

The Coronavirus Pandemic in Arabic Novel: From Documentary Realism to Imaginative Literature

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Received: 20/08/2025

Accepted: 22/12/2025

Published: 28/03/2026

Abstract

Epidemics have played a significant role in shaping human consciousness, weaving their way into history and influencing its formation. The “coronavirus” pandemic, one that has both aggravated existing wounds and intertwined with the imaginative visions of creative writers, stands among the most devastating epidemics to afflict humanity. Therefore, this study seeks to offer an analytical reading of the Arabic novel that takes the coronavirus pandemic as its central subject, exploring the boundaries between reality and imagination. This is undertaken through an examination of selected Mashriqi and Maghrebi novels, in which authors articulate human anxiety, isolation, fear of death, the disintegration of relationships, and the reconfiguration of questions of identity. This article further aims to trace the manifestations of the coronavirus pandemic in the Arabic novel that emerged in the wake of the crisis by analysing its artistic and documentary dimensions.

Keywords: Coronavirus pandemic, Arabic novel, epidemic literature

1. Introduction

The literary text constitutes a truthful expression of the pains and sorrows of people. Humanity has experienced various epidemics, which have been recorded in diverse literary texts as writers respond to the circumstances faced by their homelands. With the advent of December 2019, the “coronavirus” (COVID-19) pandemic emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan, rapidly spreading across the world and disregarding spatial and temporal boundaries, as states hastened to contain it as much as possible.

To transcend this bitter reality and escape the inferno of the epidemic, writers took up their pens, expressing and depicting the spiritual and physical pain of “coronavirus”, so that the virus became part of the memory of literary creativity. Creators produced poems, poetic texts, short stories, novels, and plays. For novelists, the period of quarantine constituted a space for contemplative seclusion, in which they moved beyond empirical consciousness and connected

with possible consciousness by interrogating the depths of the self and revealing its anxieties, fears, suffering, isolation, and terror under pandemic conditions.

This article engages with novelistic texts that have rendered the “coronavirus” pandemic a central theme, thereby bearing witness to that human crisis and recording diverse perspectives. This prompts us to elucidate these perspectives by addressing the following problematics: How has the Arab novelist represented the “coronavirus” pandemic? What significations does the theme of “coronavirus” carry within Arabic novelistic creativity? Has the Arabic novel succeeded in presenting an image of the “coronavirus” pandemic in all its realities and dimensions?

In this study, we rely on the following novels:

- *Haribun min Corona* by Mustafa al-Qarnah.
- *Bergamo* by Mustafa al-Qarnah.
- *'Afwan Covid 19, 'A'idun Bila Arwah* by Amal Abdu al-Zu'bi.
- *Ghurba al-Manazil* by Izzat al-Qamhawi.
- *2020* by Naim Sabri.
- *Wahm al-Corona* by Hasan Ubayd Isa.
- *Khafafish Corona* by Ibrahim Rasul.
- *Mihnat Koro* by Raghad al-Suhayl.
- *Ayyam Hystiriyya* by Nasser Iraq.
- *Jaras Indhar* by Ibrahim al-Yusuf.
- *Sirat Humma* by Khalid Ahmad al-Yusuf.
- *Corona Zahra Rabi 'Iyya* by Fares Khashan.
- *Covid al-Ahlam* by Qamar Abd al-Rahman.
- *Tajalliyat Sajin al-Waba'* by Ibrahim al-Koni.
- *Rabi' Corona* by Ahmad al-Hadi Rashrash.
- *Ala'ib Khalid ma'a Corona* by Muhammad Ould Mohamed Salem.
- *Mudhakirat Tabiba Zaman al-Corona* by Amina Busaidi.
- *Al-Jasad al-Jarih fi Zaman Corona* by Mustafa al-Zawawi.
- *Ka Juththa fi Riwaya Bulisiyya* by Aisha al-Basri.
- *Layaliyyat Ramada* by Waciny Laredj.

