in the street, the weather outside the window evokes life, people, and fresh air.[[39]](#footnote-39)

Climate symbolizes both the indoors and outdoors: the atmosphere inside Yahyā's room and the climate in the outside world; the atmosphere inside the hospital room where Hassān is receiving treatment and the rain and clouds outside it, where the real colors of the world can be found. In both cases, the gap between the indoors and the outdoors is seen through a window, and the person inside the room; Hassān, for example, is isolated from the world by glass. Thābit tells Hassān that the Russian soil is saturated with snow “And you know, my child, the story of the snow here, it falls throughout the winter like manna from heaven […] the ground covered with white cloth.”[[40]](#footnote-40) The stark contrast between this cold snowy country and Iraq highlights the protagonists’ longings and feelings of alienation. Seasons, in addition to the general climate, also play a role in expressing longing. Thābit tells his son that this is the season of the aromatic green lemon in Iraq, referencing seasonal food and games he used to play with his friends in an attempt to jog the boy’s memory.[[41]](#footnote-41)

While Baghdad and its warmth are correlated mainly with the relationship between the son and his mother when he was healthy,[[42]](#footnote-42) the child spends his recovery time in cold Moscow with his father. Hence, the distinction between the climate in both cities is emphasized through the relationship between the child and each of his parents. Although the relations between the son and both his parents are depicted as normative, the backdrop of the accident cloaks their stay in Moscow in darkness. The climate here is linked with family ties, and memories of Baghdad are often evoked by the warmth the child used to feel from his mother. In Farmān’s novel, a constant question mark hovers over the child’s health, in a way that casts doubt over the very existence of his memory of the homeland and whether he will ever return to it.

Displacement due to political reasons is connected to the climate as well; Thābit tells his son that some years before, he left Baghdad in the summer for political reasons. He arrived in Germany in his summer clothes, in a cold and rainy autumn, which to him felt like winter. His shoes were torn, and he felt as if all of Europe’s rain was under his feet, as if all its mud was getting between his toes. When his feet were warm again, he felt like he was in one of Baghdad’s huge *hammams*.[[43]](#footnote-43) Europe here is identified with a cold and severe climate, while Baghdad is remembered for its pleasant *hammam*s. The climate here, once again, is recruited to emphasize longing.

Farmān also skillfully draws a connection between the climate and gender issues; for example, when Yahyā thinks of the woman he wants to meet, the climate is described as portending a refreshing rain about to fall, in spite of the fact that the day was “grey and choking.”[[44]](#footnote-44) But the rain looks deserted and displaced, reflecting Yahyā's own feelings.[[45]](#footnote-45) Climate as a means for depicting gender issues is also expressed through the minor character of Rasmiyya, ʿAlwān’s wife, who comes to Moscow for a visit. She experiences Moscow through its climate and is impressed by the effect the climate has on peoples’ clothing choices. The fact that women walk the streets in short skirts, high above their knees, and with their arms exposed in Russia in the summer is considered unremarkable by the locals. The way Rasmiyya views Moscow correlates with her being an outsider, since “the exotic and the picturesque – appeals only to the outsider,” in the words of the German-Jewish philosopher Walter Benjamin (1892–1940), in his discussion of the different ways in which city dwellers and visitors describe it.[[46]](#footnote-46) For Rasmiyya, Moscow did not restrict women’s fashion the way Baghdad did. This again raises the presumption posed by Lukács regarding the influence of the environment and the surroundings on the characters,[[47]](#footnote-47) which we extend further in this essay to the influence of the climate. We see not only that the climate affects the characters’ behavior, but that the characters’ backgrounds, education, and culture also affect their perception of the climate. Lukács concentrates on male writers in his essay; hence, in the matter of gender, the novel is more enlightening than is Lukács, as we can see in it that the environment affects men and women differently.

