



EXPLORING THE DAILY HORRORS OF LIFE IN IRAQ THROUGH FRANKENSTEIN IN BAGHDAD

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Abstract

*Iraqi writer Ahmed Saadawi's 2014 International Arabic Fiction Prize-winning book *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is the subject of this article. I contend that Saadawi identifies the origins of the terrorism. Since the United States took over the country. Rooted in terror is apprehension. Judith Butler describes the current state of affairs as "a precarious life," where the threat of violent death is ever present, and the breakdown of central authority has released the monster of fear. Furthermore, new Iraqi actors' power struggles breed egotism, demagoguery, and exploitation. Recognizing that everyone is responsible is an essential theme throughout the book. A possible escape from the horrors of the civil war and slaughter would be possible if people would only accept responsibility for their actions and recognize that no one is ultimately a victim or a perpetrator.*

Keywords

Arabic fiction, Frankenstein in Baghdad, Saadawi, Terrorism in Iraq.

INTRODUCTION

As the International Arabic Novel Prize winner in 2014, Iraqi author Ahmed Saadawi uses the narrative of Mary Shelley's monster in *Frankenstein* to represent the horrors of life in Baghdad in the aftermath of the American occupation in 2003. Saadawi's work is titled *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. A. Saadawi manages to pinpoint the cause of the terrorism that has plagued Iraq since then, which originates from the *Frankenstein* in every one of us and is unleashed by the fear of what Butler (2004) has referred to as "a precarious life" (p. XVIII), whereby sudden and violent death always looms large and which is entirely dependent on the actions of people whom we do not know and whose incentives we are unable to comprehend. Since the days during the Baath Party's reign, when brutality was the primary instrument in the state's arsenal of techniques to subjugate the people and ensure submission to the one-party rule, fear has been ingrained in the lives of Iraqis. This fear has been a constant presence throughout the decades. Via the use of severe sanctions for any acts of disobedience, as well as via a network of spies and informants,

the state instilled terror in its population. This fear caused the typical Iraqi to be afraid of expressing their political ideas, even to their closest friends and family members. Unfortunately, the atmosphere of terror did not cease with the demise of the previous administration. This is because the occupation of Iraq and the failing policies of the Provisional Authority of the Coalition led to an increase in bloodshed and sectarian fighting. This book aims to analyze the cause of the surge in terror and violence in the years that followed the occupation of the territory. It also chronicles the tale of the violence that broke out following the occupation.

He is a skinny, drunken bric-a-brac trader who chooses to gather the body pieces of individuals who have been slain in terrorist attacks and puts them together as a cadaver. The book relates the narrative of Hadī al -‘Attāk, a character in the novel. After the lost soul of a victim of a terrorist bombing strike joins the corpse, the monster comes to life and begins a mission of vengeance to punish the murderers who have slain the individuals who gave him each part of his body. Meanwhile, the creature commands a group of followers committed to his cause. In the metropolis of Baghdad, where being a few minutes early or late to a location may often mean the difference between, for example, dying in a car bombing or nearly avoiding death but seeing the awful spectacle of mangled corpses and ruin, the monster is a terrifying presence. That brutal death does not carry any promise of healing or "sublimity," but instead acts as a marker and precipitator of ultimate degradation and waste. This is even though many thousands of Iraqis have perished since the occupation began on of (Cole's, 2009,p.90)

The monster commands a group of devoted followers who congregate around him, expecting that he will guide them out of the turmoil and into a place of safety. As a consequence of his actions, he becomes the focus of attention from the media and the state security apparatus, both of whom have a significant interest in him. The journalist who writes regarding him and popularises his narrative, as well as the Brigadier-General who is attempting to apprehend him, are among the individuals whose stories we learn about. Additionally, we learn about the experiences of some of the people who live in the neighborhood of Batawyīn, which is the place where the monster seems to have been "born."

