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Imaginative Geographies and the Colonial: David Abrams' *Fobbit*

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Abstract:

This study aims to uncover Western imaginative geographies and their colonial practices and implications in David Abrams' *Fobbit* (2012). It makes visible and contextualizes the invisible agonies of the colonized and revokes the colonial claims. Imaginative geographies refer to the ways in which other spaces, peoples and cultures are represented by the West as serving Western colonial designs and interests in the East. The colonial present indicates the active position of colonialism and its progressive existence in the Middle East, which was reactivated in the aftermath of 9/11. The colonized is formed through architectures of enmity that emphasize imaginaries of difference and fear of the other to instigate the colonial past into a colonial present. I make this argument in two constructs: 'good Americans,' which examines the colonial implications of the representation of American soldiers, and 'bad Arabs,' which explores the connection between the novel's portrayal of Arabs and the American colonial presence in Iraq. Despite Abrams' attempt to expose the means by which the U.S. Army and media polish a rather ugly image of war to make it appealing and heroic; his representation of war, American soldiers, nationals, and Iraq is overshadowed by Western imaginative geographies of the Other that consolidate the colonial present in the Middle East. This study exposes the colonial present and its manifestations as implemented in the novel, making them more visible, questioned and condemned. It gives more insight into the means used to make other spaces and people more antagonistic and thus colonizable.

Keywords: colonial present, David Abrams, Iraq War, war novel.

富有想象力的地理和殖民地：大卫·艾布拉姆斯的《福比特人》

摘要：

本研究旨在揭示西方富有想象力的地理及其在大卫·艾布拉姆斯的《福比特人》（2012年）中的殖民实践和影响。它使被殖民者的无形痛苦变得可见并将其背景化，并撤销了殖民主张。富有想象力的地理指的是其他空间、民族和文化被西方代表服务于东方在东方的殖民设计和利益的方式。殖民地现在表明殖民主义

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的积极地位及其在中东的进步存在，这在9/11之后重新激活。被殖民者是通过敌对建筑形成的，这些建筑强调对差异的想象和对他人的恐惧，以煽动殖民历史进入殖民时代。我在两个结构中提出这个论点：“好美国人”，它考察了美国士兵的代表的殖民影响，以及“坏阿拉伯人”，它探讨了小说对阿拉伯人的描绘与美国在伊拉克的殖民存在之间的联系。尽管艾布拉姆斯试图揭露美国军队和媒体用来修饰相当丑陋的战争形象以使其具有吸引力和英雄气概的手段；他对战争、美国士兵、国民和伊拉克的表现被西方想象中的他者地理所掩盖，后者巩固了中东的殖民现状。这项研究揭露了殖民时代及其在小说中的表现形式，使它们更加引人注目、受到质疑和谴责。它使人们更深入地了解用于使其他空间和人们更具敌对性并因此可殖民化的手段。

关键词：殖民时代，大卫·艾布拉姆斯，伊拉克战争，战争小说。

1. Introduction

“Representations are never merely mirrors held up to the world; they enter fully into its formation” (Gregory, 2004).

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the United States of America waged two wars against Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, which kept American troops in these countries for about two decades. Many American soldiers who served in these countries came home to write literary works that drew heavily on their experiences in these foreign geographies, such as: *The Yellow Birds* (2012) by Kevin Powers, *Fobbit* (2012) by David Abrams, *The Valley* (2015) by John Renehan, *Redeployment* (2015) by Phil Klay, and *War Porn* (2016) by Roy Scranton. David Abrams wrote his debut novel *Fobbit* (2012), based on his experiences as a fobbit, “a US Army employee stationed at a Forward Operating Base, particularly during Operation Iraqi Freedom (2003-2011)” (cited in Abrams, 2012), who served with the U.S. Army in Iraq in 2005.

