

Representations of the Other in Contemporary Travel Literature: The Case of Basem Furat

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Abstract:

Contemporary travel writing has demonstrated, in line with a conception based on the premise that the current culture of travel writing necessitates an exploration of the familiar and the common ground between the self and the other—moving beyond discourse on the strange and the fantastical—and considering that the critique of the other and its authority lie at the heart of its knowledge and the revelation of its perspectives, as travel writing in this period has sought to re-evaluate the self.

This research paper aims to elucidate the transformation of the contemporary travelogue and engagement with it through the journey undertaken by Basem Furat, entitled “Places That Beckon the Stranger” as a powerful image that embodies the essence of many contemporary journeys through active engagement in the pursuit of strategies aimed at liberation from the constraints imposed by underdevelopment. This endeavour involves a critical examination of centralised structures, alongside a deliberate focus on recognising and uplifting marginalised communities, transcending stereotypes, and articulating a discourse that reflects the consciousness of the intellectual engaged with societal issues and their disintegration.

Keywords: the self; the other; the contemporary journey; places that beckon the stranger.

1. Introduction:

If literature is the fundamental link between peoples and societies, and serves as a reflection of culture, beliefs, traditions and customs in its various forms and poetic and prose genres, then travel literature is the most prominent in this regard through the ideas and perspectives conveyed by travellers, and through their descriptions of nature and peoples, and their observations of religious customs, beliefs, ethnic differences and languages. All this is embodied in a literary form known as the travelogue or travel literature; in this text, the writer is not merely a narrator or author, but an interactive entity representing society and implicitly embodying what is known as the ‘self’, which collides with the civilisation and ideas of the other, thereby enabling the travelogue to

form an image that expresses the extent of acculturation and exchange between the self and the other, with all the breadth and comprehensiveness that culture entails.

In this context, our research paper addresses the model of the self and the other, or rather the representations of the Western other in the writings of the Arab self through a contemporary travelogue by the Iraqi traveller Basem Furat in his work **Places That Beckon the Stranger**; where we shall analyse the instances in which the traveller Basem, in the image of the self, was influenced by the Western civilisation he visited and in which he documented his journey and travels, in terms of vision and acculturation, the degree of difference and the re-evaluation of the margins, the features of mutual influence, and the traveller's blending of descriptions of the components of the other's civilisation with his own perspective on what he witnessed and heard there; Since each topic has a central problem from which it is grounded and from which it sets out to answer, the central problem of our research is as follows: What are the emerging artistic features in contemporary travel writing? The following sub-problems can be formulated:

- How is the post-colonial perspective represented in Basem Furat's work? Was he able to observe the transformations in contemporary travel literature?
- What inspired Basem Furat on this journey?

And this is evident .

2- The Conflict Between the Self and the Other in Ancient Travel Literature:

Travel literature represents one of the most comprehensive fields within the arts, humanities and cultural studies; it contributes to the exploration of the unknown and plays a pivotal role in uncovering truths, as we have previously noted. Consequently, the Arabs have historically devoted great attention to travel, setting out on journeys to seek the truth and discover nature, particularly whilst performing the pilgrimage and attending scholarly and literary gatherings. They travelled the East and West, visiting Europe and Asia, traversing lands and regions, reaching distant corners and provinces, and witnessing cities and routes, They would describe their journeys, document their exploits, and thereby glean details of the conditions of other peoples, including their customs, behaviours and way of life.

Furthermore, they portrayed their feelings and impressions with an accurate and honest description, combining imaginative flair with faithful narration. This is confirmed by the Gospel of Peter, which states: "Travel literature, then, is what can be described as realistic travel literature, which is the journey undertaken by a traveller to a country in the world, where he records a description of it and notes down his observations and impressions with a degree of accuracy, honesty, elegance of style and expressive power" . This requires travellers to possess a deep insight into various aspects, enabling them to delve deeply into these aspects to understand their fundamental nature and embrace the elements of pleasure, excitement and a passion for exploration; this necessitates a profound perspective on diverse experiences.