Almost like a character in the tale is the Batawyīn neighborhood in Baghdad's Rusafa District, home to a Christian minority. It has a multi-faith history that has shaped the Iraqi people and their national identity, beginning with Jewish, Christian, and Muslim influences. Hassan (2016)"To write an account of communities at war is the transition from national story to one centred around urban communities," the author contends. This is particularly evident in Baghdad, where the ethnic and religious composition of various neighborhoods greatly influences how each neighborhood experiences conflict.

she was Residing there. Because of its rich history and diversified population, Batawyīn was selected by the author. Therefore, it might be seen as a study of a miniature Baghdad, along with themes of terror, aggression, fairness, vengeance, and free will. Feelings of loss and sadness are portrayed in the book, and Delves into the dictatorial regime's lasting impact on Iraq, which poses a challenge to the country's aspirations for reconciliation.

The Monster's Creation: The Father

To draw attention to the predicament of the average person, the author gave the animal a plebian father. Hadī al-‘Attāq, in contrast to the aspirational Victor Frankenstein, works at a menial job rummaging through

people's trash in search of housewares to sell to underprivileged individuals who cannot buy new ones. He is an outcast, an impure old guy living on the periphery of civilization. What motivated this guy to go on his divine creation mission?

Nahim 'Arankī is the spouse of Hadī al -'Attāq. He gathers trash to sort through later in his partner's horse-drawn carriage. He lived with Hadī at the ancient home, known as the Jewish Collapse, before getting married and moving to a new home. He was much younger and more traditional than Hadī; he was like a son to him. However, one day, a bomb goes off in the street, killing him and his horse in the process. Nahim 'Arankī 's flesh and horse meat mixture represents his dehumanization. The attendant instructs Hadī to construct a corpse by joining a hand from this place and a head from that place when he goes to get his partner's remains from the mortuary. Hadī suffers from depression for a while, but he soon gets down to work and makes the decision to patch together human body pieces left behind after every bombing cleanup operation. He refers to this monster as Shesma (whatever its name is) as he is at a loss for words. Hadī expects the body pieces to be removed from the trash and assembled into one with some dignity. His only wish is to see the one dead adequately buried. The nose completes the body as the last component. Later on, he considers dismembering the corpse once again, but before he can act, the hotel guard's wandering spirit finds sanctuary in the body, bringing Frankenstein back to life.

Hadi is the protagonist because of his act of creation; in the sense that Hannah Arendt differentiated between action, labor, and work, Hadi is the starter of action. Hadi's everyday work of maintaining his biological existence includes gathering trash, but creating elevates him to a new plane because, as Arndt (1998) states, "action has the closest connection with the plight of humans of natality; the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the outside world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting." He stands out from the other protagonists in the novel because he chooses to take action rather than react. By any standards, his goal of giving the unbelievable individuals who were slaughtered and forgotten a grievous existence is admirable. Hadī's act of creation is his last stand for human dignity, for both the dead and the living who, in the words of Simone Weil (as stated in Balibar, 2015, Afterward), were "an alternative human species, a hybrid of man and corpse." Like his companion Nahim 'Arankī, these individuals "have become things for life." According to Balibar (2015), "There is no play, no space, and no opening for any activity that comes from somewhere in their days."

Hadi is a creator in the sense of the arts and the inventor of the Shesma. He is an expert storyteller and scavenger who works to fashion something beautiful from the remnants of humanity he comes across. He relates the monster's tale to the patrons of "Azīz al-Masri." Café. He would tell you everything about how he built the Shesma and vanished into the night in exchange for a free supper or the cost of a bottle of vodka. Many people are drawn to his narrative, including Maḥmūd al-Sawadī, a journalist for the magazine he works for, who covers it and raises awareness of the Shesma nationwide. Hadi makes errors from time to time. He attempts to persuade the Chaldean woman who lives next door, Elishua, to sell him the figurines she had in her home. However, unlike Faraj, who was the realtor, he is not motivated by avarice or a desire to seize other people's assets. Instead, his only goal in life is to survive. He stands out from the crowd and keeps himself afloat as a character because of his acting skills rather than just his labor. In addition, he harbors some misgivings about the creature and feels somewhat accountable for