This study seeks to achieve the following set of objectives:

- to highlight the efforts of Arab novelists in investigating the “coronavirus” pandemic;
- to reveal the devastating “coronavirus” pandemic that afflicted the entire world through the genre of the Arabic novel, which has articulated a specific theory of epidemic literature governed by particular parameters;
- to shed light on the themes of the epidemic in the Arabic novel by elucidating how the creative writer simulates his ordeal;

- to ascertain the novelist's capacity to observe this epidemic and its significance within novelistic discourse.

The methodology adopted in this study is inductive, as it is most suitable for uncovering the manifestations of the "coronavirus" pandemic in the Arabic novel and how the pandemic has influenced it while employing mechanisms of analysis and description.

2. Representations of the "Coronavirus" Pandemic in the Mashriqi Novel

Since the advent of the "coronavirus" pandemic, the Mashriqi novel has played a prominent role in revealing the tragedies it has inflicted on human beings. It has articulated thought and disseminated awareness, for the writer possesses a sensory consciousness that compels him to participate "in the issues of his people and the issues of the world around him, to depict his world in which he lives, to develop it and recreate it anew."¹

The novel *Haribun min Corona* by Mustafa al-Qarnah is considered among the earliest Jordanian novels that traced the course of the "Coronavirus" pandemic, linking it to previous epidemics that struck the world throughout history and examining their modes of transmission from animals to humans, ultimately leading to the weakness and fragility of human beings before the forces of nature.²

The author succeeds in embodying lived reality within an imaginative narrative framework in which the destinies of his characters intersect, united by the shared fear of the epidemic. He also highlights trade in wild animals as one of the most significant factors contributing to the emergence and spread of epidemics.

This same vision is reiterated in the novel *Bergamo*, which addresses the "coronavirus" pandemic in the Italian cities of Bergamo and Milan, both of which were transformed into global symbols of pain, death, and isolation rather than merely geographical locations.

The novel depicts the sudden intrusion of the epidemic into the city. At the same time, its inhabitants were engaged in their ordinary lives, going to work and celebrating the victory of their favourite team, when the epidemic was probing the city's points of vulnerability, namely, the homes of elderly individuals, until it spread uncontrollably. The characters found no means of communication among themselves except through social media, such as Facebook. Thus, the character Zulia sends a text message to the character "Corona", stating, "In Bergamo, morning was not morning. The sun retreats slightly, preparing itself for the beginnings that await it, and the birds leave their longings upon the trees..."

¹ Muhammad Ghunaymi Hilal, *Comparative Literature*, 9th ed. (Cairo: Dar Nahdat Misr for Printing, Publishing, and Distribution, 2008), 322.

² See Muhammad Ramadan al-Jabbur, "Reality and Imagination in the Novel *Haribun min Corona*," *al-Hiwar al-Mutamaddin*, May 21, 2020, accessed November 22, 2025, <https://www.ahewar.org>.

“Corona”, she replied to her with a text message: “Milan has changed its appearance and has become somewhat pale; the streets no longer greet the birds, and the gardens go to sleep early.”³

That evening, “Serafino” wrote on his Facebook page: “O cobblestone passages, I love you... I long to walk through those quarters, to wander in Piazza Vecchia, that delightful square...” and Serafino read the comments on what he had written.⁴

The novel thus reveals the fragility of humanity, the bitterness of loss, and the loneliness individuals experience amid the collapse of the healthcare system and the rising number of victims. The novelist combines realistic narration with an intellectual vision, lending the novel profound human and semantic depth.

The Jordanian novelist Amal Abdu al-Zu‘bi stands at the forefront of Jordanian women novelists who have profoundly depicted the coronavirus pandemic to the extent that she appears almost as the sole novelist in the country to have devoted herself to this subject. She embodies this in her novel *‘Afwan... Covid 19, ‘A’idun Bila Arwah*, by portraying human suffering during the pandemic. She narrates the story of a Jordanian family that emigrates to America in pursuit of a better standard of living; however, the “Coronavirus” pandemic soon emerges, prompting them to decide to return to their homeland. However, the dream of return remains the greatest of aspirations, and fears intensify after the husband contracts the virus. The novel concludes with the fulfilment of the wife's desire to return to her homeland;⁵ after her husband's death, nothing remains for her to regret in that exile.