The concept of the journey, in addition to its literal interpretation as a physical expedition, is a symbolic representation rich in imagery that reflects the complex dynamics between the self and the other. This interaction serves to shed light on the mutual influence that exists between them, and the self's attitude towards the other reflects its sense of

separation from the other's representations -the Other- across various dimensions. In the context of the journey, it sheds light on the culturally different other, and the view of the other varies according to the self's perception of itself. Initially, the view of the other was one of hostility, as the other constitutes a constant threat to its identity and existence, and the self is keen to preserve its foundations. "And hostility remains a possibility even in the event of peace between the two parties... It thus becomes clear that people, whether neutral or belonging to a group, assume the existence of a potential enemy who constantly threatens their entity and identity." Through its confrontation with entities outside the scope of its knowledge, the self is compelled to question the other by scrutinising their practices, which include religion, customs, traditions and rituals. Nevertheless, we cannot stop at this point, which emphasises the antagonistic relationship between the self and the other as propagated by colonial mentalities, since every relationship involves both acceptance and rejection, given its positives and negatives.

Tracing the influence of the self and the other across different cultural contexts reveals the significant impact of Western cultures, particularly European influences, on the Arab self, most notably during the Renaissance period, which witnessed numerous campaigns targeting the Arab East characterised by Orientalist practices seeking to impose Western ideologies and epistemological frameworks.

These philosophical concepts have evolved to adopt a new perspective, extending from existential philosophy and the mechanisms of colonial discourse analysis to psychological studies, via cultural studies, where the 'other' has emerged as a focal point for evaluating the self in fixed terms "It can be said that we examine our reflections and thoughts on our own lives and understand them through the consciousness of other people." The Other implicitly contributes to shaping the internal image of the self; this interaction between these two fronts underscores the importance of studying the Other to reveal and define the geography of the self and its frame of reference, and to reveal the structural relationships between them. The issue of mutual influence between them is a given and natural, for "openness to the other is a positive movement and a natural law by virtue of the lives of peoples and nations; it compels them to interact with one another to deepen and enrich the human experience, and to supply it with constructive tributaries that revitalise and nourish it, yet it is subject to a set of conditions and constraints that frame it and define its boundaries, lest it become a factor in the destruction of cultural identity and civilisational selfhood, given the knowledge it carries that may challenge their doctrinal certainties".

Given that travel literature is fundamentally based on portraying the other in a vivid manner across its various dimensions to explore the self, it involves mingling with the other through travel and journeying. "For a journey into another's country, culture and circumstances is, at its core, a journey towards the self in one form or another." Travel literature has moved beyond the discovery of the cognitive dimensions of the other to an attempt to adopt a more comprehensive approach to strengthening relations with them, within the framework of revealing their essence and highlighting their tangible and intangible differences, viewing them as an entity distinct from Arab norms and values in an attempt to fathom the unknown.

ifying whatever was obscure, in order to craft a contemporary narrative in which the traveller's (the self's) awareness of the other is present.

In historical accounts of the past, we find that the portrayal of ‘the other’ varied according to the traveller’s perspective: some observed ‘the other’ as unfamiliar in terms of religion, belief and gender, whilst others described ‘the other’ as conforming to religion yet at odds with behaviour and morals; in this regard, some observed ‘the other’ as alien to the locale and differing in religious beliefs, whilst others were different on every level. As for the contemporary traveller, they have observed the ‘other’, confirming what their predecessors stated, whilst adding to this by revealing what had been kept silent, unravelling its details, and deconstructing its values and customs, examining their identity, and dispelling the inferior image that the ‘other’ might hold of the Arab self, given that the image of the ‘other’ does not merely represent the ‘other’ but consists of stereotypes entrenched in the Arab psyche, shaped by historical circumstances and cultural influences. The contemporary traveller undoubtedly seeks to reveal the self’s superiority over the ‘other’, broadening horizons and opening up all that was closed, and clarifying whatever was obscure, in order to craft a contemporary narrative in which the traveller’s (the self’s) awareness of the other is present.

The Contemporary Journey: Towards a New Horizon for the Journey.

Basem Furat’s journey, entitled ‘Places That Beckon the Stranger’, encompasses numerous elements that contribute to its depth and richness. These include his deep passion for poetry and his intense enthusiasm for exploration and photography, as well as his identity as a daring adventurer and migrant. The story of his travels unfolds against the backdrop of his experiences in exile, which have made him a transient figure crossing numerous countries across the globe, particularly those on the margins of mainstream attention.