his actions. However, neither Thesma nor the other characters in the narrative take him seriously as a parent; instead, they see him as a humorous diversion. Later on in the narrative, however, things take a more dramatic turn when Hadi's home is raided by the soldiers of the Brigadier General, who beats him almost to death and removes his little possessions. Upon his injuries from the last bombing after the book, the authorities declare him to be Frankenstein and take him into custody.(Butler,2004,p.56).

The Shesma inherited his father's gift of captivating audiences with his tales. He is also a marginal figure who cares for others who have been abandoned and wronged, just like him. Frankenstein repeats the tale of thousands of ordinary individuals killed for the leader's survival and growth by allowing Hadi to be imprisoned and used as a scapegoat at the end.

The Monester's Mother

In contrast to the monster from Frankenstein, the Baghdadi monster is born of a mother. After the hotel security guard's soul finds a new home in that body after losing its original one, the new monster is born. Unclothed and bewildered, he departs from Hadi's shed and ascends. To the home that sits next to Elishua's. "A Chaldean," Amid the novel's chaotic setting, the only steady figure is the elderly Elishua. Even when her husband passed away, and her two daughters emigrated to Australia, she remained steadfast in her determination to wait for her son Daniel, who was conscripted to serve in the Iraqi-Iranian War twenty years ago but never returned. She finds strength in her belief in her son's homecoming; despite her daughters' offers to go to Australia and Faraj, the realtor's insistence on purchasing her property, she remains steadfast in her rejection. That Saint George, her patron saint, would fulfill her desire and return her son is something she believes in with all her heart.

Christian and Muslim women in the area feel conflicted about her. They find her living alone in her seven-bedroom home insane, yet some see her as a lucky lady who keeps terrorists at bay. It seems like everyone around Elishua is eager to have her removed. The older woman must be exceedingly courageous to stand firm despite overwhelming odds, as she is alone and has no one to lean on for help. She symbolizes the country's old past, which more recent eras have almost erased. An era of Islamic sectarian strife is making her an increasingly rare exception. Her home was close to the Jewish Ruins, which is just another example of how complicated the nation's past and present are. Elishua cannot accept her son's death. This loss even more characterizes her existence.

Then, with the departure of her two daughters and the death of her spouse, when hundreds more young men were losing their lives, her neighbors showed little concern for the loss of one. However, she has been hating him for twenty years. She has faith that her patron saint would reunite her with him. Thus, she recognizes Frankenstein as her son when he climbs to her home from Hadi's shed, gives him her son's clothing, and treats him with his wounds. She purchases meat the next day, dons a red bandanna, and informs her neighbors that her kid has returned to her. This marks the end of her grieving. She accepts Shesma as her son, ending her twenty years of depressing wait for her son. Does she think it is Daniel, however? What is the significance of her embracing Shesma and, later in the book, her grandson Daniel, who returns from Australia and persuades her to accompany him and his mother as stand-ins for her own Daniel?

Elishua's acceptance of the replacements for her son can be interpreted, in the context of early Freudian

