

# Historical Features in the Novel of "Taghreebatu Qariyah " (A Village Agony), by Mohammad Obeidat,

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## ABSTRACT

This Paper discusses the Paradox in the Novel: "Taghreebatu Qariyah", ( A Village Agony), written by Mohammad Obeidat, in which the incidences took place in Kafr Soum village, at the northern part of Jordan, and the ordeal that befell it and its people, following the burning of the sieve that United States installed for some villages around there, as a result of protesting against the Baghdad Pact, then it was punished again after some years when people demonstrated and called for unity with Egypt and Syria, influenced by the nationalist movement in the sixties of 20<sup>th</sup> century. This paper focuses on a specific aspect of a novel, that is the paradox. It defines the novel then moves on to present the various definitions of the paradox, and refers to its examples. This paper concludes that the novel was based on a paradoxical structure and exploited it through a capable and conscious style, due to the importance of such function in the novel construction, and addressed a message by the writer which was: condemnation of what had happened and what is happening now, then impeded these incidences in the minds of young and new generation, so he discovered what they needed in the paradox that revealed much of what the victims had hidden.

**Keywords:** A village Agony, Sieve, The Year of Seizure, The Year of incidence, Spies, Occupation.

### Problem and Importance of the Study:

This paper discusses the history that engulfed the novel (2010), which focuses on two major incidences: The year of Seizure and the year of occupation, according to the term coined by the people, but officially it was called the year of incidences.

### Justification for the Study:

The novel revolves around the incidences that took place in the Kafr Soum village at the northern part of Jordan. The incidences were known as the Year of Seizure, in which the people reacted violently against Jordan's intention to join the Baghdad Pact. Jordanian's authorities ignored what had happened in those two years, so there was no information about them in the official history taught in schools and universities.

This novel highlights these incidences and re-reads it, while the novel was not studied or discussed or even commented on, except by some press reviews, but not academically despite the importance of that period of time.

### Hypotheses of the Study:

**H1:** How much confidence in the historical information that the writer collected verbally from the people and through the folk songs that immortalized these indecencies?

**H2:** What is the presence of the human side in the novel?

**H3:** How appropriate is the narrative discourse of the historical material?

### Research Methodology:

This paper adopts two types of methodology:

1. The own theoretical one that includes the definition of the novel and its important incidences.
2. Applied aspect that focuses on the narrative discourse, especially the paradox element that dominates other elements.

### Years of Seizure and Incidences:

#### 1. Year of Seizure:

This year witnessed the punishment of the village who went out seeking freedom, and had an early political awareness, as most people of the village joined either an Islamic or national party.

Many party affiliations gathered in one family, so you find the brother was nationalist while the father was Islamist for example. In the year of seizure a cordon of soldiers surrounded the village, where the term "punishment" stuck to the minds of villagers, especially the children.

The punishment was imposed due to the village rejection of the Baghdad Pact. Such rejection was

culminated in burning the sieve that was installed by U.S economic aid project in the village, as an aid to the developing countries, including Jordan, through what was called Point Four Program.

The sieve was burnt since it represented the American interests in Jordan, where people of other villages participated in the burning action, but the people of Kafr Soum held the burden alone, where they sacrificed blood, money and compensation to U.S (Obeidat, 2020: 12-24).

The soldiers arrested every person, regardless they were young or elders over 15 years old. Whoever was fortunate to flee out of Jordan, as Abdullah did, who served the soldiers while they denied him, then slipped away. After Abdullah hid, he waited the opportunity to escape, like Adnan's mother who succeeded in preparing a hideout for him in her house, which turned into a military headquarter.

The house was divided into two parts, similar to the division of Germany after the WWII, where one part was used by the family and the other was used by the soldiers, while Adnan stayed in between, despite both young persons were different in party affiliation.

The prison, in which men and boys suffered from various kinds of torture and insult, was a school. Persons slept on concrete floor in cold winter, with no heating or blankets, except for the remnants of torn clothes as a result of arrest and torture (Obeidat, 2010: 2-21).

## 2. The Year of Incidence:

That year was a punishment against the village, after its people called for unity with Egypt and Syria, which was the demand of several political parties, according to the viewpoint of the villagers.

The school was turned into a temporary detention center again. The school should abort every attempt to practice its true role to provide knowledge and enlighten to every student. After the army withdrew the school it became a stable for cavalry horses (Obeidat, 2010: 87).

It is useful to point out some of the devastating effects on the people of the village, where some lands of the village were confiscated, while some farmers were banned from cultivating their fields.