Abram's novel is considered one of the most prominent novels on the Iraq War, depicting the excruciating nature of war in an unembellished framework. It was named a New York Times Notable Book of 2012. It was hailed with many positive reviews and was labeled as an ingenious study on anxiety and a disturbing description of how the military tells its truths (Busch, 2012), a “disturbing, heartbreaking and ridiculous as war itself” (Bauman, 2012), and “an impressive Iraq war satire” (Basbanes, 2012). Abrams was applauded for integrating fiction and journalism; “his tale is a concerto played with several hands, each player delivering his own tune in exquisitely crafted dialogues, inner monologues, diary entries, memoranda and press releases” (Mathonniere, 2014, p. 4). Each character's efforts sound true because they are skillfully crafted as fiction. The narrative is recounted through the perspectives of four characters: Chance Gooding Jr., an Army officer; Lieutenant Colonel Eustace Harkleroad, Gooding's superior officer; Captain Abe Shrinkle, a commander; and Lieutenant Colonel Vic Duret, a battalion commander, and Shrinkle's superior officer.

Fobbit serves as a harsh critique of the U.S. Army's official narrative of the Iraq War, as well as that of the media, which opted for gentler stories of war in line with American culture at the expense of the truth (Kunsa, 2017). In the same vein, Susan Kollin (2015)

believes that Abrams' is an anti-war novel that presents a parody of the experiences of American soldiers in Iraq. However, Paul Ady (2014) argues that the novel speaks highly of soldiers with lower ranks and only criticizes those with higher ranks. In fact, the hierarchical conflict between higher and lower ranks in the U.S. Army is one of the recurring themes in the novel. He adds that Sergeant Brock Lumley is introduced without the contemptuous description of the higher ranks. This character is the narrative epitome of the soldiers who find themselves in the position of having to endure the incompetent officers like Duret and Shrinkle, while watching officers like Gooding rise through the ranks while relatively out of harm's way. However, the colonial present is not addressed in these studies, even though it is pervasive throughout the work. This study examines colonial practices and implications as exemplified in David Abrams's *Fobbit* (2012). It uncovers the colonial techniques, means, and implications employed in the novel.

2. Conceptual Framework

Renowned geographer Derek Gregory (2004) argues that in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks, the United States of America has shaped the Other in the Middle East through “architectures of enmity” (Gregory, 2004, p. 20), reinforcing imaginaries of fear to recreate the colonial past into a colonial present. These architectures are used in various ways to outline the other as a reviled enemy in order to wage war against him, conquer and colonize his land; “the asymmetry that underwrites the colonial production of imaginative geographies was endlessly elaborated through the repetition of a single question. “Who hates America?”” (Gregory, 2004, p. 20). The other is made the most obvious enemy of the United States and all that it stands for to justify retaliation.

It is Edward Said's (1979) contention that there is an organic connection between colonialism and Orientalism. Under the influence of orientalism, the “Other”, its peoples, geographies, and civilization are explained and interpreted; it is a formation of specific political powers and activities. The Orient is changed “from being textual and contemplative into being administrative, economic, and even military” (Said, 1979, p. 210) and “from alien into colonial space” (Said, 1979, p. 211). Orientalism provides justification

for warring against the Other and helps Western countries rationalize being in a constant state of war with these entities (Smith, 2006). Orientalism continues to function in the present to support Western colonial designs in Middle Eastern geographies by providing a cultural basis for present and future colonial plans (Kalin, 2004; Maira, 2009).

Through self-produced narratives, “[t]he Other is cited, quoted, framed, illuminated, encased in the shot/reverse-shot strategy of serial enlightenment. Narrative and the cultural politics of difference become the closed circle of interpretation” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 31). The other thus becomes the passive object of frequent acts of representation and interpretation in which each form of interpretation signifies the others. The West creates self-sufficient myths about its mission to modernize the other, claiming its essentiality for developing the backward East (Gregory, 2004). These self-productions involve the creation of the Other, which ultimately emphasizes the centrality and superiority of the West and upholds Western interests in the East (Gregory, 2004; Semati, 2010). Western civilizational missions are based on the notion of Western supremacy to advance Western colonial projects in the Middle East, such as the recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (Gafaïti, 2008; Gregory, 2004).

Gregory (2004) argues that the U.S. government treats its enemies after 9/11 through three strategic acts: locating, confronting, and expelling. Locating means to turn enemies into objects, which produces an abstraction of other people as the Other. The situation in the 2003 war shows how “the imaginative geographies that were given such terrifying force by the events of September 11 were connected to performances of space that have been (and continue to be) deployed in other circumstances” (Gregory, 2004, p. 248). Thus, the US Army destroyed the buildings of Baghdad but “never killed Iraqis” (Gregory, 2004, p. 248). Western imaginative geographies reduced the Other to an object in a graphic field, made it the enemy, and finally reduced it to a worthless being, which explains why the huge numbers of Iraqi deaths and casualties were not accurately stated or recognized but given in totality. Nevertheless, most people will be able to recall the number of casualties of the 9/11 attacks and even tell some their harrowing stories.