The novel presents a profound human vision by depicting the psychological alienation that dominated the individual during the pandemic. The constant anxiety of the character “Suzan” and her psychological distress reflected her psychological and social experience, as illustrated in the narrator's statement: “She began her usual routine after entering through the main door... she removed her outer garments, shoes, mask, and gloves, placing them in the designated area for sterilisation, and went directly to the bathroom of her room to bathe and disinfect, as was her habit.”⁶

The novelist Izzat al-Qamhawi portrays in his novel *Ghurba al-Manazil* the daily realities of death in Egypt, immortalising the traces of the epidemic within a single residential building, through which he followed the lives of diverse protagonists during the “Coronavirus” pandemic. The epidemic is manifested in this novel through the enforced isolation imposed by quarantine, as the characters find themselves confined within themselves, confronting their fears and long-standing anxieties, such as fear of the future and fear of the city's collapse, as in the case of the

³ Mustafa al-Qamah, *Bergamo*, 1st ed. (Cairo: Dar al-Riwaya al-Arabiyya for Publishing and Distribution, 2021).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ See Muhammad Ramadan al-Jabbur, “The Psychological Dimensions in the Novel *‘Afwan... Covid 19, ‘A’idun Bila Arwah* by Amal Abdu al-Zu‘bi, September 18, 2020, accessed February 13, 2025, <https://www.ahewar.org>.

⁶ Amal Abdu al-Zu‘bi, *‘Afwan... Covid 19, ‘A’idun Bila Arwah*, 1st ed. (Amman: Dar Shahrazad, 2020).

historian Badi‘ al-Attar. As a result, he imposed upon himself a self-isolation even before the epidemic imposed a general lockdown, and he ended up dying alone, without it being known whether he was killed or died.”⁷ Thus, the novel underscores the fragility of the contemporary human being and his helplessness before an invisible virus.

Similarly, the novel *2020* by Naim Sabri embodies the “coronavirus” pandemic and describes it as a personal experience. The novel does not address the epidemic as a biological danger; rather, it is presented as a symbolic representation of political and economic upheavals, the actions of Trump, and the contestation among major world powers due to “Coronavirus”, as well as the fragility of human principles within a vessel overflowing with emotions. It conveys the focal point of early interactions in the spread of pandemic news.⁸ The novelist states, “Speculations predict a Turkish retaliatory strike to respond to the blow it has received, and here we are awaiting a new danger to be added to COVID-19, the Renaissance Dam, and the remnants of terrorists in the east in the Sinai desert. Analyses and discussions continue across satellite channels, and the level of nervous tension escalates amid this multifaceted chaos.”⁹

The Iraqi novelist Hasan Ubayd Isa, in his novel *Wahm al-Corona*, addresses the experience of the “Coronavirus” pandemic as a human event. He focuses on representing the state of panic, anticipation, and isolation produced by the pandemic and its indiscriminate devastation of human beings, without distinction between the poor and the rich. Within this atmosphere charged with anxiety and fear, the protagonist questions the boundaries of truth and the beginnings of illusion in a world where reality has become entangled with rumour and where fear has transformed into a force controlling individuals’ destinies and behaviours. He states, “I saw two of the mourners leaving the condolence hall, each of them concealing half of his face behind a green cloth mask, and fear suddenly overtaking me.

At once, I remembered the death that claimed the lives of the Chinese in the streets, and images of their final tremors crowded my mind as they breathed their last. I found myself identifying with them as I watched that dense death... Why did I stop after reading the sign?... Why did I enter the hall having recalled all that?... Now, while the deadly virus roams freely among our homes?

Will my offering of condolences be a reason for the deceased to enter Paradise?... Will my friend erase my friendship from the register of his friends if he knew that I did not attend to console him?... Or will I even cross his mind at all?... At that moment, I forgot all the phrases

⁷ Mamduh Faraj al-Nabi, “Ghurba al-Manazil: Stories of Fearful Characters Living in Isolation,” April 10, 2022, accessed March 3, 2023, <https://alarab.co.uk>.

⁸ See Asma Saad, “The Novel *2020* by Naim Sabri: Hope in Confronting a Year of Infection, Illness, and Death,” *Shorouk News*, December 3, 2021, accessed May 13, 2023, <https://www.shorouknews.com>.