In addition, the soldiers confiscated the livestock. The products of livestock were allocated for the cavalry, while people were prevented from lighting fires for heating and baking bread (Obiedat, 2010: 40-42), as if those villagers were the family of Jassas to recall ancient incidence from the people memory—, despite that they were not treacherous.

The novel mentions, for example, Adnan's father, the first wanted person by the police, and Muflih who owned third of the village barns so the production was not enough. Due to the lack of plough mechanized system they used oxen, but the confiscation of oxen forced them to use the donkeys, which means a decrease of yield and increase of costs. That year the corn was not cultivated due to the lack of harvesters who were divided into prisoners and fugitives (Obiedat, 2020: 54).

## 2.1 Agony of a Village and the Popular Memory:

This novel tells the story of most Jordanian villages and some cities at that time. Rather, it tells the story of many Arab villages and cities that were plagued by colonialism, as stated in the preface of the novel.

Although these incidences are of great importance, but they changed the shape of villages, its future and even the future of Jordan. In other words, they were the years of embers and bullets for Jordan, though the term was applied to the period between sixties and eighties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Morocco.

Despite the importance of the incidences, they remained hidden and not mentioned in the official media and history textbooks. It was marginalized and ignored except in the popular memory, where such memory preserves exceptional incidences which should not have happened, or incidences that were not witnessed or foreseen before emergency and extraordinary statues (Al-Ghanimi, 2021: 39).

It is true that we don't find written documents, but we used to hear about these incidences from parents who lived at that time, or by their relations with neighboring villages, where the villagers used to transmit these news related to the people of villages who were either prisoned or exiled and the land left by. The popular memory kept telling the story in various styles such as songs, as they sing the following quartets:

"We have become the ring of every corner  
Soldiers and Cavalry seized us  
They covered the land and valley  
They flooded us like Euphrates River  
The army invaded all ages  
Confiscated grain, wheat, and the stores  
Rice, meat, lamb and ghee  
Coffee, Sugar.. They took it in bags" (Obeidat, 2010: 26).

Since literature narrates what history ignores or overlooks, consciously or unconsciously, these incidences found a place in popular songs until they found their way to this novel, which has the ability to absorb texts and dialogue with multiple literary genes (Yaqteen, 2006: 31).

## 2.2 Features of the Jordanian Village in the Novel:

The novel draws a picture of the Jordanian village, in all details at the time, while it is similar to the accurate documentation of the same time, and shows the intertwining of its social, economic, and human relations.

Agricultural seasons for example, are present in the novel, like the season of harvesting grain, picking corn and sesame, and the rituals related to each season. The novel focuses on picking corn which is done post the afternoon prayer with a long handle sickle, unlike the short hand sickle of grain.

The pods are piled up in the field before transported to the threshing floor for preparation. Granaries from which its seeds were picked are used as brooms for bread oven,

because no alternative material was available (Obeidat, 2010: 34).

The novel doesn't neglect reference to the architecture system or the bases on which rural houses were built. Adjoint rooms were built specially for the family, with place to store grains, while the third part was allocated for breeding animals, and the fourth was a hole for collecting animal waste to be used for the oven in the village, which depended entirely on the products of the village of crops, dairy, animals and poultry.

The bread was baked from corn where women mastered making the Kardoush where thyme, tomato, onion or a mixture cover the bread with lump taste (Obeidat, 2010: 34).

The novel describes the marriage customs and traditions prior to the wedding day, such as food, songs and dabkah dance. Dabkah is divided into two types, one for young people who need fitness and activity due to the various movements and jumps, while Joufieh of elders was of slow movements. The songs were different than dabkah where islamists, nationalist and Palestinian sang their own songs.

One Palestinian song says:

O Palestine, you are the pain of our body  
and you are the cause of all difficult things  
you overwhelmed us from the seas  
where is the doctor who heals our body  
neither a doctor nor a healer  
O Jule Jammal who drowns the enemy ship.

Jule Jammal is the Christian Syrian lieutenant who participated in Suez Canal war with the Egyptian army and was a hero who sacrificed his soul to defend Egypt (Obeidat, 2010: 36-37).

The novel registers chronicles of real incidences, refill them with a special perspective and monitors the social transformation that occurred in Jordanian society, through renovation by a knowledgeable narrator who hides behind a little (Todorov, 2005: 133), to give the lead of narration later to some personalities who witnessed and experienced those incidences.

Adnan, who narrates, from his own viewpoint, while others may have different narration for the same incidence (Genett, 1980: 114-16), which provides information that might had been absent to reader. The writer narrates what information he obtained from Adnan's Uncle and wife about hiding and disappearance before escaping.