Memory is essential to the construction of the colonial present through two seemingly contradictory qualities, colonial nostalgia and colonial amnesia (Gregory, 2004). While colonial nostalgia involves recreating the colonial past in the present, colonial amnesia involves forgetting how Western cultures have viewed other people as others. This is not limited to viewing other peoples and cultures as alien, bizarre and exotic, but extends to how Western cultures have concealed their destructive appropriation of other cultures. He explains the American war on terror in this sense as a militant return to the colonial past, “with its split geographies of “us” and “them,” “civilization” and “barbarism,” “good” and “evil”” (2004, p. 11). Colonial

nostalgia resurrects the colonial past by differentiating between what is Western and what is not, and by promoting the discourse of the clash of civilizations, which ultimately leads to a colonial present.

Spaces of visibility indicate those events or situations that are highlighted and promoted, while spaces of invisibility indicate those that are ignored, disregarded, and silenced. Spaces of visibility and invisibility reveal the intertwined act of simultaneously highlighting and covering up or ignoring certain events. Only news of violence that occurs in Western countries is disseminated, while similar events in non-Western countries are not acknowledged or circulated (Gregory, 2004; Kumar, 2012). Active imaginative geographies constantly repeat the distinction between “us” and “them” at the expense of what is “just” and “unjust” (Gregory, 2004, p. 27). In the same way, the 9/11 hijackers, their people, and their countries were treated as Others or enemies. Fear of these Others is created and activated in the Western media to reveal and make visible the true faces of these Others as Others. The Other is thus reconstructed in many ways, still within a framework of the colonial present that sees it oscillate between the visible and the invisible.

In the 2001 and 2003 wars, photographs showing thousands of civilian deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan were restricted and made invisible so as not to disturb and reduce public support for the American colonial presence in the Middle East (Gregory, 2004). Nonetheless, American media created a visible space in which local people and geographies appeared simply as “points on a map or nodes in a network: in short, as targets [. . .] Ground truth vanishes in the ultimate “God-trick,” whose terrible vengeance depends on making its objects visible and its subjects invisible” (Gregory, 2004, pp. 53-54). The American people could not access the realities of these wars and their effects on the people there; they were only allowed to see what had already been created for them through a game of visibility.

Orientalism was revived after the attacks of 2001, reaffirming the West's role in making the Other more visible (Feldman, 2004). The history of the Other is invoked within a framework of blame for the terrorist attack. Answers to 9/11 were sought in the targeted sites in Afghanistan and Iraq, which were made visible and ultimately destroyed. American forces were publicized and made more visible. Military strikes were presented as “cinematic performances” rather than aggressive attacks that caused the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians (Gregory, 2004, p. 198); “spaces of constructed visibility are always spaces of constructed invisibility” (Gregory, 2004, p. 199). American soldiers were made heroes even though they broke the law and acted as if they were above the law; on the other hand, Iraqis were kept as “anonymous” and unknown mobs, and thus their agonies were invisible to Western audiences (Gregory, 2004, p. 198). American targets in Iraq were made visible, while locals were neglected and forced into a space of invisibility. American soldiers

were shown with their family relationships and romanticized characteristics, while Iraqi soldiers were shown without family or personal characteristics.

This study aims to uncover Western imaginative geographies and their colonial practices and implications in David Abrams' *Fobbit* (2012). The analysis is presented in two constructs: 'good Americans,' which examines the colonial implications of the representation of American soldiers, and 'bad Arabs,' which explores the connection between the novel's portrayal of Arabs and the American colonial presence in Iraq.