⁹ Quoted in *ibid*.

of condolence uttered in such situations... I stood silent, imagining myself as the next victim of Corona, awaiting the moment when I would tremble with the shudder of death.”¹⁰

The text *Wahm al-Corona* is one in which the real and the imaginary intersect, revealing the transformation of societal fear from a transient condition into an active structural element within the narrative. It reshapes social relations and reorders human values in times of crisis. Thus, the text does not merely reflect the “coronavirus” pandemic but transforms it into an artistic instrument for interpreting the psychological and existential transformations that affect human beings when they are gripped by anxiety and fear.

Through his novel *Khafafish Corona*, the novelist Ibrahim Rasul presents a scathing critique of the ruling class in Iraq, which exploited the spread of the “Coronavirus” pandemic, exposing the reality of their governance founded upon corruption, injustice, and vice. The narrator states, “He began delivering resounding speeches to us, oscillating between intimidation and inducement, between a regime that had passed and another that had arrived. He recounted to us the advantages of the new regime and the democracy we had dreamed of in our rosy aspirations. We rose in cheers and applause for these newcomers, full of hope in them, for they were of our own kind and from the womb of our suffering. However, they differed from us in that they had not endured the torment of the previous regime; they fled abroad seeking asylum, while we remained, enduring the bitterness of misery and deprivation more severe and harsher...”¹¹

In his study of this novel, the critic Tahir Habib observes that Ibrahim Rasul’s use of the symbol “bats” constitutes a projection onto human bats who transmit sorrow and pain through the fabrication of falsehoods and the pursuit of rapid profit, which is sought by pharmaceutical companies. The narrator states, “Murtada insists that the company’s situation will not continue as it once did; it may soon fade and vanish, for competing companies have risen and begun to rival the company to which the master belongs. Who, one wonders, has the capacity to spread an epidemic of such magnitude and devastation? The World Health Organisation will adopt protocols agreed upon for treating this epidemic, yet the organisation is unaware of the drug that works against it, and perhaps it has an opinion unknown... Corona is advancing forcefully towards the poor; there is no justice even in the distribution of the epidemic, no justice in the application of the law, and no justice in anything.”¹²

The novelist Raghad al-Suhayl's use of the epidemic theme in her novel *Mihnāt Koro* takes a different direction, one dominated by symbolism. Her characters are invisible, powerful, and ferocious animal-like entities that are lethal to human beings. In this novel, the human being is narrated about, while the narrator is the invisible virus “Koro”, the germ that causes coronavirus.¹³ When the narrating virus describes Baghdad, it presents it from a new

¹⁰ Quoted in Baha al-Miri, “*Wahm al-Corona: A New Novel Published by Dar al-Nukhba*,” *al-Bawaba News*, December 23, 2020, accessed March 17, 2022, <https://www.albawabhnews.com>.

¹¹ Ibrahim Rasul, *Khafafish Corona*, 1st ed. (Baghdad: Dar al-Warsha for Printing and Publishing, 2021), 18.

¹² Ibrahim Rasul, *Khafafish Corona*, 110–126.

¹³ Raghad al-Suhayl, *Mihnāt Corona*, 1st ed. (Beirut: Arab Foundation for Studies and Publishing, 2023), 192.

perspective, drawing a broad, panoramic, horizontal scene as it roams its streets, alleys, and houses, thereby constructing for us a fresh, newly born world.

To it, the aeroplane appears like a winged capsule;¹⁴ moreover, the car is like a moving metal box.¹⁵ It perceives human beings as resembling carrion, possessing odours and producing waste, which causes “Koro” to feel repulsion. Moreover, it classifies them into giants and wretches them according to each individual’s capacity to eliminate them. Giants are human beings in general, whereas the other classifications, baseness, vileness, and malice, are attributed to the degree or capacity of each to destroy it.

