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Role of Memory in Contemporary Iraqi Diasporic Poetry

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Abstract

The post- monarchy era in Iraq (1958-) has been turbulent and traumatic for the Iraqi intellectuals because of the successive repressive and authoritarian regimes, decades of wars, UN sanctions, American invasion of Iraq in 2003, and horrors of the civil war (2005-2008). Consequently, some of them have sought exile worldwide.

The aim of this paper is to highlight the role of memory in the diasporic poetry of the two Iraqi poets, Saadi Youssef and Dunya Mikhail, who were forced to leave Iraq because of their political views and activities.

Personal and collective memory in their diasporic poetry does not function only as a passive repository or nostalgic recollection of the past; it acts as a form of ethical witness, political and aesthetic site of resistance and identity formation, where the fragmenting forces of dislocation, displacement foreignness, and homelessness of exile are countered by the reconstitution of personal and cultural history through traumatic and violent recollection.

Memory, therefore, helps Youssef and Mikhail to heal the wounds of their diasporic experience through engagement in a continuous dialogue with Iraq's tumultuous present. It poses urgent questions of nationalism, the destruction of Iraqi social fabric, and offering at the same time space for alternative future hopes.

Keywords: Diaspora, Memory, Saadi Youssef, Dunya Mikhail, Without an Alphabet, The War Works Hard