3. Analysis

3.1. Good Americans

In President George W. Bush's speech to the nation announcing the end of major combat operations in Iraq on May 1, 2003, he describes American soldiers as strong, kind, courageous, willing to face danger, and of good will (Bush, 2003). Gregory (2004) maintains that the imaginative geographies of the 2003 war created heroes out of American soldiers who broke the law. In Abrams' *Fobbit*, American soldiers on the battlefield are portrayed as concerned about the safety and well-being of Iraqis, despite the novel's critical and sarcastic approach to the war in Iraq, who seem ungrateful and sympathetic to the American enemies, the insurgents. The soldiers set up a cordon to keep the locals at a safe distance from an explosive-laden car stuck under an American tank. However, a young local child manages to escape the soldiers and find his way to the driver of the car, a Syrian insurgent later identified as "Swiss" (Abrams, 2012, p. 58), who is badly injured. Sergeant Lumley dismisses the idea of taking the child back and exposing himself to death for a "stupid" boy (Abrams, 2012, p. 29). The boy approaches the formerly "scowling" driver (Abrams, 2012, p. 29), who smiles at the boy and offers him water. The boy places the bottle between the man's lips and helps him drink, "cupping his hand beneath the blood clotted bread to catch drips. When the man finished drinking, he leaned close to the boy and spoke few words before his head rolled back against the head rest and he passed out" (Abrams, 2012, p. 29). As seen in the boy's behavior, Iraqis are emphasizing on an insurgent who is planning to inflict death on Americans, while Americans are risking their lives to protect Iraqis. The humane protective actions of the American soldiers are contrasted with the antagonism of the Iraqi people, where a child helps a "terrorist" (Abrams, 2012, p.16). The nationality of the driver, Syrian, then identified as Swiss, eliminates any quality of resistance as a foreigner and accentuates his being a terrorist. Even children in Iraq have compassion for those who target Americans, reflecting inherited antagonism toward Americans.

American soldiers are shown to be humane, even toward those who are enthusiastic about killing Americans for purely religious reasons. After Sergeant Lumley shoots the man in the explosive-loaded car in

order to save the lives of Americans and Iraqis, he reflects on the situation; he does not feel remorse for taking action, but there was always that nagging, niggling doubt: maybe hajji [Iraqi/militant] wasn't going for the grenade; maybe he was reaching to unbuckle the seat belt so he could come out of the car in surrender; or maybe it was just a final muscular twitch of a man who was already dead [. . .] Later that night, Brock Lumley would dream he was standing in front of a Whac-A-Mole sponge-rubber mallet in his hand. Each time the Syrian's head popped up, Lumley smacked it with the mallet. The head would burst like a balloon in a drench Lumley shirt with blood and viscera. Then another head, and another, and another (Abrams, 2012, pp. 39-40).

Even as he does what appears to be defensive and survival, Lumley is preoccupied with killing a man who is trying to cause the most death and destruction among Americans. The humanity of the Americans is contrasted with the ideologically based hostility of their enemies in Iraq. Gregory (2004) contends that "spaces of constructed visibility are always also spaces of constructed invisibility" (Gregory, 2004, p. 199). By showing these noble qualities of the Americans and making them visible, Abrams's novel covers the background of the anti-American feelings among the Iraqis, which is the unwanted presence of the Americans in their country, i.e., their colonial endeavor in their country.

The story of Kyle Pilley is another example of a noble American soldier in wartime. He is shot by an Iraqi sniper hiding in a van while his colleague is filming the incident. He miraculously escapes death when the bullet hits his thumb, saving his life. Realizing the source of the fire, he and his platoon pursue the men, who eventually get stuck in traffic. McKnight aims at the van's tire but hits "one of the terrorists, [. . .] the sniper himself" (Abrams, 2012, p. 213). After a long chase, one man is tackled while the other is shot by McKnight under the armpit, hitting a large vein. He loses big amount of blood, stops and sits down while the blood rapidly pumps out of his wound. He uses his own first aid kit to treat the man who fired his gun to kill him minutes earlier. He does not see the man as an enemy; he does his best to help a man who needs help; "I knew I needed to help him, no matter who he was" (Abrams, 2012, p. 214). Although the novel exposes the propaganda used by the U.S. Army to promote the war on Iraq, it ironically supports the image of some American soldiers as humane and caring, which masks the fact that they are there in Iraq primarily on unfounded pretexts (Gregory, 2004).