Nevertheless, “Koro” falls in love, becoming enamoured of Ghazlan and living with her, nearly causing her death were it not for the assistance of her aunt, Dr Khulud, who works to raise people's awareness and help them avoid falling prey to the “Coronavirus” virus. The ordeal of “Koro” concludes with the dream of returning to the forest and reuniting it with its companions. The novelist has employed her specialised expertise in immunology and microbiology to signal the significance of the “coronavirus” pandemic and to outline a roadmap for confronting it. Addressing Ghazlan, she states, “Listen, Ghazlan, the transmission of the virus from animals to humans is a natural phenomenon that recurs throughout the history of epidemics... However, I had imagined that this pandemic would turn towards science, unify humanity, and steer its vessel towards safety. However, it seems that it will lead to further brutality... It is a detestable conflict between science and ideology, each seeking to impose its authority.”¹⁶

However, “coronavirus”, in the view of the novelist Nasser Iraq in his novel *Ayyam Hystiriyya*, has metaphorical significance. He employs the theme of the epidemic as a means of expressing several themes, including divorce and its complications, hasty marriages conducted via Facebook, the tragedy of loneliness experienced suddenly by the novel’s protagonist at the age of sixty, the issue of spinsterhood and delayed marriage in Egypt, and the problem of addiction among youth, along with its causes and roots. The author states, “*Ayyam Hystiriyya* is the eleventh novel in my creative career, and I take great pride in it. I wrote it during moments of extreme psychological hardship and difficulty, so that writing became a form of solace alleviating the intense pain that afflicted me. I also wrote it under the daily bombardment of the Coronavirus, as I was confined within my home, sorrowfully following the crimes of this killer and its spread from one country to another and from one continent to another...”¹⁷

The Syrian novel likewise kept pace with the “Coronavirus” pandemic and the pain and suffering it engendered. The novel *Jaras Indhar* by Ibrahim al-Yusuf documents the spread of the “coronavirus” pandemic through the eyes of a migrant, offering a vivid portrayal of the world’s response to the epidemic. It addresses sensitive themes such as isolation and fear,

¹⁴ Ibid., 219.

¹⁵ Ibid., 13.

¹⁶ Ibid., 191.

¹⁷ See “*Ayyam Hystiriyya*,” *Jadaliyya*, December 7, 2021, accessed June 20, 2023,

<https://www.jadaliyya.com>.

politics, and emotional relationships. The narrator states, “Imagine, yesterday I did not sleep for many reasons news of pharmacists and doctors from the homeland being infected. My friend, Dr Nahid from al-Suwayda, died yesterday after contracting the Coronavirus... The entire world stood helpless before an invisible virus, thousands of times smaller than the head of a pin... I felt deeply embarrassed; I had never said such words to anyone before the time of Corona, especially to an exceptional woman loyal, knowledgeable, between us is something whose codes and enigmas I am still unable to decipher as I should.”¹⁸

The narrator of the events is a Syrian who sought refuge in Germany, fleeing the war in his homeland; however, he emerges into what is portrayed as the greatest war in existence.¹⁹ The war of “Coronavirus”, which was “a strange kind of war: silent, cold, leaving neither shrapnel nor odour, filling neither the air with smoke nor gunpowder, nor leaving behind traces of destruction. It is a war in which one sees neither the muzzle of a cannon nor a guided missile. It is the most lethal and ferocious weapon of the age; it is biological warfare. One can, by releasing an infection through a virus or germ, defeat entire nations, destroy their economies, paralyse their movement, and declare a state of maximum alert, as although they were under external invasion.”²⁰

The Saudi novelist Khalid Ahmad al-Yusuf, through his novel *Sirat Humma*, portrays the condition of Saudi society before and during the spread of the “Coronavirus” pandemic. The two protagonists of the novel, “Dr Khuzayma” and “Hatim”, who are childhood friends, trace historical, geographical, and archaeological features during their journey between Najd and Hijaz until the epidemic spreads and quarantine begins. They both end up contracting “coronavirus”.²¹ Moreover, they adhere to isolation in their respective rooms, as “quarantine is considered one of the most important means of combating the spread of epidemic diseases.”²² The two friends remain together, consuming hot beverages and following a course of treatment. Hatim states, “I shall remain loyal and devoted to him, bearing hardship for his sake, to serve him in our shared illness. It so happens that we fall ill at the same time and in the same condition, and we shall soon recover, God willing.”²³ They recall their friendship, as “Abu Khuzayma” reminisces about some of his journeys. He is “a doctor specialised in archaeology”,²⁴ passionately devoted to the desert, addressing himself: “Here you are, in constant anxiety before

¹⁸ Ibrahim al-Yusuf, *Jaras Indhar* (Cairo: Arwiqa Foundation for Studies, Translation, and Publishing, 2022), 295–321.