analysis of melancholy and mourning, as an act of cutting the emotional tie to the lost object and making herself available for a new investment in a different object, or in a different son that is even younger and reminds her of a time when she was a young mother (Lerner, 2007, p. 46). Judith Butler, however, views the act differently, seeing it as a component of her effort to "preserve the object as part of the ego" (Lerner, 2007, p. 47). In "Melancholy and the Act," Slavoj Žižek (2002) dissects the connection between melancholy and sorrow and refutes the idea that melancholy is an act of loyalty while mourning is an act of betrayal (p. 658). So, putting a stop to her grieving does not mean that she is abandoning her Iraqi heritage. The elderly mother decides to go, maybe to support her grandson's identity preservation since he does not speak Arabic and is likely to integrate into Australian culture. Her departure is representative of the situation faced by Iraqi Christians who have no military backing from their tribes or sects and are forced to leave their country. In addition, she wishes to spend her last days in peace with her daughters and grandkids and forget about the horrors of past and contemporary conflicts. She thus considers bringing her patron saint's image with her before departing. When she finally pulls out a pair of scissors, she removes the saint's heavenly face—which resembles a halo around his head—leaving the dragon, the sword, and the shield in place. In a symbolic sense, she is letting go of the memories of conflict and the dualism of good against evil to preserve solely the tranquil recollections of happier times. Elishua stands for remembering in this period of mass forgetting. Her confidence in her son's homecoming is remarkable, notwithstanding her rejection of the official narrative of the Iraqi-Iranian War. Her refusal to accept Daniel's death would have unnerved the Baathists, who would have preferred that people move on or participate in a nationally prescribed mourning that would celebrate the "martyrdom" of the young men in the service of their country, even though her actions are not "Antigone-like disruptive claims of grief and grievance" (McLvor, 2012, p. 429). She also demonstrates her resistance to any pacifist religious attempt to assuage her fury when she refuses to forgive Abu Zaydūn, the barber who enrolled her son in the conflict, despite her pastor's invocation of Christian ideals.

At the book's conclusion, the widely held notion that the elderly lady is the neighborhood's defender is validated. After she departs with her grandson, Um Salīm's home, the hotel, and her own are all destroyed by a massive attack carried out by terrorists in Batawyīn. Whatever the actual role, the neighborhood was shielded from horror by the elderly lady, who instilled in them a sense of confidence in a higher force. Frankenstein gains tenacity and an unflinching trust in his objectives from his mother. However, unlike her, he lacks a well-defined reason. His intentions are corrupt. In the novel's last scene, he is seen petting Elishua's old cat, whom she abandoned. Even though he says he is battling the devil, he is not any better than the dragon in the painting, who is the angel she tossed. He is the military portion of the image.

The Birth Place

The history of Batawyīn is multilayered, including Jewish, Christian, and Muslim periods. Many locals claim that they are original residents, while others are from far-off Iraqi villages; nonetheless, the narrator contends that since everyone has lived there for so long, nobody can determine who is new or original. Moment. All of them are trying to figure out what post-American Iraq looks like. Everyone attempts to profit from the changing dynamic to earn a livelihood or amass wealth. They go on with their lives

essentially as usual since that would divert their attention from the constant threat of death. For instance, Faraj, the realtor, is buying the homes of individuals who have left the nation. He sees the instability as a chance to grow his little business empire. He and his men beat up and chase away several young guys from a non-governmental organization who come to the neighborhood to take photos of historic homes and attempt to preserve the area's legacy. He looks closely at anybody attempting to thwart his intentions to purchase new homes and evict their occupants.

Despite his self-serving intentions, his actions demonstrate the work required to tear apart cities and redraw communities (Stephens, 2007, p. 162). When central authority is weakened after the occupation, people's avaricious inclinations to profit from the conflict are freed. Like him, many people saw opportunities in the recently established Iraq. The best illustration is Al-Sa'idi, who, in addition to running a magazine, is attempting to purchase a printing press to use during the election year to produce pamphlets and other materials. In the new Iraq, complete anarchy is the norm. Nobody can predict whether they will be killed by a sniper, die from torture, or perish in a bomb. Batawyin has developed into a center of corruption, crime, and depravity. Frankenstein makes the dramatic decision to take action since he lives in an environment like this.