Americans in Iraq are shown trying to win the hearts of the the Iraqis. While the American Army distributes toys to Iraqi children to give Iraqis good impression of their mission in Iraq, insurgents use these toys to distort that image. In a weapon store, the Americans find some "Beanie Babies [toys] with hand grenades stuffed inside them [. . .] that some kid's gonna cuddle up with in bed at night" (Abrams, 2012, p. 249). Therefore, the

Americans stop the Beanie Baby program and confiscate all the toys and balls, “going door to door” (Abrams, 2012, p. 249) to protect Iraqi children, although it is the “most successful PR campaign, putting the happiness in the hands of deprived children” (Abrams, 2012, p. 249), conducted by the Army Public Affairs of the U.S. Army. Again, the kindness of the Americans toward the children is contrasted with the terrorist counter-effect of the insurgents; the noble mission of the Americans as well as the cruel efforts of the enemy are both made visible.

Although the novel consistently mocks officers like Captain Abe Shrinkle and holds him accountable for the consequences of his mistakes, he ends up receiving a greater punishment and thus becoming a victim. On one occasion, he shoots a man suspected of being a suicide bomber because of his heavy clothing in the hot Baghdad summer and his provocative movements near a gas station. After the man is killed, it is discovered that he is mentally ill. Suffice it to say, however, that the American soldiers are there primarily to protect the Iraqis who were there from a potential suicide bomber, which makes the Americans saviors despite Shrinkle's precipitation. They are there primarily to protect Iraqis from their suicide bombers; they are the protectors of Iraqis, albeit with some mistakes. In the same manner, Shrinkle throws a grenade into the cab of a perfectly good American fuel truck, completely destroying it. After extinguishing the flames of the burning truck, the Americans find the body of a burned Iraqi under the truck. Nevertheless, the local is not without fault, at least partially, for choosing to hide in such a place, or perhaps he has some hostile plans against the Americans. Thus, although he is a victim, he bears some responsibility for his death. At the end of the novel, Shrinkle, after being demoted and reduced to a gym attendant, is blown to bits by a mortar attack. His arm is burned only to “nubs” (Abrams, 2012, p. 336). His condemned killing of the “innocent man” (Abrams, 2012, p. 313) is unintentional, while his killing is clearly planned by the insurgents, making him a casualty of war rather than a guilt-ridden officer. The attack is launched while he is in the middle of a pool enjoying a can of beer, not on the front lines or in an offensive mission, reflecting his innocence. Even after his death, the place where Abe Shrinkle is bombed, Gooding realizes that Shrinkle “*would have been killed anyway, no matter how many times I pulled him out of that pool in my dreams. Death is relentless and unswerving*” [original italics] (p. 348). The way Abe Shrinkle is killed serves as an expiation of his sins and shows the inhumanity of the enemy, which concludes the story about the benevolence of the American soldiers.

3.2. *Bad Arabs*

Western narratives of the Other and the cultural politics of difference are the closed circle of interpretation in which the Other is quoted, represented and framed to serve the colonial project (Bhabha 1994).

Western representations are used to emphasize the Other's hostility, backwardness, and fixity, thus making it visible as the enemy (Gregory, 2004). In *Fobbit*, despite their humanistic efforts to protect the Iraqis, the Iraqis' sympathies are with the anti-American militants. When the Americans interrogate, through a translator, a boy who has offered a drink to the driver, an insurgent, of a car packed with explosives, he tells the translator that the man in the car wants him to tell the Americans,

“He is from Syria and his terrorist group has planned to launch many vehicle bomb attacks today and other attacks will follow. He says he is here to kill Americans and it is his supreme pleasure to follow Allah's will as he sends us to hell's flames. [. . .] Duret stared at the boy, who returned the look without cracking a smile. This was the problem with Iraqis, he thought. They believed everything they heard. Now this [taboo] is a hero in this kid's mind and he thinks he has earned a place at Allah's right hand just because he gave the [taboo] a sip of water.” (Abrams, 2012, p. 30).