When Rasmiyya wears short sleeves like ʿAlwān’s Russian women friends do, he castigates her. Additionally, when she walks in the streets of Moscow wearing short sleeves and smiles to unfamiliar men, ʿAlwān becomes angry, since, in his opinion, a woman’s true purpose in life is to serve her husband, especially when her husband is a man with a mission (*risala*), like him. However, Rasmiyya sees herself as his equal and mocks his fake liberalism. He woos other women but calls his own wife “whore” when she becomes interested in another man, leading each to believe that the other is shaming Iraq’s reputation.[[48]](#footnote-48) On Barak, in his essay on the connections between changing climate zones as a consequence of migration and the dress code, argues that heat not only incites people, but intensifies existing gender and class disparities.[[49]](#footnote-49) In the same manner, the climate in the novel reflects the characters’ viewpoints on proper relations between the sexes; in the summer in Russia, Rasmiyya allows herself to dress as she wishes, in contrast to summer in Iraq, where she is expected to dress more conservatively. The climate and its implications on the dress code is thus an indicator of gender perceptions regarding women’s rights and the associated social customs which accompany the exilic experience in the novel. In her study on the urban novel, Hana Wirth-Nesher states that “the weather can take on cultural features”;[[50]](#footnote-50) in Farmān's novel, the climate indeed plays a role through the presentation of its effects on people’s clothing, behavior and mindset, and also reflects their perception of chastity and self-expression. Yaḥyā, for example, notices that some young men in Moscow have long hair, like women,[[51]](#footnote-51) which for him is an unfamiliar sight. The differences between societal conventions in the city of origin and in Moscow as depicted through the eyes of visitors differ from how they are described by exiles who have lived in the city for months or years, as explained by Wirth-Nesher and Benjamin. Therefore, when Jamīla, Ṣāliḥ’s sister, visiting him from Baghdad, is shocked by the mere suggestion that she go to a restaurant in the company of men, she exclaims:” My goodness! Will I go to the restaurant with men?” and Ṣāliḥ answers: “And you will also see women… this is not Baghdad.[[52]](#footnote-52) The cultural differences between the two countries are apparent also when Ṣāliḥ tells Jamīla to stare at men, just as they stare at her, making Jamīla think that there must be something wrong with her brother.[[53]](#footnote-53)

Rasmiyya is captivated by Moscow and the freedom it offers women (as manifested through another comparison with Baghdad), She feels that in Moscow, the free city, men treat women with respect, while in Baghdad, they covet women with their eyes and undress them in their minds. She feels the “breeze of freedom” on her body while walking unaccompanied and self-confidently in the streets, trying to rid herself of the remnants of Baghdad's sandy dust.[[54]](#footnote-54) This description of Rasmiyya in Moscow strengthens the traditional convention of dust as an element that distinguishes Eastern from European cities.[[55]](#footnote-55) Male characters, then, do not perceive Moscow as a positive place, while women like Rasmiyya gradually come to see Moscow as a space in which they can express themselves freely, a colorful city, unlike the drab city of Baghdad with its brown sandstorms.[[56]](#footnote-56)

While mentioning all the good Moscow has to offer its visitors and residents, including exiles, it may strike one as odd that Farmān touts Moscow as a haven and neglects to mention the shortcomings of the Soviet regime, such as the purported emancipation of women, which was not always genuine, but more of a façade. But the circumstances under which he left his homeland should be considered. In Iraq, Farmān suffered at the heavy hand of the Iraqi regime and was even imprisoned due to his Communist sympathies. Furthermore, while in Iraq, he suffered from bad health and needed medical treatment that he was able to receive in the USSR for free.[[57]](#footnote-57) Thus his “neglect” of the failings of Communism in general is quite understandable.

The climate in the current novel is used not only as a device to show the difference in self-expression between ʿAlwān and Rasmiyya, but also as a means for Thābit to remind his son of his past, and to prevent him from returning to Iraq before he recovers. Thābit convinces his son that the Iraqi summer is too hot and that it would be better to return to Baghdad in the more pleasant autumn.[[58]](#footnote-58) The climate is used here both to revive memories of Iraq as preparation for return and as a reason to stay in Russia in the meantime.

Landscapes in general play a significant role in Farmān’s depictions of exile. Nādiya, Yahyā’s ex-wife, is apparently from a non-Arab country, and when she arrives for a visit, she praises her country and its beautiful landscape. Thābit tells his son about Nādiya as a part of his effort to revive his son’s memory, and compares her native country to their own homeland, trying to convince the child that everyone is happy with what they have, quoting the Quranic verse “each party rejoices in that which is with itself.”[[59]](#footnote-59) He continues: “and we as well, the sons of the desert, praise its nature […] this is patriotism and it is a person’s noble feeling.”[[60]](#footnote-60)

Ecology, in the form of the Iraqi desert and its blazing sun, plays a crucial role in this novel’s characterization of political predicaments. The reader learns that Thābit Husayn is a former political prisoner who was transferred from Baghdad to Samāwa in 1963 on “the death train” (*qitar al-mawt*), a reference to an actual event which took place on July 7, 1963, as an act of retaliation against members and activists of the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP).[[61]](#footnote-61) It was a time in which any force that could have posed a threat to the regime was brutally crushed.[[62]](#footnote-62) Communist prisoners were transported in cattle wagons of a cargo train, which was deliberately ordered to proceed very slowly in the blazing heat of July, thus ensuring that many of the prisoners would die before reaching the Samāwa prison. At a certain point, the train driver understood that the “cargo” was human beings and increased the train’s speed in order to arrive sooner. When they arrived at Samāwa, he called for help, and the city’s residents supplied the prisoners with water and food and saved some of them from certain death,[[63]](#footnote-63) although these prisoners were still tortured later in prison.[[64]](#footnote-64) While trying to help his son regain his memory, the father tells him about this horrific event, and recounts that thoughts of the boy was the only consolation the father had in that terrible time. The father relays the details of the “death train” as he remembers it. He has no qualms about telling the son how terrible this was, ending with the words: “you were born in one of the most horrible years,”[[65]](#footnote-65) a statement confirmed by ‛Azīz al-Hājj's memoirs, in which he depicts the sadistic torture and killing of hundreds of Communists immediately after the fall of ‛Abd al-Karīm Qāsim in February 1963.[[66]](#footnote-66)