Through his writing, he seeks to shed light on cultural differences and reveal the hidden aspects of each society by forging a deep connection with the region and immersing himself in the unique identity of each country. Frat’s innovative approach to Bedouin storytelling involves employing various strategies to draw insightful comparisons between Eastern and Western societies, not with the intention of favouring one over the other, but to objectively identify distinctive contrasts. In this regard, he says: “ ‘And if I make comparisons between peoples, societies and cultures, it stems from my belief that comparisons are for clarification, not for favouritism or disparagement.’ His approach, which transcends the merely surprising and strange, his sense of wonder at the new, and his obsession with writing about the different, has made contemporary travel writing an expression of the intellectual’s consciousness, his acceptance of its decline, and his resistance to the politics that caused this backwardness.

Whenever the traveller looked at himself and compared himself to others, he felt a sense of regret; this feeling then gave way to self-criticism, as if the journey were no longer concerned with outward appearances but had become an intrinsic requirement of the journey itself. The fact that the author’s textual presence is active does not imply that he was absent from earlier travel writings, but rather that he has acquired a distinctive presence, one that sets apart his perspective, his imaginings, his emotions and his visions as a sign of a new birth for the travel writer, more clearly defined as the focus on narratives that delve into subjectivity, taking shape in an emotional attempt to forge an identity that glorifies his personal experiences. Consequently, the scholar of this

contemporary literary genre focuses on the traveller's inner world, having come to the conclusion that there is nothing left to discover in this world with the advent of technology, If this statement indicates anything, it is that we are witnessing a shift from external-centredness to self-centredness, with the desire for discovery being replaced by a desire to discover the self. "The postcolonial traveller refuses to view the culture and civilisation of the non-Western 'other' through the lens of Western travel, anthropological and cultural discourse, ... but rather seeks to discover and understand the other through his own experience and adventure, even if it is fraught with danger." In this way, it becomes clear to us that the traveller on this journey takes us from a narrative of actions to a narrative of emotions; the contemporary travel narrative has become a revelation of existential tension, coexisting with the present reality whilst recalling the absent past, through vision and imagination.

In an effort to identify a clear shift in the approach to contemporary travel writing, it is undeniable that anyone reading **Basem Furat's Journey** will find the journey's objectives and responses scattered throughout the book's introduction, body, and even its title. Whilst there is a close connection between the title and the text of the journey, if we consider the title of **Basem Furat's Journey**— 'Places that beckon to the stranger', it takes on a metaphorical dimension that alludes to the pleasure of observation, imbued with the traveller's eagerness to create a sense of wonder and a captivating snapshot. Whereas in most ancient travel writings the title is clearly defined, indicating the genre of the text, misleading, sometimes brief, sometimes lengthy, most of them titled 'A Journey' with the author's name appended—this being done to identify the author and personalise his journey—there are new paradoxes emerging in contemporary travel writing, particularly in the title itself. We find the self intertwined with the recording of descriptions of the countries, as we see in the selected work "Places that beckon to the stranger". The reader will inevitably link this to the 'self' in the final word of the title, for it is the author who is a stranger to these places he has visited, which have sharpened his mind and led him to combine his literary, biographical and travel-writing styles. and the place is the space denoting a specific region in its aesthetic or fragmentary image; however, attributing this word to an additional construct gives it a metaphorical dimension: they are "places that beckon to the stranger"—places that embraced the stranger in his exile, weaving friendly ties between the marginalised and the centralised.

We cannot help but acknowledge that, however long or short these travelogues may be, and however much they may convey their content or draw the reader into the realm of questioning, they retain a particular symbolism that sets them apart from other forms of discourse.

Characteristics of postcolonial travel writing:

If the travelogue is a literary genre in which different cultures converge, "such that peoples benefited from one another, just as travellers perceive the differences between the various cultures in the countries they visited, and experienced the manifestations of civilisation in those countries—some of which may have become part of the traveller's cultural formation, whilst others may have constituted a cultural conflict in the traveller's thinking..." There are other aspects worth discussing in this blog, as it is not without several questions regarding the biased narrative—if that is the correct term—practised by

travellers through self-glorification, following a plot of various cultural narratives that create perceptions falling within those related to identity and the self. What is striking in this travelogue is the dominant presence of the author's self, whether in the first-person singular pronoun referring to the 'I', or the collective pronoun denoting the traveller and his wife who accompanied him throughout his travels. This presence imbues the journey with a subjective quality, as he infuses his journey with his habits, feelings, opinions and impressions, towards the themes he has chosen for the journey through commentary, the expression of an opinion, or the demonstration of a feeling.