¹⁹ See “*Jaras Indhar* by Ibrahim al-Yusuf,” *Asharq al-Awsat*, March 13, 2022, accessed April 11, 2023, <https://aawsat.com>.

²⁰ Mahmoud Muhammad Ali, *The Coronavirus Pandemic between Conspiracy Theory and Nature’s Punishment*, 1st ed. (Alexandria: Maktabat al-Wafa, 2021), 10.

²¹ See Yusuf al-Arif, “A Critical Study of the Novel *Sirat Humma* by Khalid al-Yusuf,” *Fargad Creative Group*, August 14, 2021, 11:25, <https://fargad.sa>.

²² See Salih ibn Ahmad Rida, *Scientific Miracles in the Prophetic Sunnah* (PhD diss., Omdurman Islamic University, Sudan, 1995), 547.

²³ Khalid Ahmad al-Yusuf, *Sirat Humma* (Dammam: Markaz al-Adab al-Arabi, 2021), 207.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

the miracle of the desert with which you have been captivated, especially after your repeated visits to the enchanting lands of al-Samman, as you describe them. Its spring, trees, seasonal plants, and the sight of grazing herds in continuous movement from one meadow to another inhabit you. The camels, with their striking colours, draw you in... the scattered black Bedouin tents among the grasses captivate you.”²⁵

The Lebanese novelist Fares Khashan, in his novel *Corona Zahra Rabi 'iyya*, presents the “Coronavirus” pandemic, through which he reflects the present and the traces of the past, wealth and bankruptcy, democracy and dictatorship, ruler and ruled, social diversity and racial disparities, illness and crime, survival and death, smiles and tears, faith and atheism, prayer and disbelief, hope and despair, loyalty and betrayal, the dream of migration and the longing for return, morality and stratagems, solidarity and selfishness, prayer and hallucination. Thus, the “coronavirus” pandemic has become a catalyst for reflection on the meaning of existence and human destiny.

The Palestinian novel likewise employed the “coronavirus” pandemic to instil guiding values among young people, as exemplified in Qamar Abd al-Rahman's *Covid al-Ahlam*, which addresses social relations within Palestinian society and the need to maintain balance in terms of giving and receiving. It states, “The feeling of love means experiencing joy and happiness”. It also focuses on the challenges faced by women in Palestinian society, asserting that “women must learn the art of love and how to make themselves attractive through continuous learning, culture, and giving to create a confident and educated generation. However, all this often does not occur in our societies, because no one provides women with books, lest their eyes open to a beautiful world that would enrich their routine lives.”

Thus, across all the novels, whether explicitly titled after the epidemic or bearing indirect titles that indicate its devastation, the human being remains the central subject.

3. Representations of the “Coronavirus” Pandemic in the Maghrebi Novel

The creative productions of Maghrebi novelists have multiplied in their attempt to provide a photographic image, imbued with an imaginative and literary creative touch, of the “Coronavirus” pandemic, much like their Mashriqi counterparts.

In Libya, Ibrahim al-Koni authored the novel *Tajalliyat Sajin al-Waba'*, in which he states, “The value of any creative work resides in its stance towards mythology; it resides specifically in the place that belongs to the substance of creativity. This means that the value of place lies in the mythology of place, for it is this mythology that creates the identity of place.”²⁶ The novel explores the psychological and emotional depths of human beings, as well as their intellectual dimensions, during the days of “coronavirus”. Quarantine thus transforms from a temporary health condition into a profound existential state, prompting the novel's characters to reassess their relationships with others and with themselves and to question their own selves and

²⁵ Ibid., 6.

²⁶ Ibrahim al-Koni, *Tajalliyat Sajin al-Waba'* (Beirut: Arab Foundation for Studies and Publishing).

destinies. This gives rise to narratives that rely on interior monologues and philosophical and existential reflection on the meaning of isolation, death, and survival.