According to Sluglett and Sluglett, earlier in that year, the Communists had not taken any preventive measures despite being aware of a potential coup to take over the country and possibly target them.[[67]](#footnote-67) According to Tareq Y. Ismael, not only was the ICP aware of an upcoming coup, but was also warned of it.[[68]](#footnote-68) After the Ba'thist coup took place that year, many of these dissidents were arrested, tortured, and killed, men and women alike, and “the scale on which the killings and arrests took place in the spring and summer of 1963 indicates a closely coordinated campaign” which “severely weakened the ICP.”[[69]](#footnote-69) This was a “reign of murder, torture and terror,”[[70]](#footnote-70) or in Charles Tripp’s words, “the savage anti-communist campaign of 1963.”[[71]](#footnote-71) The sun in this scene of *qitar al-mawt* is a prominent component of the suffering inflicted on the prisoners, since the wagons were made of iron, which heated up in the Iraqi desert sun in July. The sun, and the train running underneath it, become participants in political torture, as the train began its journey at eleven in the morning,[[72]](#footnote-72) when the intensity of the sun’s heat began to be felt.

Thus, the climate influences the characters’ lives and fates. Thābit tells Hassān that air was more precious than food and drinking water in the locked and stifling cargo wagons in which the prisoners were piled like sacks, and that the elderly prisoners were carried by others to the cracks in the wagons’ walls so that they could breathe.[[73]](#footnote-73) On the one hand, the different ways in which the prisoners were tied to each other indicate that everything was rushed, but on the other hand, the fact that the guards who were posted between the wagons wore civilian clothes to deceive the onlookers[[74]](#footnote-74) shows that it was organized and premeditated. Farmān, through the words of the father, cynically compares the compassionate train driver (who saved the prisoners’ lives by driving faster) with Iraq’s leaders (who wanted the people to see them as “drivers of the train of the nation and the homeland,” while in reality, “they drive the [nation’s] train into hell and destruction”).[[75]](#footnote-75)

The prisoners were in constant danger in both prisons – near Baghdad and in Samāwa – but on the train, their lives were at even greater risk. Although they received water at their destination, they remained in mortal danger throughout the journey. The desert, as a distinct space with a distinct ecology, is associated in Farmān’s work with politics, that is, the lives of political prisoners, and with language, as the story is told to the injured Hassān as a part of his father’s attempts to revive his memory. Farmān here goes beyond the horrific depictions that we as readers are accustomed to in such novels. He combines the fictional story of the injured son with a real historical event. Together with depictions of how the ecological elements frame the event, Farmān sheds light on a dark chapter in Iraq’s past that is often neglected by history books. Farmān’s narrative acquaints us with a unique point of view – that of the prisoners – a view which is mostly lacking in existing literature. With that, Farmān enriches the body of knowledge about this event, as the details he provides are mostly factual and accurate, based on the few historical accounts that do exist.

The state’s attitude towards its Communist opponents and the sophisticated methods it used to bring about their deaths are not new, but here, Farmān sticks to the facts as much as possible. Through his novels, he actually supplies us with stark documentation that, to the best of our knowledge, has not been artistically depicted before, and therefore stands out as a particularly salient contribution to our understanding of that dark chapter. Hamdan and Lukács did not discuss severe events of this kind, and Adorno referred to the feeling of mutilation as characterizing life in exile, not in the homeland as depicted by Farmān. Hence, Farmān transcends their theories and transforms these horrifying experiences into word. Farmān actually takes Adorno’s words on exile to reflect on being a stranger and persecuted inside one’s own homeland. In addition to Farmān’s daring treatment of volatile topics, be it the relations between men and women, or a critique of religion and authority on which he wrote,[[76]](#footnote-76) here, he once again dares to talk about the indescribable and the inhumane. The climate is a tool used by Farmān to depict both life in exile and life inside Iraq at a time of political harassment.

