



Book Review. Yako L. (2021). *Bullets in envelopes: Iraqi academics in exile*. Pluto Press.

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Wars not only kill people in trenches but also erase nations' existence by destroying educational gains. Louis Yako's book *Bullets in envelopes: Iraqi academics in exile*, which was published in 2021, is a very critical book showing the enormous impact of the invasion of Iraq by the U.S. on higher education and academics. The destruction and restructuring of Iraqi academia can be seen as a political strategy to shape society, and Yako's book reveals this picture clearly and vividly.

Louis Yako is an independent Iraqi-American anthropologist, writer, poet and journalist. *Bullets in envelopes: Iraqi academics in exile* is a significant book as it makes cultural, political and epistemic contributions to our understanding of the problems in the academia of war-torn countries.

Bullets in envelopes: Iraqi academics in exile has two parts consisting of seven chapters. It has a rich bibliography section along with notes and index sections at the end. Yako begins the book with a preface sharing his views about why he chose Iraqi academics as the population, describing them as "near and dear" to his heart. In the preface section, Yako also gives insights about his personal experiences in a decade of exile and poignantly shares what he felt in the airport when he came back to Iraq in 2015. His immediate family members were not there to welcome him as they had all left Iraq, and he felt rather alienated. He furthermore notes that the post-US occupation Iraq can be named as "new Iraq", wherein language acted as a metonym in power configurations.

Bullets in envelopes: Iraqi academics in exile has a rich and encompassing introduction titled "The story of this story" revealing key features of the book. This section entails how the author's doctoral study turned into this book. The central questions, along with the contributions of the book, are presented in this section. In addition, important details about the research design and fieldwork have been provided. The introduction section also includes a chapter-by-chapter summary.

Chapter 1, titled "A nuanced understanding of Iraq during the Ba'ath Era", covers the dynamics of the Ba'ath period. The Ba'ath Party was founded in 1943 in Syria. It has branches in many Middle Eastern countries and was the ruling party

in Iraq from 1968 to 2003. The Ba'ath Party had a highly authoritarian structure advocating the formation of a single Arab socialist nation. While covering the dynamics of the Ba'ath period, this chapter focuses on the situation in Iraq before the occupation. To this aim, firstly, a brief overview of Iraq's history has been presented. The history of Iraq from the Ottoman times up to the times of the discovery of oil, along with Britain's invasion in 1920, has been addressed. In addition, the seizure of power by the Ba'ath regime in 1968 and its policies have been evaluated. One of the points underlined in Chapter 1 is the objective of the Ba'ath regime to create 'a new Iraqi man'. The author cites various scholars' works defending this point. The author defines the cultural and scholarly production in these years as "state-sponsored" by referring to Eric Davis' 2005 book titled *Memories of state: Politics, history, and collective identity in modern Iraq* (p. 21). The author ends the first chapter by referring to an interview he conducted with an Iraqi academic. The academic, in a tone that accused UN sanctions and international society, said the following: "They thought that a hungry nation would receive the invasion with cheering and flowers!"

Chapter 2 is titled "The Ba'ath Era: Iraqi academics looking back", and it has four parts. The first part deals with the lives of the currently exiled academics under Ba'ath rule. The author focuses on the stories of communist Iraqi academics and notes that the majority of these academics were fiercely opposed to Ba'ath rule. The second part deals with the issues of curriculum, fellowships and freedom of expression. The author refers to his discussions with Iraqi academics, one of whom is Sameer. According to Sameer, many academics were invested in countering the Western domination of knowledge production, hence the choices made in revising the curriculum (p. 36). The third part of Chapter 2 addresses women academics under the Ba'ath regime. Sura, one of the female academics cited in this part, says that the women under Ba'ath rule were not oppressed, but the post-1980 period was more regressive because of the attack. The fourth part is entitled "Religion and sectarianism under the Ba'ath". This part emphasizes the argument that both the political and religious players have employed sectarianism to reconfigure the academic space in Iraq.

Chapter 3 is titled "The UN sanctions: Consenting to occupation through salvation". This chapter covers the 13 years of the UN sanctions (1990-2003). The author notes that the years of the UN sanctions, according to most of his interlocutors, were the hardest times for them. Many academics believed that these sanctions were used as a tool by Western powers to force people to consent to the later occupation of Iraq.

In Chapter 4, titled "The occupation: Paving the road to exile and displacement", the author focuses on how Iraqi higher education institutions were destroyed and reconfigured after 2003. The main argument presented in this chapter says that the major methods that define the reconfiguration of power and the reconfiguration of the role of academics in post-occupation Iraq included death threats, sectarian violence, assassinations, and the wretched policies of "de-Ba'athification"

Chapter 5 is titled "Lives under contract: The transition to the corporate university". In this chapter, the author examines how exiled academics had been subjected to change: leaving the status of being vital actors with stable jobs before 2003 and then starting a life "under contract" in Jordan and Iraqi Kurdistan. According to the author, this change had devastating effects on their personal lives, scholarly projects, and the future of Iraq. The testimonies in this chapter show that the situation of academics is not separate from the ongoing corporatization of higher education in global terms. Chapter 6 is titled "Language as a metonym for politics". In this chapter, the author focuses on how the Kurdish language acts as a metonym for politics for the academics displaced internally. The author presents important insights into the social, cultural and historical aspects of the Kurdish language in Iraq. There are three sections in this chapter with the following sub-titles: the politics of language on campus; the social implications; do sad stories ever end?

Chapter 7 is the concluding chapter of the book titled "Final reflections: Home, exile, and the future". In this chapter, the author summarizes the key insights of the book. At the end, he provides a collage of Iraqi voices with their own words telling how they feel about home, war and loss. This chapter also draws a vivid picture of their hopes, dreams and aspirations.

Bullets in envelopes: Iraqi academics in exile is based on in-depth interviews with exiled academics. This book veers away from the so-called understanding of post-occupation Iraq – that of securitization – to focus on the experiences of several Iraqi academics who live in exile. The concepts presented in the book can be seen as a significant contribution to the literature. Louis Yako introduces the subject of Iraqi academics in exile with the concept of "genealogy of loss" to describe the ramifications of the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Last but not least, it can be said that the sui generis tone of the book diverts away from the colonial narratives and provides ample space for critical reflection. I strongly recommend Yako's book to everyone interested in knowing Iraqi academics' positions in the aftermath of the U.S. invasion of Iraq. *Bullets in envelopes: Iraqi academics in exile* is a must-read for everybody who wants to explore the sui generis stories of Iraqi academics through exile and displacement.