The Libyan novelist Ahmad al-Hadi Rashrash, in his novel *Rabi ' Corona*, portrays humanity's suffering during the spread of the "Coronavirus" pandemic and its consequences, including quarantine, border closures, and the paralysis of daily life. He states, "A deadly epidemic struck the Chinese city of Wuhan, rapidly transforming into a global pandemic known as the coronavirus (COVID-19)."²⁷

The novel narrates the story of a Libyan student named "Umar", who is pursuing a master's degree in electronic media at Shanghai Jiao Tong University in China, accompanied by his brother "Sulayman", who resides with him in Beijing. With the outbreak of the "coronavirus" pandemic, the protagonist, "Umar," is compelled to leave China and return to his country, Tunisia.

The Mauritanian novelist Muhammad Ould Mohamed Salem, in his novel *Ala 'ib Khalid ma'a Corona*, addresses the nightmarish atmosphere brought about by the "Coronavirus" pandemic by focusing on the suffering of a Mauritanian child who moved to live in the United Arab Emirates after having lived in a popular neighbourhood, where he had formed friendships. With the outbreak of the epidemic, he found himself deprived of going out and struggling to adapt to the harsh reality because of isolation and social distancing imposed by health measures to confront the virus. As quarantine measures intensify, the child remains in contact with his cousins and friends in Mauritania, who tells him about the games they play and the freedom and happiness they enjoy in their popular neighbourhood in Nouakchott, which had not been affected by lockdown and curfew measures. Memories resurface, his longing rekindles, and his sorrow intensifies. He decides that he must travel, prepares his suitcase, and approaches his father to ask him to buy a ticket for his return to his homeland. He resolves to return, and the novel concludes with the triumph of human will and the restoration of a beautiful life.²⁸

The Tunisian novel has also depicted the epidemic and its daily realities through *Mudhakirat Tabiba Zaman al-Corona* by Amina Busaidi, which recounts the efforts of Tunisian doctors to confront the pandemic. It describes a love story between a female doctor and her patient infected with the "coronavirus", who transmits the virus to her, leaving her bedridden in a shared room with him. The novel concludes with the death of the beloved and the deterioration of the doctor's condition,²⁹ as death places bare the falseness of human relationships and highlights social selfishness.

²⁷ Ahmad al-Hadi Rashrash, *Rabi ' al-Corona*, 1st ed. (Cairo: Dar Umm al-Dunya for Studies, Publishing, and Distribution, 2023), 36.

²⁸ See *Ala 'ib Khalid ma'a Corona*, a novel by the Mauritanian Muhammad Ould Mohamed Salem, accessed October 22, 2025, <https://www.omandaily.com>.

²⁹ See Abd al-Rahman ibn Ahmad al-Sabt, "The Impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic on the Features of Novelistic Characters (*Mudhakirat Tabiba Zaman al-Corona* by Amina Busaidi as a Model): A Descriptive Analytical Study," *Journal of Sharia Sciences and Arabic Language* 7, no. 2 (2022): 377–378.

Numerous creative works addressing the “coronavirus” pandemic have also emerged in Morocco, such as the novel *al-Jasad al-Jarih fi Zaman Corona* by al-Mustafa al-Zawawi, which documents the pandemic and reveals the panic it engenders and the harshness of quarantine.³⁰ The narrator states, “The sun of February set with the increasing number of infections in several countries of the world, foremost among them Italy, France, Germany, and then the United States of America, followed by some Arab countries, as reflected in the headlines of published newspapers... In the face of this situation, the individual was afflicted by an obsessive-compulsive state, the symptoms of which were manifested in the pathological tracking of what was broadcast on foreign and local channels, on WhatsApp, and across social media networks...”³¹

The novel *Ka Juththa fi Riwaya Bulisiyya* demonstrates the novelist Aisha al-Basri's ability to transform real events, however harsh or painful, into inspiring artistic works that touch the reader's conscience and provoke philosophical reflections on life, death, and human existence under exceptional circumstances.³²

Through the interrogation of her protagonist “Sa’ida”, the writer reveals “the submission and subjugation that strip the Arab woman of her agency, as evidenced by the investigator’s manner and harsh tone in communication, in addition to the baseness with which his assistant treated the case, suppressing her on more than one occasion.”³³