**The Temporal: Waiting and postponing**

When speaking of this novel, Farmān explained that its aim was to raise awareness about exile and émigrés.[[77]](#footnote-77) Moscow is depicted as a temporary place of residence, a purgatory in which the characters stay until they can return home. For some characters, it is a place for treating their health problems, for others, a place to earn a living. According to Farmān, waiting is unique not only to the families of the exiled, waiting for them at home,[[78]](#footnote-78) or to those wishing to return to their homeland, but each and every character has its own waiting to do, as “all of us are postponed plans.”[[79]](#footnote-79) Thābit Husayn waits for his son to recover after four months in Russia and eight months of hospitalization;[[80]](#footnote-80) Yahyā Salīm is waiting for his son to call him “father”; Nādiya, Yahyā’s ex-wife arrives for a visit and tells him to wait for her and their son at the train station, which here serves to demonstrate (im)patience, lingering, and waiting.[[81]](#footnote-81) For Yaḥyā, the crowds in the train station and the metro station, both places of waiting, resemble the day of resurrection or a sea of people, all waiting, like him.[[82]](#footnote-82) The train arrives eventually, but its progress is slow and indifferent, and it makes numerous stops on the way to its destination.[[83]](#footnote-83) Even Nādiya’s stay at his home is described as a mere station, from which she will continue with their child, and not as a permanent place of residence.[[84]](#footnote-84) The text, then, presents a constant conflict between memories of the past and a desire for the future, and the forced delay which prevents people from accomplishing their goals. This is consistent with how Hamdan views art, in contrast to both myth and science, as a means of reflecting the spirit of time and place.[[85]](#footnote-85)

The postponed return to home, to an appointment, and to a homeland, is represented not only in similes and metaphors such as the train station, but also directly. Thābit feels that he has not accomplished any of his plans.[[86]](#footnote-86) We know that in his book on Farmān, ʿAlī Ibrāhīm compares the son’s vague memories to the vague identification of the city, finding points of correlation between the two. Hence, we can assume that the son and his “lost” memory have multi-faceted significance. Thābit’s son’s recovery, for example, might be a metaphor for the attempt to rebuild the memory of the homeland,[[87]](#footnote-87) while the postponing of his operation alludes to plans that remain unimplemented.[[88]](#footnote-88) Although the plans of the exiled friends are constantly postponed, Yahyā believes that life should be lived and not waited for or philosophized about, since waiting is a waste of time. In response, Thābit says that he opposes making long-term plans outside the homeland. When Yahyā shouts that no one knows where they will die, in a paraphrase on the Quranic verse from Surat Luqmān: “nor does anyone know in what land he is to die,” Thābit responds that if the soul could choose where to die, it would choose the homeland.[[89]](#footnote-89)

In contrast to the Quranic verse about the omnipotence of Allah who is the only one who knows the destiny of every soul and the time of one’s death, the argument in the novel is based on different views regarding being away from the homeland. Thābit is anxious to return home, while Yahyā believes that the matter is out of his hands. The disagreement reflects the difference between those who have someone waiting for them in the homeland, like Thābit, and those who do not, like Yahyā, who feels in no rush to return to Iraq. Yahyā even gives an example of a man who had no one to go back to, and hence preferred to be buried in exile, rather than to force his friends to transfer his body to Iraq.[[90]](#footnote-90) The paraphrase on the Quranic verse is thus used here to express the characters’ attitudes toward life and death on foreign soil.

The characters call themselves “the generation of the waiting people” (*jil al-muntaẓirin*), because waiting is such a prominent component of their lives, or at least a monotonous aspect of life.[[91]](#footnote-91) Life in exile appears to Yahyā to consist of nothing but waiting for something to happen (although we do not know what); it does not evolve.[[92]](#footnote-92) It appears that this waiting has a political dimension as well; the Ba'ath regime promised to bring about change,[[93]](#footnote-93) but in the novel, the characters are still waiting for that change.

The word for “waiting” in Arabic (*intiẓār*) also means “expectation,” thus adding an element of tension to the situation of the characters, who are both waiting and expecting, whether it is for the son’s recovery, or any other social, personal, or political development. This constant waiting does occasionally evoke a sense of futility and hopelessness. For some characters, waiting is the essence of their stay abroad. Even when someone does plan to return to Iraq, friends are not certain that it will actually happen, since the person in question has postponed the return to Baghdad time and time again. Postponing one’s return home becomes such a part of the exile’s life that friends even joke about it. The yearned for (*al-murtaja*) and the postponed (*al-muʾajjal*) are intertwined, and while the homeland is described as yearned for, it is also depicted as harsh and uncaring towards its citizens.[[94]](#footnote-94)

Throughout the novel, the characters shift between periods of movement and action and periods of stasis. The ability to move is indisputably a precondition for the sick boy Hassān returning to Iraq. When he arrived to Moscow, he was incapable of carrying out even the simplest actions; in addition to the attempts to revive his memory, he also underwent surgical procedures to enable his body able to function again. The longer he remained in the hospital, the more active he became; and the more active he became, the closer came the time for returning to the homeland.