In his voluntary imprisonment, where he hid for fear of the soldiers, and waited for the suitable opportunity to escape, his mind was preoccupied with many questions: what happened to the villages? who was arrested? who was the victim of investigation, and who spilled the bean? what would happen to him if the soldiers arrested him?

The mere hiding is an accusation to him and his family, and it is purely humane feelings (Obeidat, 2010: 92-94). In addition, the writer dedicates a space to tell us what he knew about Hasan journey from the school to the prison school, then to the real prison where he was sentenced to death.

If the reader obtained some information on the journey, the ordeal, so to speak, but the picture was completed when the narrator let Hasan narrate with the conscience of the writer his experience of being subjected to detention in the school before sentenced to death. Such approach increased the trust between narrator and reader (Burnoff and Oleh, 1992: 23), where the latter accompanied Hasan personality and interacted with him momentarily.

These incidences have been transformed from an individual, family or village experience to a human experience, as it has transcended the personal incidence to public and raised it to the rank of human experience (Beydoun, 2019).

### 3.1 The Presence of Paradox in the Novel:

This paper pinned the paradox in the novel, where it was adopted beside the dominant technique in order to convey a message, perhaps to emphasize a meaning, which is simply represented by the people of the village in their experience of rejection of what had been happening, their yearning for freedom and their spontaneous willingness to sacrifice despite being subject to strict social order like tyranny.

The spontaneous impulse, and their willingness to sacrifice could have been taken as advantages for liberation from colonialism, by many great countries, that created glory for their nations also benefited (Obeidat, 2010: 8-9). But the absence of democracy and rule of law were reasons for not benefiting these sacrifices.

In addition, the people of the village were bearing ideas, knowledge and cognition, so they were not spies for anyone. When the national candidate won elections of representatives the village didn't witness arguments, didn't heal or resent the loses, as it happens now after the loss of a party candidate, after the assassination of a period of awareness building the squeezed into the cradle.

Destruction, failure and deterioration lead to killing of the personality that makes effort to rise up and liberate, besides killing the ambition to transform the society into hoards, perpetuate individual selfishness, and encourage narcissism competing leaderships, in order to become easier to control them.

The inevitable consequence of this systematic policy, was that the present generation mocks these sacrifices of the past generations for the sake of their believed ideas, which they defended and sacrificed fiercely, while they were not satisfied with ridicule only. Some young people now deny that history.

As for the other section, it is not known about this history which was ignored and neglected by the official syllabus and media because the main concern of government is to meet the basic needs of people (Obeidat, 2010: 132-34).

### 3.2 The Paradox as Idiom:

The paradox is a technique or strategy used by the writer to create indirect text, hide multiple connotations within it, that requires deep reading to

acquire what the text hides and to access the depth (Al-Tamara, 2016: 41).

The writer applies the paradox to express and reveal the fake and false information, and his goal is to reform and ridicule in a time of repercussion, political oppression and marginalization of human being (Qasim, 1982: 144).

The paradox is a way to deceive and circumvent the censorship especially when it uses the same words of the prevailing regime ostensibly, but it means another thing (Qasim, 1980: 143). It is the salt that makes the dish delicious (Ibrahim, 196).

Dictionaries and lexicons cite multiple definitions of paradox, including what was mentioned in the Concise Oxford Dictionary.

The scholars say that it is an expression and words in the language that bear a meaning which contradicts the original meaning, especially when one pretends to adopt the other's viewpoint, using a tone denoting praise but with the intent of sarcasm.

The sarcasm is the occurrence of a desired event or circumstance but at a completely inappropriate time, as it is a mockery of the idea of the appropriate thing. It is the use of language in a way that bears on a candid meaning directed to a special audience, and another apparent meaning directed to the persons being addressed or concurred" (Enright, 1986: 5).

The paradox may mean "a form of saying in which one meaning is conveyed while the other meaning is intended, which often contradicts the superficial meaning, and it can be intended to say one thing and suggest its opposite (Suleiman, 1999: 16). It is the "soft and quiet way to deceive others (Murick, 1982: 26).

Finally the paradox may occur with the meaning of "contradiction which is based on belittling the self in a higher sense than its opposite, or based on pretension, humility even when it is pretentious. It indicates more good upbringing from boasting (Sibbak, 2017).

### **3.3 The Paradox in the novel "Agony of A Village":**

Obeidat, the novel writer, employed the paradox to suit his experience and serve the message that he wanted to reach the audience, as he condemns the present and turns to the recent past to prove this condemnation. That past which witnessed heroism and sacrifice for the sake of principle without betraying it or involving a conspiracy, so that successive generations may use it or at least preserve in the collective memory of the next generation, without ignorance.