The Monster

Frankenstein embodies the Gothic monster archetype, much like his namesake. "Haunted houses, ghosts, monsters, and the undead" are central to gothic stories, as pointed out by Devetak (2005). Although the Gothic style emerged as a backlash against both thet it has been helpful at times of uncertainty and turmoil, such as the Renaissance and the French Revolution, when previous paradigms collapsed. When describing September 11 and the events leading up to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, George W. Bush evoked the gothic era when he talked of "rouge and terrorist nations who are equally dark, perverse, and indomitable forces" (p. 622). This is something that Devetak (2005) correctly notes. How, therefore, could the Iraqi writer depicting his nation twelve years after Bush's comments benefit from the same gothic link that the enemy of Iraq used?

Monsters, according to Devetak (2005), were "metaphors for human anxieties," and the situation of Iraq after the beasts of fanaticism and nightmares were released, partially as a result of the entire collapse of that central authority that had, for good or worse, kept all the warring factions in check via its ruthless state security apparatus (p. 624). After the monopoly held by the state Once the ban on violence was abolished, every sector of society claimed its fair share of violence. It utilized the unrestricted availability of firearms to terrorize those who did not fall under their groups or tribes. Frankenstein may be seen as a response to what psychologist Judith Butler refers to as the "corporeal vulnerability" of all of the people who have been victims of assault from Iraq (Butler, 2004, p. 19). He is the embodiment of all the human beings who were demoted to a lower, sub-human condition. Nevertheless, even though he was a humble endeavor to uphold human dignity, the people elevated him to a political savior in their imagination.

In a short time, he comes to command a group of individuals not referred to by their names but rather by various monikers, including the Lesser Madman, the Greater Madman, the Sophist, the Evil One, and the Wizard. A religion of change in politics and revolution emerges around each of them, and each has its own following. Following the overthrow of the Baathist administration in Iraq, a variety of new political

movements and political parties have emerged on the scene. These leaders may be representative of the many new political parties and movements. For instance, the narrative almost foretells the formation of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which is headed by a former prisoner who has been successful in rallying criminals and dissatisfied individuals in favor of his so-called Islamic State. Because he was created from the remains of victims, the monster, whom the journalist would later refer to as Frankenstein, is born pure, just as all children are. At the same time, everyone sees in him the possibility of retribution and maybe even a fresh start for the nation. In the eyes of the Lesser Madman, Frankenstein embodies the essence of Iraqi culture: Each of his components comes from a different kind of person. In the eyes of the Great Madman, Frankenstein is represented as the instrument of devastation that will clear the way for the advent of the Saviour. As a result, the Great Madman assists Frankenstein in making it feasible for the Saviour to arrive. When it comes to the Greater Madman, Frankenstein is the one who saves the day. (Butler, 2004, p. 50)

At the beginning of the story, Frankenstein sounded like a savior. To inflict his vengeance on those who have committed murder, criminal acts, and terrorist acts. On the other hand, it is ironic that his first victims are the three beggars who assault him and whom he forces to strangle one other. Except for the traffic lights and the dark lane in which they resided, Brigadier Surūr said that nobody would miss those individuals. His subsequent victim is Abu Zaydūn, the barber who, during the Iraqi-Iranian War with Iran, was responsible for the deaths of several young men. Among these young men were Daniel, the sole son of the elderly mother, and Salīm, her neighbor's son. If Frankenstein were to exact his vengeance on any of the individuals from whom he had taken body parts, the human part in question would break off. That indicates that Frankenstein must continue to murder to make up for the pieces that are already gone. To ensure his survival, he begins to murder innocent individuals, and as a result, he develops a tendency towards malicious behavior.

The strong tendency towards self-centeredness characterizes most people in the book. One theory proposes that a natural response to feelings of dread. Moreover, insecurity is the development of selfishness. The book investigates the many responses that individuals have to the "precarious" existence that they are experiencing, as well as the Hobbesian "war of all versus all" (Balibar, 2005, Afterward). However, prior to tackling the dread of the current wave of terrorist activities, the book refers to the state of fear often Iraqis lived in when the Baathist dictatorship was in power. Dread is a characteristic that is associated with authoritarian regimes. The book blasts the current crop of Iraqi politicians for wanting to cement their position at the top rather than bring about a democratic transition in the nation. An ambitious, wealthy, and charming (but no less powerful) new elite has emerged in Iraq.