Unlike Hassān, Yahyā the translator moves less the longer his exile lasts, since moving from country to country in the early days of his exile did not improve his life.[[95]](#footnote-95) The dictionaries that he uses remind him of death,[[96]](#footnote-96) and he cannot bring himself to be more active. At one point, he is so fed up with being cooped up in one room all day, that he feels he is suffocating and will die if he does not get up from his chair at once.[[97]](#footnote-97) Traveling makes Yahyā tired, in contrast to his date, who thinks that “travel is what matters.” Yahyā is so passive that his companion’s fast steps scare him, and although the two of them walk side by side, he experiences a deadly loneliness; the woman seems to him to be as far away as if she were in the Saudi desert of al-Rubʿ al-Khālī.[[98]](#footnote-98)

Life in the novel is associated with movement, as opposed to death, which is stagnant.[[99]](#footnote-99) As long as the injured son suffers from memory loss (that is the loss of his childhood in Iraq), he is depicted in images of death; to the doctor who holds his hands, Hassān’s fingers seem dead, and his hand looks like a dead bird.[[100]](#footnote-100)

**Conclusion**

One of Mas‛ud Hamdan’s conclusions in his discussion of the relations between texts, theory, and interpretation, is that in contrast to myth and science, literature tends to unite binary oppositions that are more present in the former two. According to him, the spirit and atmosphere of a literary work can convey multi-faceted cultural messages. In the same manner, Farmān’s *al-Murtajā wa-l-muʾajjal* presents a complex picture of life in exile, and also of life in the homeland, via two intertwined themes: the ecology – climate and time – and the state of waiting. Exile enhances the feeling of alienation, and climate affects culture, behavior, and customs. Both are accompanied by a state of postponement and waiting, sometimes in vain. The ways in which the characters view their place of exile, Moscow in this case, is deeply influenced by the circumstances of their exiles, as well as by their perceptions of their homelands. The memory reconstructed in this novel is not only the child’s, but also all the characters’ memories of their places of birth, real or imagined.

The ecological dimension enables Farmān to explain the temporal dimension of exile, which sometimes lasts for the entirety of the exiles’ lives. The climate is not limited to one specific character, but as is Farmān’s custom, is attached to a variety of exiles, in an attempt to portray exile as a holistic experience, and not as a simplistic one-sided situation. The climate influences the characters, as proposed by Lukács, but at the same time, the climate is also described in a way which is influenced by the background of the very same characters, in a mutual interaction. Being in exile is accompanied by symptoms of illness and mutilation, as suggested by Adorno.

Through the prism of these theories, this paper analyzed Farmān’s skillful use of the ecological landscape, and demonstrated how his novel not only contributes to these theories, but is also of documentary value, depicting dark times in modern Iraqi political history, such as the scene of the “death train” in which he shows how the heat of the desert was a tool the regime used to crush its opponents. Farmān’s writing calls upon us to focus more on the writing of landscapes, as landscapes represent far more than just a set on which events take place. The ecological dimension motivates, accelerates, forms, and symbolizes the events. The abiotic components represent real events caused or experienced by humans. Hence, ecocritically deciphering them illuminates the author’s socio-political messages.

As such, an ecocritical analysis of the climate in the novel contributes to both migration studies and environmental studies, expanding our knowledge of the life experience of exiles, the meaning of longing, and unfulfilled hopes to return home. This is especially true of Farmān’s characters, who almost never return to their homeland, and their plans to return home are perpetually postponed, as the title of the novel suggests, making this novel of 1986 indicative of the period of emigration that was about to unfold.

**About the author:**

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She is the author of The Prose Works of Gha’ib Tu’ma Farman – The City and the Beast (Lexington Books, 2018) and has published peer-reviewed articles in the Journal of Arabic Literature, the Journal of Semitic Studies, Middle Eastern Studies, Die Welt des Islams, Oriente Moderno, and Kurdish Studies. She has also contributed a chapter to the book State and Society in Iraq: Citizenship under Occupation, Dictatorship and Democratisation (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017).

1. \*All translations are the author’s unless noted otherwise.