The novel *Layaliyyat Ramada, Taratil Mala’ikat Covidland*, by the Algerian writer Waciny Laredj is considered among the earliest Algerian novels to address the theme of the “coronavirus” pandemic. It portrays the struggle of individuals with the pandemic by confronting death through art and addressing themes associated with the epidemic, such as death, love, and fear. It also seeks to expose the political and social repercussions of the pandemic that afflict Algeria, as they do other countries of the world. “Ramada” states, “The name of my father or my grandfather does not matter; the former killed me with the knife of ignorance and rigid certainty, and the latter imprisoned me in a history that has been of no use to me.”³⁴

This novel surveys the fluctuations in epidemics and diseases throughout history and the human losses they have caused. It also designates the name “Covidland” for a city that continues its resistance to this day, a city of the epidemic through which it addresses the epidemic on the one

³⁰ See Abd al-Rahman al-Sufi, “Narrative Manifestations and the Violence of Coronavirus Time in the Novel *al-Jasad al-Jarih fi Zaman Corona*,” *al-Hiwar al-Mutamaddin*, September 12, 2020, accessed April 15, 2025, <https://www.ahewar.org>.

³¹ al-Mustafa al-Zawawi, *al-Jasad al-Jarih fi Zaman Corona*, 91.

³² Hasan Lamin, “*Ka Juththa fi Riwaya Bulisiyya* (Human Reflections in the Time of the Epidemic),” *Diwan al-Arab*, 2024, accessed January 19, 2025, <https://www.diwanalarab.com>.

³³ Sufyan al-Burraq, “*Ka Juththa fi Riwaya Bulisiyya*: Aisha al-Basri Narrates Human Life during Coronavirus,” January 23, 2023, accessed February 8, 2025, <https://www.alquds.co.uk>.

³⁴ Waciny Laredj, *Layaliyyat Ramada (Taratil Mala’ikat Covidland)*, 1st ed. (Algiers: Manshurat Baghdadi, 2021), 13.

hand and “Coronavirus” on the other. “Ramada” states, “Covidland is a city that is like a homeland... since Covid, life has almost entirely withdrawn from Covidland... for a long time, I have not seen the city in its expanse; in my refuge in the laboratory, there is nothing but suspended circles and the scent of death, whose reach has greatly expanded... everyone is in hiding, waiting for another sky. The large new mall, where people once found some comfort, has closed; even the mosques have closed... even the mosque of the Scala Heights that we once passed by...”³⁵

The novel thus focuses on the impact of the pandemic on human relationships within the family and society, revealing the psychological transformations that have affected individuals, the extent of human fragility in the face of illness, and the disintegration of social bonds in the time of “coronavirus”.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, several findings of this study can be summarised as follows:

- The Arabic novel has rendered the “coronavirus” pandemic in a distinctive, realistic manner, conveying the feverish daily realities of the epidemic, the laments of the Arab individual, and his flight from inevitable death, thereby touching the hearts of all who experienced the period of “coronavirus”.
- The Arab novelist has documented the “coronavirus” pandemic, with its pains and daily occurrences, transforming it into narrative imaginings that simulate the daily struggle with the epidemic and the death that has troubled humanity.
- Arabic novel coronavirus has translated the epidemic symbolically, endowing it with multiple meanings that reveal a degraded reality across political, social, economic, and cultural levels while portraying the painful events people around the world have experienced.
- The Arabic novel has kept pace with contemporary reality and expressed it in literary terms, thereby constructing a rich world grounded in reality. It has also demonstrated the Arab novelist's capacity to engage with major transformations and absorb collective shocks, expressing human anxiety, isolation, and fear while simultaneously revealing a critical awareness of society and the self.

Thus, the Arabic novel once again affirms that it is a mirror of reality and an instrument for understanding the human being in moments of profound rupture.

- The Arabic novel about coronavirus has combined human experience on the one hand and creative invention on the other.

³⁵ Waciny Laredj, *Layaliyyat Ramada (Taratil Mala'ikat Covidland)*, 75, 102–103.

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