After demonstrating how Americans are targeted by non-Iraqis, the driver is said to be part of a “group” involved in large-scale attacks on Americans in Iraq, reiterating the terrorist nature of the attacker. The religious animus against Americans is made visible and emphasized when the driver connects killing Americans to “Allah's will” and makes that his ultimate goal (Abrams, 2012, p. 30), like that in many post-9/11 novels (Alosman et al., 2018a; Alosman et al., 2018b). The boy is not innocent in this context, as he is shown to be complicit in this anti-American behavior by refusing to “crack a smile,” adding to his antagonistic qualities (Abrams, 2012, p. 30). He also indulges in such religiously based resentment against Americans. The novel implements the colonial representation of the Other as a simple entity who believes anything; Iraqis are naïve who “can be dumb as a sack of rocks” (Abrams, 2012, p. 240), and this makes them an easy target for manipulation, which also influences their children and increases their unreasonable hostility. While the basis for the American presence in Iraq is made invisible, the religiously based and unjustified animosity toward Americans is made visible.

Through colonial amnesia, the novel overlooks the culpability of the Americans for all the postwar violence and chaos in Iraq and instead tries to place at least a good part of the responsibility on the Iraqi insurgency. It erases the real reasons for the Iraqis' resistance, which is the presence of the Americans as an occupying power, and presents only their unfounded antagonism toward the Americans. In this case, the Americans are the saviors of the Iraqis. The novel shows how insurgent attacks cause most of the death inflicted on Iraqis. They target Shiite pilgrims at two sites and a mosque. Seven Iraqis were killed and dozens more wounded. American forces intervene and try to neutralize these radicals on the ground and from the air. Another extremist attack targets another site when a “terrorist” spreads a “false alarm” among pilgrims who panic and cause a stampede (Abrams, 2012, p. 277).

“The huge mob of pilgrims pushed and screamed, shoved and ran, jostled and tripped, the fallen trying to rise but being kicked down by more and more feet fleeing the feared blast zone, those at the edge seeing the surging human tide and turning, walking rapidly at first, then, as they felt the hot breath on their necks, also starting to run and tripping and falling and lying flat to be stomped and suffocated by all those sandaled feet [. . .] Dust clogged the air, swirled by screams and flailing limbs [. . .] People were crushed, their breath pushed from their lungs, their ribs cracked, their organs compressed, and the legs, arms, and necks of young children snapped like thin dry twigs” (Abrams, 2012, p. 277).

The event demonstrates the cruelty and absolute ruthlessness of the terrorists in inflicting death on innocent civilians during religious rituals. Children are also being killed and injured, some of them stomped to death, their fragile bodies broken and smashed, further demonstrating the brutality of the enemy. Beyond the American-protected areas, other Iraqi screams as he is tortured by insurgent interrogators. “The cold precise snip of pruning sheets removing a set of toes one at a time. The laughter, the scream, the “Allahu Akbar!”” [original italics] (Abrams, 2012, p. 367). Farther away, another mortar shell falls to the ground, followed by the wail of sirens. Like Americans, Iraqi civilians suffer from the same source of terrorism, which has no regard for human rights or religious considerations. Both Americans and Iraqis are placed in the same group of victims with a common enemy, the insurgency. The incident emphasizes the viciousness of the attackers, the parallel innocent status of the Americans and the Iraqis, and the role of the Americans as the saviors of the Iraqis.

The militants in Iraq are rogue extremists motivated primarily by their religious animosity toward Americans. They invoke their religion to inflict more death and destruction on Americans. Sergeant Gooding, a reader and admirer of Joseph Heller's anti-war novel *Catch-22* (1953) and Miguel de Cervantes' satire on war *Don Quixote* (1612), describes the frequency of attacks in his diaries, “*this instant, this nanosecond before the next bomb is detonated, before the next grubby thumb presses the remote-controlled cell phone trigger or the next zealous Muslim chanting “Allahu Akbar!” steers his car bomb towards a U.S. convoy*” [original italics] (Abrams, 2012, p. 323). Gooding is against their involvement in Iraq, “*the desert where we got ourselves tangled in a briar patch and stuck to the tar baby of terrorism*” [original italics] (p. 324). He is against the war, emphasizing “*the awful waste of this war*” [original italics] (p. 323), but he still could not comprehend his country's colonial status in Iraq and the Iraqis' right to challenge their presence. For Abrams, all those who target Americans in Iraq are ideologized terrorists who have no other agenda, such as that of anti-colonialism.

Despite the Americans' efforts to help Iraqis rebuild their infrastructure, their efforts are in vain because of

the bombing; “[w]e're blowing into a punctured bag” (Abrams, 2012, p. 96). They try to help the Iraqis modernize, while the locals push back and resist such help.

