



## **Cultural Voices of a Fragmented Nation: War, Trauma and Remembrance in Contemporary Iraq**

**International Symposium  
Marburg, December 11-13, 2008**

in cooperation with

Europe in the Middle East - The Middle East in Europe (EUME),  
a research program of the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, the  
Fritz Thyssen Stiftung and the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin,  
and the Center for Near and Middle Eastern Studies, Philipps-Universität Marburg  
(CNMS)

The images and news reaching us ever since the invasion and occupation of Iraq generally represent a simplified or reductionist take on the highly complex political, cultural and social situation in that country. But even if the past few decades have been marked by revolution, political violence and dictatorship, one should not forget that Baghdad, the birthplace of modern Arabic poetry, has been a major and vibrant center of dynamic cultural developments ever since the 1950s.

Due to the dramatic events that have shaken Iraq over the past half century, the country's literati have been forced to work under problematic conditions or even go into exile—a worldwide Iraqi Diaspora being the consequence. For several decades the Iraqi cultural scene was driven by the ideological gap that existed between those who stayed and those who emigrated; since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003 it has been replaced by other antagonisms and dividing lines.

The aim of this symposium is to critically re-examine the complex networks and discourses of the diverse intellectual and literary positions within the country itself and in its manifold places of exile and Diaspora. To what extent did Iraqi intellectuals and artists themselves contribute to those dramatic political developments that helped shape the latter half of the twentieth century?

During this symposium our main question will be: What kind of intellectual, literary and artistic means did contemporary Iraqi authors employ in dealing with the ongoing fragmentation and destruction of their country and society? If "trauma is the impossibility of narration," as Aleida Assmann says, then what is the role of literature and arts in a daily life shaped by mortal danger, political persecution and ethnic religious expulsion? How can art cope with war, violence, trauma and the absence of "normality"? Is Iraqi literature—as is the case for many texts of Holocaust literature—a literature of testimonies?



To be traumatized means loss of control over the body and mind. It means that memory has gained complete ascendancy over the life of an individual, usurping his past and present and rendering his future impossible. In what ways are literary language, form, and content shaped by those traumatizing experiences? How do authors react to this "crisis of representation"? Or, to put it more generally: Considering the ongoing traumatisation in Iraq, might one indeed conceive of "trauma" as a veritable *prerequisite* for the writings of many Iraqi and other Arab authors?

Based on artistic, anthropological and psychological perspectives, PANEL 1 "The Art of Surviving" will scrutinize the impact of violence and traumatization on gender, family structures and the arts supported by a multi-media-based presentation of various short films by contemporary Iraqi artists. Given the fact that Iraq has produced an impressive number of leading Arab poets, PANEL 2 "The Poetics of Trauma" will discuss the role of war and trauma for the emergence of a new poetics in Iraq and Iraqi Diaspora. PANELS 3 and 4 will reflect upon recent developments and trends in Iraqi literature and drama within and outside the country. PANEL 3 "Trauma, Memory, and Modernity" deals with literary enactments and figurations of fragmentation, modernity and gender, while PANEL 4 "Iraqi Culture(s) between Exile and Home" discusses Iraqi voices of resistance and remembrance in the Iraqi Diaspora (Jordan, Great Britain, and Germany). The symposium will start with a keynote speech about the challenges of rewriting Iraqi history and the role of scholars and intellectuals in the process of redefining the Iraqi identity.

The overall aim of these panels is to confront the diverse positions and discourses developed in Iraq and in Diaspora societies so as to outline the characteristic tensions and antagonisms that have emerged from the special circumstances of recent Iraqi history.

The international symposium is part of the research field 'Travelling Traditions. Comparative Perspectives on Near Eastern Literatures' within 'Europe in the Middle East – The Middle East in Europe', a research program of the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung and the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin. The symposium is funded by the Center for for Near and Middle Eastern Studies and the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung. It will be convened by Professor Dr. Friederike Pannewick and Stephan Milich (CNMS, Marburg). A follow-up conference in Berlin is planned.



## **Program**

### **Thursday**

8:00 p.m.

Keynote speech: Hala Fattah / Amman

"Iraq Revisited – The Challenge of Rewriting Iraqi History"

### **Friday**

09:30 – 9:45 a.m. Opening address

#### **PANEL 1: The Art of Surviving**

Chair: Sinan Antoon

09:45 – 10:30 a.m. Nadjie al-Ali / SOAS London

"Narrating the Nation, Trauma & War: Representing Iraqi Women's Memories"

10:30 – 11:15 a.m. Fakhri Khalik / Frankfurt

"Trauma, Affect, and Changing Family Structures in Iraq"

11:15 – 11:45 a.m. Coffee break

11:45 – 1:00 p.m. Rashad Salim / London

"Greater and Lesser Trauma; Iraq: History, Art and the Cognition/Denial of the Obvious"

#### **PANEL 2: The Poetics of Trauma**

Chair: Friederike Pannewick

3:00 – 3:45 p.m.

Sinan Antoon / New York University, Fellow of *Europe in the Middle East – The Middle East in Europe 2008/09*

"Echoes of Future Nightmares: On the Late Poems of Sargon Boulous"

3:45 – 4:30 p.m.

Stephan Milich / CNMS Marburg

"Haunting Memories and the Poetics of Trauma in Contemporary Iraqi Exile Poetry"

4:30 – 5:00 p.m.

Coffee break



5:00 – 5:45 p.m. Leslie Tramontini / CNMS Marburg  
"Trauma and Violence in Iraqi War Poetry of the 1980s"

8:00 – 9:00 p.m. Reading of *Ijaam: An Iraqi Rhapsody* Arabic-English, discussion  
with Sinan Antoon

### **Saturday**

#### **PANEL 3: Trauma, Memory, and Modernity**

Chair: Leslie Tramontini

9:30 – 10:15 a.m. Haytham Bahooora / New York University  
"Writing Women's Bodies: Space, Gender, and the Production of  
Literary Modernism in 1950s Baghdad"

10:15 – 11:00 a.m. Hartmut Fähndrich / Universität Zürich  
"Coming to Grips with Wounds. Some Recent Iraqi Novels"

11:00 – 11:30 a.m. Coffee break

11:30 – 12:15 p.m. Amel Mahmoud / Universität Bayreuth  
"Stream of Consciousness and the Ceaseless Visit of a Traumatic  
Past: An Exploration of this Theme in *Love Poem with Rhyme  
Letter Zed* by Abd A. al-Rawdan and *Leaves of Eggplants* by Abdul  
Sattar Nassir"

#### **PANEL 4: Iraqi Culture(s) between Exile and Home**

Chair: Stephan Milich

2:15 – 3:00 p.m. Christiane Schlote / Universität Bern  
"Theatre in Times of War: Iraq and Political Drama"

3:00 – 3:30 p.m. Coffee break

3:30 – 4:15 p.m. Andreas Pflitsch / Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg  
"Violence from a Distance. Trauma in Iraqi-German Literature"

**Venue:**



Hörsaal 00A26  
Center for Near and Middle Eastern Studies  
Philipps-Universität Marburg  
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Participants are asked to register at  
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**For more information please visit:**

[www.uni-marburg.de/cnms/arabistik](http://www.uni-marburg.de/cnms/arabistik)

[www.eume-berlin.de](http://www.eume-berlin.de)