### **3.4 Types of the Paradox in the Novel:**

#### **3.4.1 The Paradox of Duty:**

Seizure, which indicates a defect in the relationship between the citizen and authority. "A soldier stands in front of the door with his helmet and holds his weapon as he is in a war.

The soldier is usually prepared for war as it is assumed in the frontline or a training camp which is the

natural place for this soldier, who wears the war gear and clutches his weapon in a preparedness sign, to defend borders and protect people, but not to occupy the village to intimidate and punish its habitants against their beliefs and opinions.

#### **3.3.2 The paradox of Knowledge and Ignorance:**

This paradox was mentioned by Atif, who was not seen talking except greetings, but the enormous incidence told him the truth, and brought out what was hidden in his subconscious mind. Education arrived the village after burning the American interests and institutions.

This paradox exists between presence and absence, the presence of American interests and the systematic ignorance. When the American interests became absent, education and enlightenment arrived the village.

In a gathering of some villagers, Atif said that the sieve village had no school so its students walked to our village to study. "I see that American interests and our education do not agree with each other. It is a fact that ignorance is a feature of occupation? (Obeidat, 2010:24).

#### **3.4.3 The Paradox of Sarcasm:**

This paradox is embodied in the dissolution of parliament, "This council was dissolved shortly after elections where some representatives were sent to a desert prison. The nationalist and Islamist members who competed for elections gathered under the roof of the prison instead of parliament (Obeidat, 2010: 39). The polite behavior of the villagers whose nationalist candidate won the election didn't encounter violation by Islamist people nor there was a sabotage of public properties or protests, but rather they accepted the result willingly and freely, while the reaction of authority was different, it sent both factions to prison. It didn't provide them with a suitable atmosphere to exchange opinions and ideas and discuss the problems of the country, but it provided them with a desert prison.

#### **3.4.4 The Vocal Phenomenon Paradox:**

The villagers are waiting for the program of Ahmad Saeed at Sawt Alarab Broadcasting from Cairo, after the death or life imprisonment sentences. Sawt Alarab described the demonstrations of the village as a victory but didn't send them a piece of bread, since Ahmad Saeed exploited their sacrifices for more fame only". The radio continued to fight at a distance, as the war through the media has become an Arab habit to confront their enemy as in Six day War in 1967 (Obeidat, 2010: 75).

#### **3.4.5 The Paradox of Sacred Against Profane:**

Perhaps it is the most critical paradox, through which the novel tried to convey a message that reflected the writer view to what is happening now of rapid change that engulfed the society of deteriorated conditions, changed values, and bad morals. The village continued to

boast that it didn't bow to anyone and it escaped the biggest flaw, as they didn't reveal a secret or provided information about the wanted persons despite the different ideological affiliations.

However, Habis, who was the Imam of the masjid, not the village, who came from another village and inherited his job from his father as mo'athin (caller for pray), servant and Friday Preacher for free, prompted the villagers to reconsider his boast. Habis had a role that contradicted his supposed role in terms of commitment towards his mission as a preacher and Imam. He overcame this when he detected people news and eavesdropped on their conversations. Rather, he stole from their crops, while they pretended to believe him, so when Aziz, a villager, caught him stealing a grain, he asked him about the reason for such robbery, Habis answered that he wanted to inspect the quality of the crop.

The villagers didn't expect a reverend and pious Imam would steal, but he violated the values, duties and ethics of his position. His daughters introduced the culture of dance recently instead of Dabkah. This case is similar to Kulaib (ancient tale) when he did not expect that Jassas would betray him. However, Zahra, the daughter of Habis, became proud that she and her father could send any villager to the prison. This happened many times, where some people were subject to investigation and insult as a result of the reports by Zahra and her father to the authorities (Obeidat, 2010: 35, 33, 64).

#### **3.4.6 The Paradox of Marginalization:**

Those incidences, despite its influence and impact on the fate of many villagers and neighboring villages, didn't affect positively the feeling of the new generation due to the marginalization, absenteeism, accusations and treasons, where these facts were not registered officially and in textbooks, not even a gesture or hint by any history researcher to write a paper about what had happened (Obeidat, 2010: 139).

#### **3.4.7 The Paradox of Innocence:**

This paradox talks about the detention of Atif, who was carrying a gun, where the soldier guessed that Atif intended to shoot him so he hit Atif with the butt of the gun, caused a cut on his head where blood flowed profusely. Atif's hand was much smaller than the size of iron handcuff so his hand slipped through, the paradox here is that he called the soldier innocently and naively to inform him that the handcuff was too large for his hand. Aziz, his colleague, blamed him for being tied down since if he hadn't called the soldier, he would have been relieved of his torment unit they reached the prison (Obeidat, 2010: 53-55).

