

Contemporary Arab Petrofiction: Opening up Biopolitical Spaces for the Dispossessed

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Abstract:

The paper is an exploration of how petrofiction, as a form of biopolitical fiction, charts out the discontent of the selected Arab writers with the present as well as their visions of the past and the future. Within the context of the United States' imperialism, expansionism and the resultant Arab Modernism, two postmodern Arabic novels from different nation states and cultures translated into English at different time periods have been chosen for this study with a view to examine themes common to their biopolitical and necropolitical backgrounds. The novels are *Cities of Salt* (1984), the first volume of a petro-quintet by Saudi-Jordanian novelist Abdel Rahman Munif, and *Men in the Sun* (1963) by the Palestinian Ghassan Kanafani. These texts are analyzed as petronarratives demonstrating oil as a resource curse, and its fallout of development as a form of distorted modernity. By deconstructing unilinear narratives of progress and possibility, the selected marginalized authors reject easy solutions or fantastic alternatives to the present. Their narratives deterritorialize the codifications of colonial discourse to open up new spaces of possibilities for the dispossessed. They work as writer-activists signifying the attainability of the idea that fiction is powerful enough to effect political change and develop biopolitical memory. The study concludes with the crystallization that although representation of the wounded memory through written text is not possible, the text as a body can initiate biopolitical change.

Key Words: Petrofiction, Arab Modernism, Petro-despotism, Text as body