“These martyrs were speed-bumping the brigade's *real* work in and around Baghdad: the nation rebuilding that was in itself a constant struggle, suicide bombers or no suicide bombers. There were sewer lines to patch, electric substations to rewire, schools to build, backpacks to distribute to solemn-faced boys and girls, and local sheikhs to convince that what America brought to the table really *was* better than anything Saddam had offered during his decades of tyranny. *That* was the mission that was supposed to consume the larger percentage of his times” [original italics] (Abrams, 2012, p. 104).

Elsewhere, an American officer trains an Iraqi officer more than twenty times about the use of an M16 weapon. “The nod of the Iraqi, the raise of the weapon, the jerk of the trigger, and the wild shot that went high and brought down a goose that, until that moment, had been enjoying a peaceful migration south” (Abrams, 2012, p. 367). While Americans are shown to be interested in rebuilding Iraq and renovating its destroyed infrastructure, in helping Iraqis educate themselves and send their children back to school, helping them build their security forces, Iraqis resist and make it impossible for Americans to achieve their noble goals. Iraqis are being made enemies of themselves and of any good that is intended for their country. What is not mentioned, however, is the fact that the Americans themselves are the first to be blamed for the destruction inflicted on the country because they initiated a war based on unfounded pretexts (Gregory, 2004). The catastrophic effects of the war on Iraq's infrastructure are attributed to amnesia, a colonial amnesia that erases the negative effects of the war while accentuating the positive attempts of the colonizer.

Fobbit is a harsh critique of the war, but it does not escape Western colonial representations of the Other and his land. For Gooding and for the novel as a whole, Iraq is “*the desert where we got ourselves tangled in a briar patch and stuck to the tar baby of terrorism*” [original italics] (Abrams, 2012, p. 324). To his officers, each Iraqi “is a grain of sand beneath our boots – we never know which way he'll *shift* away from us” [original capitals and bold] (Abrams, 2012, p. 245). Iraq, like any other colonized geography, is a desert full of simple-minded but vicious people who resist the persistent colonial attempts at modernization. Abrams seems unable to escape what Said (Abrams, 2012, 1979) describes as the unconscious Orientalist mindset, relying on its stock images of Arabs and their lands, critiquing colonial war but with colonial representations of the colonized.

4. Conclusion and Implications

David Abrams' *Fobbit* (2012) exposes the means used by the US Army and media to polish a rather ugly

image of war and make it appealing and heroic. He presents a different perspective on the war as he shows the making of war news in the Army Public Affairs offices in Iraq and how stories are manipulated to serve the official narrative of the war. Nevertheless, his representation of the war, American soldiers, nationals, and Iraq is overshadowed by Western imaginative geographies of the Other that consolidate the colonial present in the Middle East. Americans, despite the misadventures of some, are largely humane and willing to offer assistance to the aggressive, ungrateful, and simple locals who resist American efforts to modernize and rebuild the war-torn country.

Iraq, like other Eastern countries in Western imaginations, is an uninhabitable and barren desert full of vicious people. As Derek Gregory (2004) argues, the colonial is still in the Middle East. This paper exposes the colonial and its practices and representations, and contributes to locals in Iraq challenging colonial representations and reclaiming the narrative as no previous studies have done. It makes visible the invisible agonies of the colonized, contextualizes them, and provides evidence to undermine the claims of the colonizer. This study has implications for the narrative of war in general and the American novel on the Iraq War in particular by revealing the hidden face of war and making its horrors on locals more visible, thus challenging the pro-war discourse and, hopefully, curbing future wars.

More studies should engage, expose, and challenge the colonial, its practices, and its representations so that local people can reclaim the narrative. Invisible and silenced agonies of the colonized should be given space to revoke the pro-war narrative or any civilizational or humanitarian claim of the colonizer. Wars cannot bring democracy and modernization; they only bring death and destruction and make life less livable for the vast majority of the locals. More studies of Western literature should be done to expose the colonial and defuse its imaginative geographies, as this study has done.

5. Limitations

This study focuses only on Western imaginative geographies and their colonial practices and implications, and is limited to David Abrams's novel, *Fobbit* (2012) and not all American war novels.

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