The traveller celebrates the self within the paradox of difference, which is linked to the notion of the stranger—a concept arising from exile and distance—and carries a compelling significance. This is associated with Basem Furat's experience during his early travels, so the text's articulation of the meaning of alienation was rich, both in the title and within the text itself, portraying this 'stranger' in various discursive contexts; for he had not emotionally left Iraq, as it was ever-present in his book through various comparisons. He had not forgotten the homeland in which he had lived, and so he made these comparisons, saying: "Everything in Hiroshima is astonishing and close to the heart, ... because my passion for Hiroshima from the very first moments had never been felt before."

He added in another context, saying: 'How many nights have I spent strolling along your banks, and as I continue my walk beneath the bridge opposite our house, your waters rise and lap at my feet in an embrace, as if conveying greetings to me from the Tigris and the Euphrates. I shall never forget that night when, as I walked beneath the bridge, a wave suddenly rose and embraced me. At that moment, I neither felt nor thought of the wetness; rather, I wept—yes, I wept—because I felt that my longing for Iraq had been sensed by the two rivers, and this was their message.' And what is always noted about the traveller is his constant and deliberate evocation of the Euphrates and Iraq in his travel narratives; in other words, the traveller affirms his Arab identity and his longing, whilst within him grows the compulsive sense arising from exile and distance from the homeland.

And he stated in the same context: 'I am the son of the rivers; I am a descendant of the Tigris and the Euphrates. Is not my name, Al-Furat, named after the Euphrates River, on whose banks civilisation began, and where man invented writing and the wheel, and gave humanity its first poet, its first poem and its first epic?' The image of the stranger here reveals that the present remains merely a focal point for longing, and the traveller never strays far from the alienation that has surrounded him in every country he journeys to, especially given the association of the homeland in his name. This tone of speech expresses the extent of his ability to thaw the ice of Iraqi history and attempt to dispel the illusions that others have fostered, whilst the Arab self was the cradle of civilisations.

It is no secret to us that throughout this journey, Basem Furat has sought to respond in writing to all the nonsense propagated by Western thought and the media, with their singular agenda: to portray the Arab world as suffering from a cycle of death and terrorism, whilst seeking to destroy everything connected to Arab civilisation and its history, whose roots stretch back to pre-Islamic times. The catastrophe in Iraq served as a means to erase the Iraqi cultural identity, which was the cradle of civilisations; in the

same way, the distinct characteristics of the Arab countries were obliterated with the spread of globalisation among the oppressed peoples, and their identities were uprooted. This passage highlights the true dimension and the deconstructive vision that served as the principle for creating the imagery of the contemporary travelogue, through modern strategies.

Basem Furat revealed facts concerning the Palestinian cause and compared them to the Iraqi situation, attempting to champion this cause, which has witnessed the implementation of the Zionist project to build a Greater Israel on sacred Arab lands. He says: If many Iraqis have confused the behaviour of a population group governed by its economic and social conditions—conditions that give rise to economic and cultural class disparities—with a major humanitarian issue that is the most important in the world, and is there anything more painful than the displacement of a people and the bringing in of population groups from dozens of countries who have nothing in common but their faith, based on a claim of historical and religious entitlement?

This confusion has led to the creation of an image that has never touched reality; rather, the injustice suffered by the Palestinians has turned Arab sympathy for them into a poetic form of sympathy—if one may describe poetry as a metaphor and an alternative homeland for language, in which it achieves what no language can achieve in lived reality." The poet, with the eye of a creator, observes what he sees and interacts with it; thus, he presents us with images that are at times of architecture and the poetry of place, and at other times turns to history to capture its issues and the state of societies. and what took root in their hearts through his repeated wanderings was nothing but a fleeting sense of triumph over the various truths pertaining to Arabness, to expose the reality of the settlers in the Palestinian territories—a diaspora gathered from various corners of the world to a land whose people were openly oppressed, and who established a fictitious narrative, claiming the land belonged to them and that they had preceded the Muslims by centuries. This passage exudes sorrow and, in the name of the Euphrates, insists on refuting these claims by highlighting the connection between the Palestinian cause and the Arabic poetic language, as it is the only language that raises the issue in every era; through it, the Arabs affirm their stance against this falsehood and reject it in all its narrow-minded forms.