It was more detrimental than the officials of the previous administration. Bahir al-Sa'īdi, the truth newspaper owner with many connections, is the new model of an Iraqi politician. He is the one who proposed the term 'Frankenstein' for the beast. In the Green Zone, he associates with politicians like the American and Brigadier-General Surūr, a former Baathist who was spared purging by the Americans and oversaw the Investigations and Tracking Department, which was involved in Frankenstein's case. Bahir al-Sa'īdi encourages his protégé, Maḥmūd al-Sawadī, to pursue the monster and transforms Frankenstein into a famous phenomenon. Fear is a tool that Al-Sa'īdi knows how to employ to further his objective. Even though he plays a tiny role, al-Sa'īdi plays a crucial role in shaping the novel's concept and storyline.

The end or the beginning

In a country where mindless brutality and haphazardness prevail, preparing for the future seems absurd. Chance can turn the tables on even the most skillful schemers. Elishua departs Baghdad, and Hadi and the realtor Faraj both receive what they want. Hadi purchases the Mementos in her home, Faraj inherits both the home and the Al-Orouba Hotel, whose proprietor likewise chooses to return to his hometown in the south. However, in an existential twist, just after Elishua leaves, there is a car bombing in the neighborhood that destroys Elishua's former home and does damage to portions of Um Salim's house and the Al-Orouba Hotel. Hadi's face is deformed, and his injuries make him resemble Frankenstein. They detained him on February 21, 2006, and labelled him as Frankenstein. People celebrated the end of the terror state by taking to the streets around Iraq. One guy, however, was seeing the spectacle from a room within the abandoned hotel.

Frankenstein was that person. Ironically, the day the government announced the end of terrorism was earlier than the day the Golden Mosque bombing in Samara occurred, which is said to have started the Iraqi Civil War. According to the book, Frankenstein was responsible for the blast. Whether it was an actual civil war or a rebellion, and whether it was being fueled by outside forces or developing naturally in the country (Derian, 2008, p. 933), the day's events ensnared Iraq in the grip of a bloody conflict that continues to linger there. For a long time, this unstoppable beast will keep terrorizing people.

CONCLUSION

Because life is a conflict between all individuals, the choices that people have are limited: They can either leave the country. They may remain and attempt to take benefit of the shifting political landscape to acquire power and engage in a hedonistic pursuit of happiness. They can give their will to any charming monster to gain power. Safeguarding. All of the possibilities are detrimental to the nation, and the latter most likely explains why ISIS has become so prevalent. As a result of the fact that terrorist attacks continue to take place daily, the predicament in Iraq has become even more problematic. As a result of the "cultural trauma" caused by sectarian strife, there is no relief from the atrocities that have occurred in the new Iraq. In his argument, Redfield (2007) states that trauma "involves blockage: an inability to grieve or to move from repetition to working through" (p. 56). There would be a silencing of the voice of reasoning and rationality if the violence continued to repeat itself. There is no formula provided in the book that explains how to eliminate violence in Iraq. On the contrary, it illustrates the complexities of the problem and the fact that every Iraqi implicated in their nation is in a predicament. Due to the self-centeredness of people who attempted to further their gains from the conflict at the cost of the nation, the end of the authoritarian rule did not bring about the tranquility and prosperity that everyone had hoped for.

On the other hand, the book makes a few points very plain. Relying on a heavy-handed state security apparatus or resorting to fortune tellers and astrology (or any other distorted religious or ideological answers not founded on factual facts) will not ensure the change everyone is looking for. Anger is not the answer. If politicians wish to increase their profits, they are playing with fire, which will finally result in their deaths. The task of national reconciliation may not begin until all of the parties involved in violence recognize that they are responsible for the violence and until there are no individuals who are seen to be

pure victims or perfect attackers.

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