 Farmān wrote eight novels and two collections of short stories. He also contributed to collections and wrote critical works such as *al-Hukm al-aswad fī al-Irāq* (*The Dark Regime in Iraq*. Cairo: Dār al-fikr, 1957), and numerous newspaper and journal articles, and translated novels from Russian into Arabic. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For a detailed and comprehensive description of Farmān’s cultural and political milieu while still in Baghdad, see: Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); on Farmān’s life and writings see: Fabio Caiani and Catherine Cobham, *The Iraqi Novel: Key Writers, Key Texts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp. 73–138; Muhsin al-Musawi, *Reading Iraq: Culture and Power in Conflict* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2006), p. 15; Hilla Peled-Shapira, *The Prose Works of Ghaʾib Ṭuʿma Farmān: The City and the Beast* (Lanham: Lexington, 2018); Yameen Hanoosh, “Contempt, State Literati vs. Street Literati in Modern Iraq,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 43 (2012), p. 382; Zouhair Shlaiba, *Ghāʾib Ṭuʿma Farmān: Dirāsa muqārina fī al-riwāya al-ʿIrāqiyya* (*Ghāʾib Ṭuʿma Farmān: A Comparative Study of the Iraqi Novel*, Beirut: Dār al-kunūz al-adabiyya, 1996); Khālid al-Miṣrī, *Ghāʾib Ṭuʿma Farmān: harakat al-mujtamaʿ wa-tahawwulāt al-naṣṣ* (*Ghāʾib Ṭuʿma Farmān:* *Society’s Transformation and the Changing of the Text*, Damascus: al-Madā, 1997); Aḥmad al-Nuʿmān, ed., *Ghāʾib Ṭuʿma Farmān: adab al-manfā wa-l-hanīn ilā al-watan* (*Ghāʾib Ṭuʿma Farmān: Exile Literature and the Longing for the Homeland*, Damascus: al-Madā, 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Georg Lukács, “Longing and Form” in: idem, *Soul and Form* (translated by Anna Bostock) (London: Merlin Press, 1974), pp. 91–106, esp. pp. 91–92. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid., p. 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Mas‘ud Hamdan, *Text Theory Interpretation: Theories and Texts as Psycho-Cultural Prisms* (Jerusalem: Magness, 2009), pp. 8–9, 38, 171–172 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Nico Israel, *Outlandish: Writing between Exile and Diaspora* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Orit Bashkin, “‘Out of Place’: Home and Empire in the Works of Mahmud Ahmad al-Sayyid and Dhu Nun Ayyub,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 28:3 (2008), pp. 428–442. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Meliz Ergin, *The Ecopoetics of Entanglement in Contemporary Turkish and American Literatures* (Los Angeles: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), p. 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Farmān, *al-Murtajā wa-l-muʾajjal*, (Beirut: Manshūrāt Bābil wa-Dār al-Fārābī, 1986), pp. 78–79. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid., p. 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Yosef Ewen, *Character in Narrative* (Tel Aviv: Kibutz Artzi, 1993), pp. 92–93 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Al-Tayyib Ṣāliḥ, *Mawsim al-hijra ilā al-shamāl* (*Season of Migration to the North*. Beirut: Dar al-'Awda, 1969). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Birtā Khalīl al-Nabr, *al-'Unf fī al-qissa al-'Arabiyya al-hadītha* (*Violence in the Modern Arabic Story*. n.p: no publisher indicated, 1991), pp. 105–130, esp. p. 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. ‛Abd al-Mālik Nūrī, “Rīḥ al-janūb” in idem., *Nashīd al-arḍ* (Baghdad: Dar al-shuʾūn al-thaqāfiyya al-‛āmma, 1954), pp. 69–83. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. According to: ‘Alī Ibrāhīm, *al-Zamān wa-l-makān fī riwāyāt Ghāʾib Ṭuʿma Farmān* (*Time and Place in the Novels of Ghāʾib Ṭuʿma Farmān*, Damascus: al-Ahali, 2002), pp. 154–155. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Farmān, *al-Murtajā wa-l-muʾajjal*, p. 7. A perspective on the various backgrounds of the characters’ exile is to be found also in: Ibid., p. 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Israel, *Outlandish*, p. 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Farmān, *al-Murtajā wa-l-muʾajjal*, pp. 108, 110, 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Hamdan, *Text Theory Interpretation*, p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. The sun has long been a symbol of Iraq and even appeared on its flag during the Qāsim regime (1958–1963). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Munīf, *al-Kātib wa-l-manfā: humūm wa-āfāq al-riwāya al-'Arabiyya* (*The Writer and Exile: Intentions and Horizons of the Arabic Novel*.Beirut: Dār al-fikr al-jadīd, 1992), p. 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Munīf, *al-Kātib wa-l-manfā*, pp. 106–119, esp. p. 106. This was first published in the journal *al-Badīl* in Damascus in 1991, and then again in al-Nuʿmān, ed., *Ghāʾib Ṭuʿma Farmān*, pp. 192–202. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Munīf, *al-Kātib wa-l-manfā*, pp. 107–109. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid., p. 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. In Farmān’s works, Iraq is generally associated with a hot climate and the desert, despite having more than one climate zone. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Farmān, *al-Murtajā wa-l-muʾajjal*, p. 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Almog Behar, “Upon the Passing away of Prof. Sasson Somekh: Arabic Works in the First Hebrew City,” *Haaretz*, Aug. 19, 2019 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Farmān, *al-Murtajā wa-l-muʾajjal*, pp. 8, 76, 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. The father met the physician Prof. Kozin in Baghdad, when the latter visited Iraq as part of a medical delegation from Russia. However, the son was transferred from an Iraqi hospital to one in Russia. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Farmān, *al-Murtajā wa-l-muʾajjal*, p. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Ibid., p. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Ibid., p. 15. See also: “This is your life and you cannot forget it,” Ibid., 28; “what do people have but their memories, which they retrieve in a state of a dream or longing,” Ibid., p. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Ibid., p. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Ibid., p. 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Ibid., p. 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Ibid. For Farmān in exile, the sun, associated with the desert, is a visitor from another world. Munīf, *al-Kātib wa-l-manfā*, p. 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Farmān, *al-Murtajā wa-l-muʾajjal*, p. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Ibid., pp. 52, 60, 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Ibid., p. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Ibid., pp. 63–64. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Ibid., pp. 95–96. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Ibid., p. 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Walter Benjamin, “The Return of the *Flaneur”* in: *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, eds.,M. W. Jennings, H. Eiland and G. Smith (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 1:2, pp. 262–267. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Georg Lukács, “Longing and Form,” pp. 91–106, esp. pp. 91–92. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Farmān, *al-Murtajā wa-l-muʾajjal*, pp. 122–123, 125, 126–127. When ʿAlwān sees his wife with the other man, he tells her that a proper Arab response would have been for him to kill them both. Ibid., p. 127; An analysis of this scene as an intergender struggle can be found in: al-Miṣrī, *Ghāʾib Ṭuʿma Farmān*, pp. 103–105. Al-Miṣrī sees Rasmiyya’s rebellion as a partial fulfilment of her rights, and views. ʿAlwān’s response to her actions as hypocrisy; he, despite being an intellectual holds old-fashioned views regarding women. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. On Barak, “Shorts Came to Palestine with the Pioneer Women, and Immediately Caused a Flap,” *Haaretz*, June 2, 2020 (https://www.haaretz.co.il/blogs/sadna/BLOG-1.8879078) (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Hana Wirth-Nesher, *City Codes: Reading the Modern Urban Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Farmān, *al-Murtajā wa-l-muʾajjal*, p. 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Ibid., p. 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Ibid., p. 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Ibid., p. 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. On Barak, “The World in a Mote of Dust,” Sept. 15, 2017, https://www.haaretz.co.il/blogs/sadna/BLOG-1.2733433 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. See the city from the men’s perspective: Farmān, *al-Murtajā wa-l-muʾajjal*, p. 17 versus the city from the women’s perspective: Ibid., p. 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Peled-Shapira, *The Prose Works of Ghaʾib Ṭuʿma Farmān*, pp. 1–3. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Farmān, *al-Murtajā wa-l-muʾajjal*, pp. 87, 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. *Al-Quran*, 23:53 (*The Qur*'*an*, translated by ʿAbdullāh Yūsuf ʿAlī, New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, Inc., 2005). Quoted in: Farmān, *al-Murtajā wa-l-muʾajjal*, p. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Farmān, *al-Murtajā wa-l-muʾajjal*, p. 17. See the phrase *ʾabnāʾ al-ṣaḥrāʾ* also in: Ibid., p. 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. In addition to supporters of 'Abd al-Karīm Qāsim and civilians. ‛Alī Karīm Sa‛īd, *'Irāq 8 Shubbāt 1963: min hiwār al-mafāhīm ilā hiwār al-dam, murāja'āt fī dhākirat Tālib Shibib* (*Iraq of 8th February 1963: From the Dialogue of Conceptions to the Dialogue of Blood, Reviews in Talib Ash-Shibib’s Memory* Beirut: Dar al-kunūz al-adabiyya, 1999), p. 302 (n. 1). [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), p. 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. According to Sa‛īd’s account, one man died during the journey. Sa‛īd, *'Irāq 8 Shubbāt 1963*, p. 303 (n. 1). The people of Samāwa’s compassionate help was called by Hamdi Ayyub, one of the prisoners, “intifaḍat al-Samāwa al-samita” (the quiet *intifaḍa* of al-Samāwa). Ibid; for more details on the circumstances that preceded the event of *qitar al-mawt*, see: Tareq Y. Ismael, *The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 109–113; Hanna Batatu does not mention *qitar al-mawt* in his book, but briefly notes one of the events that preceded it, “the Communist rising at ar-Rashīd Camp on July 3.” Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 1019. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. In his memoirs, Tālib Shibib (the Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1963) claims that he knew little about *qitar al-mawt*, adding that he did not know if any of the prisoners died while on the train from where they were incarcerated in the al-Rashīd Camp on their way to Nuqrat Salmān prison near the city of al-Samāwa, nor had he heard anything about it at the time. Shibib attests that he was among those who objected to the decision to send the Communist officers on the train, a decision that was made in a spirit of vengeance. He adds that theprisoners were to be executed in Nuqrat Salmān, and he and his colleagues succeeded in convincing Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Bakr to cancel the decision. Sa‛īd, *'Irāq 8 Shubbāt* 1963, 302–306. In the novel, Farmān talks about 1500 prisoners who were on the train (Farmān, *al-Murtajā wa-l-muʾajjal*, p. 79), while Shibib mentions thirty (Sa‛īd, *'Irāq 8 Shubbāt* 1963, p. 304). There are different accounts regarding the number of officers sentenced to death on this occasion, ranging between 12 and 450. Sa‛īd, *'Irāq 8 Shubbāt 1963*, p. 304 (n. 1). [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Farmān, *al-Murtajā wa-l-muʾajjal*, pp. 78–79. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. ‛Azīz al-Hājj, *Dhākirat al-nakhīl: safahāt min Tārīkh al-haraka al-shuyū‛iyya fī al-'Irāq* (*Memory of the Palm Tree: Pages in the History of the Communist Movement in Iraq.* Beirut: al-Muʾassasa al-‛Arabiyya li-l-dirasāt wa-l-nashr, 1993), pp. 65, 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2001), pp. 86, 104–105, 219. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Ismael, *The Rise and Fall*, p. 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq since 1958*, Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Ibid., pp. 227–228. See also the July 1963 events in: Johan Franzén, *Red Star over Iraq: Iraqi Communism before Saddam* (London: Hurst and Company, 2011), p. 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 174; Shamrān al-Ajlī describes the attitude of the Ba'th Party towards the Communists in 1963 concisely as “harshness” (*qaswa*): Shamrān al-'Ajlī, *al-Kharīta al-siyāsiyya li-l-mu‛āraḍa al-'Irāqiyya* (*The Political Map of the Iraqi Opposition*. London: Dar al-hikma, 2000), p. 287; Fāḍil al-‛Azzāwī calls this attitude toward the Communists in 1963 “crimes” (jarsa'im). Fāḍil al-‛Azzāwī, *al-Rūḥ al-ḥayya: jīl al-sittināt fī al-'Irāq* (*The Vital Spirit: The 60th Generation in Iraq*. Damascus: al-Mada, 1997), pp. 47, 146, 244.