#### **3.4.8 The Paradox of Human Sense:**

Despite the bleak image of the soldier in the novel it indicated the human side of some citizens, not only tools of torture and intimidation, but their humanity

appeared when they overlooked the escape of Adnan, but they tolerated teacher Khawla and her friends when they came to visit Um Abdullah, who hid Adnan, so they were protected from the strict seizure in the evening, which allowed Adnan to flee to the valley then to Syria. After some time the soldiers became friends to some citizens in the village (Obeidat, 2020: 16-101).

### **3.5 The Dramatic Paradox:**

D. H. Green pointed out three factors to consider the dramatic paradox:

1. An oblivious character versus a strong one.
2. A situation governed by tension, so the first character is ignorant of the reality of circumstance that surrounds it (a contradiction between appearance and reality of things).
3. The viewers who participate in making incidences are aware of the real situation of the oblivious character.

### **3.6 Examples of the Dramatic Paradox in the Novel:**

#### **3.6.1 The first example:**

The scene that depicts Abdullah setting fire to the soldiers although they didn't spare his agony at first when they asked him to lit lumber outside the house without kerosene while lumber was wet by the rain and snow. The weather was very cold to the point of freezing and was impossible to lit fire. Then he brought them a pot of tea despite he was wanted by the authorities but they didn't recognize him, and fortunately they have no photo for him. The reader may be confused by some doubt, but when he connects this scene with the following lines the doubt becomes a kind of certainty. The scene ends with Abdullah sneaking into the valley to escape the detention (Obeidat, 2010: 14-15).

#### **3.6.2 The Second Example:**

Perhaps the most famous personalities that embodied the dramatic paradox was Ali (Obeidat, 2020: 65-6). The school teacher, who was never a partisan of any party, but was arrested for his national affiliation. When he got in the car he found himself with people who didn't recognize him, so he asked: why are you here? why am I here? They answered him: we are detained nationalists, so his reaction was: what do I have to do with this problem? They answered him: because you are similar to us, he said: but I don't know you, I was surprised by this situation. So he asked the officer; Am I really a nationalist? the phrase was simple but rather closer to instinct and honesty in sacrifice. At the same time it indicates the random way of detention and treatment of the villagers and the collective accusations.

### 6.3 The third Example:

The reaction of soldier and the officer -later- was real and nationalist when they condemned the government against arresting and insulting the child Issa of 15 years, 15 kg, and a height of 140 cm. The officer said angrily: "what a miserable government that detains people like you Issa (Obeidat, 2010: 117-118). The officer continued: Is this detention worth the cost and effort of a patrol sent to fetch and detain Issa? Paradoxically, he was sentenced to death despite his young age, but the government issued a certificate that showed he was more than 18 to justify the execution of Issa (Obeidat, 2010: 119). Subsequently the department of registration of birth claimed that he was unregistered so they issued a certificate for his age. Yet the novel narrates what happened in the past from the viewpoint of the victim who tasted the bitterness of torment, who once aspired to freedom and to expressed his opinion, meanwhile he was not absent from the present as none of his previous ambitions and dreams of change were accomplished.

This presence was absent from the desire to change reality, and adherence to individual gains and narrow interests of a limited group in the society appeared, as leaders and rivals, as a result of bringing closer some people and marginalizing others. The conflict governed the relationship of many who claim to be the leaders of society.

### Conclusions:

1. A village agony novel that discussed the silent topic which was neglected officially in Jordan, while some novels dealt with a specific aspect of this history, which was the desert prison, one of the repercussion tools in the "year of incidences", where it was the fate of nationalists who called for joining the Unity with Egypt and Syria. The reader does not find such information in the official media but in some novels.
2. The novel chose the paradox and applied it with full awareness, as it appeared in the paper due to its importance in construction of the novel and in the message the writer wanted to convey to the reader.
3. Condemnation of what had happened and what is happening now.
4. Consolidate these incidences in the minds of young people and new generation.
5. The writer found the theme in the paradox that revealed what the victims hit, especially when the novel adopts the viewpoint of the victims, and narrates the incidences from his own perspective, that victim, who had political awareness

and a desire for change, but these expectations were dumped

6. The past is present in the novel, while the present is absent, but the repercussions of the past impose their dominance on the present, which is dominated by the individual gains, where interests are narrow for a little percentage of the society, while leaders multiplied, and the struggle over crumbs increased, as a result of bringing some people closer to the regime and marginalizing others. This increased the enmity of the members of community towards each other's.

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