This forum revealed the political astonishment that raises political issues; we see the political behaviour adopted by the Jews to seize the rights of others, and this domination, power and false image were the product of cultural influences and Western support for their behaviour, as well as their exploitation of their sacred religion and its historical connection to this holy place, in order to grant themselves authority commensurate with the ideas they had adopted, which had a negative impact on the local community (the Palestinians).

The narrator of the journey says elsewhere: 'Ecuador and Colombia form Greater Colombia, which I want to be the nucleus of Latin American unity; but Simón Bolívar's dreams were shattered by dictatorship

From the journey of 'Places That Beckon the Stranger', we have observed certain perspectives on the 'other', which encompass various aspects of life as shaped by their experiences, customs and dispositions, and the sum total of their beliefs. Among these

perspectives are those that reinforce the aforementioned conceptions, whereby Cole sees that “the self grows through interaction with others”, and strengthens the bonds of coexistence between one community and another. It is this that drives this perspective within the relationship between the self and the other, whilst also generating a sense of belonging and forging connections with them through “shared goals, interests, beliefs and concepts... membership of which satisfies social needs, a need that is evident in the desire to live with this group”, it is therefore essential to uncover these manifestations, which is what the contemporary journey has achieved through a conscious, broad and comprehensive study of the West in a manner that expresses the active self.

Among its objectives is also to establish a horizon of communication and a bridge of mutual understanding for harmony and coexistence with the other, indeed to forge reciprocal relationships with them, by accepting their standards, values and behavioural patterns, and by mitigating the sources of extremism, intolerance and hatred, for many of the causes of extremism and hatred stem from ignorance of the other.

Basem Furat’s view of the other is built on a balance that he returns to when encountering them; if those scenes and visions do not detract from his values in any way, he accepts them with open arms; for he does not deal with the other emotionally, nor did he go to the West to understand it as he wishes to be understood by it.

The West, however, sought to understand these marginalised regions by saying: ‘Colombia, a victim of internal wars, drugs and mafia feuds, was loved by the peoples of the earth because it gave birth to a genius who planted his love in the hearts of millions of people... Colombia is Gabriel, and Gabriel is Colombia. I felt this as I watched the country celebrate him; I remembered Al-Sayyab, who had long been the target of his critics’ arrows... but the harshest arrows came when he was erased and removed from the poetry of one of them...’ This testimony reveals the Colombian people’s celebration of the magician of Macondo, Gabriel Márquez, author of **One Hundred Years of Solitude**. Despite the conflicts, upheavals and stereotypes associated with Colombia, these circumstances did not allow for the denial of Gabriel Márquez’s achievements.

This is the opposite of what the Arab literary scene experienced with the poet Al-Sayyab, and the author’s use of this contrast is significant in terms of the freshness of his vision, in that he does not succumb to the stock of ready-made images of the other, but rather discovers its full scope through the diversity of his perceptions and the multiplicity of his inner structure, shedding the mental images shaped by preconceived assumptions about him, to reassess his view following direct observation.

Thus, Basem Furat’s journeys have introduced a new consciousness into contemporary travel writing; the symbolism of the traveller’s awareness and the power with which he challenges the fallacies evident in various ideologies within the Arab reality constitute the essential characteristic that distinguishes this literary work.

Conclusion:

To conclude this article and as a general summary, we can say: Travel literature, or the journey in general, is a cultural source and a system that embodies a comparison between the self and the other. This has merged with the Arab sense of a cultural disparity between themselves and the Western world; thus, the Arab journey served as a revealing

reflection of this characteristic and a model for representations of the self and the other: the 'I' as narrator and the 'I' as society, and the 'other' as the society visited by the traveller. Through our examination of the image of the self and the other, specifically in Basem Furat's travelogue **Places That Beckon the Stranger**, we gain insight into many of the subtleties of this contemporary Arabic travel text. What distinguishes this text from the various approaches it adopts is that it does not excel in detail; nor does it favour either the self or the other; rather, it presents the positive and negative aspects of both through a humanistic cultural discourse aimed at bridging divides and alleviating the sources of hatred arising from ignorance of the other—a discourse that constitutes the essence of contemporary travel writing.

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