‛Azīz al-Hājj refutes the claim that the anti-Communist measures were not planned in advanced, and that the primary intention was only to exile a few dozen Communist leaders. Al-Hajj says in response that destroying the Communists was the Ba'th party’s primary aim. ‛Azīz al-Hājj, *Ma‛a al-a‛wām: safaḥāt min Tārīkh al-haraka al-shuyū'iyya fī al-'Irāq* *bayna 1958-1967* (*With the Years:* *Pages in the History of the Communist Movement in Iraq between 1958-1967*. Beirut: al-Muʾassasa al-‛Arabiyya li-l-dirasāt wa-l-nashr, 1994), p. 158. Al-Hājj adds that torture was used not only for extracting information from Communist prisoners, but also as a tool for exacting revenge and killing; some of the Communists who had been sentenced to death were tortured to death. Many were also buried in mass graves outside of Baghdad, and their families searched for their remains to no avail. Ibid., p. 160; Samir al-Khalil notes that although the official number of Communists executed during the 1963 persecution by the Ba'th regime was 149, the number of those who “unofficially” died was in the hundreds. Samir al-Khalil, *Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), p. 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Sa‛īd, *'Irāq 8 Shubbāt 1963*, p. 302 (n. 1). [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Farmān, *al-Murtajā wa-l-muʾajjal*, p. 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Sa‛īd, *'Irāq 8 Shubbāt 1963*, p. 302 (n. 1). [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Farmān, *al-Murtajā wa-l-muʾajjal*, p. 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Peled-Shapira, *The Prose Works of Ghaʾib Ṭuʿma Farmān*, pp. 71–88. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Al-Miṣrī, *Ghāʾib Ṭuʿma Farmān*, p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. As seen in Ṣāliḥ’s words to his sister about their family in Iraq: “Let them wait.” Farmān, *al-Murtajā wa-l-muʾajjal*, p. 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Ibid., p. 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Ibid., p. 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Ibid., p. 10–11. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Ibid., pp. 11–12. Metaphors related to water and the sea recur in Farmān’s novel; see, for example, Yaḥyā’s memories of a vacation with Nādiya: “the numerous waves of people.” Ibid., p. 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Ibid., pp. 12, 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Ibid., p. 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Hamdan, *Text Theory Interpretation*, p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Farmān, *al-Murtajā wa-l-muʾajjal*, p. 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Ibrāhīm, *al-Zamān wa-l-makān fī riwāyāt Ghāʾib Ṭuʿma Farmān*, pp. 138–142 [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Farmān, *al-Murtajā wa-l-muʾajjal*, p. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. *Al-Quran*, 31:34; Farmān, *al-Murtajā wa-l-muʾajjal*, p. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Farmān, *al-Murtajā wa-l-muʾajjal*, Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Ibid., p. 45. See the detailed conversations on how each of the characters experiences waiting and expectation: Ibid., pp. 45–47. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Ibid., p. 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. On the Ba'ath movement as the embodiment of the idea and message of renaissance see: Orit Bashkin, “Looking forward to the Past: Nahda, Revolution, and the Early Ba'ath in Iraq” in: *Other Renaissances: A New Approach to World Literature*, eds., B. Deen Schildgen, G. Zhou and S. L. Gilman (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 59–86; idem., *The Other Iraq*, pp. 147–148. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Farmān, *al-Murtajā wa-l-muʾajjal*, p. 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Ibid., p. 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Ibid., p. 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Ibid., p. 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Ibid., p. 97–99. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Ibid., p. 18–19. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Ibid., pp. 23–24. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)