

Decentering Human/ Becoming Posthuman: Monstrous Subjectivity in Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013)

Ne'am Abd Elhafeez *

English literature and English Language Unit coordinator, Arab Open University, Egypt

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Abstract

Since its appearance in Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* (1818), the monster figure was deemed the human's other that poses a threat to humanity. In 2013, in his award-winning novel *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, Ahmed Saadawi, the Iraqi acclaimed writer, appropriated Shelly's monster in the hybrid posthuman figure of Whatsitsname that shares with Shelly's *Frankenstein* the same anxieties but within the context of Iraq after the American invasion in 2003. With the advent of the twenty first century, and emergence of new social realities due to the capitalist system, the changes associated with technology, war on terrorism and globalization led to the rise of the posthuman condition in which human and other-than-human entities are envisioned in a new light. What characterizes the posthuman condition is the reassessment of the dualistic thinking that governed the human thought and the rise of hybrids as posthuman subjects. In this respect, many traditional boundaries between nature/culture, human/other, and humanity/monstrosity were transgressed. This paper aims at exploring manifestations of posthuman subjectivity in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013) by Ahmed Saadawi in the light of critical posthumanism. It claims that the monstrous figure in the novel is a posthuman subject that presents an alternative vision, not a threatening entity. It will focus on decentering human identity as highlighted in Michel Foucault's criticism of biopolitics, and exploring posthuman subjectivity as pursued by Rosi Braidotti and Ellen L. Graham.

Keywords: Posthumanism, Monster, Subjectivity, Decentering, Frankenstein.

Introduction

In her introduction to the second edition of *Frankenstein* in 1831, Mary Shelly stated that she intended to write a story that would "speak to the mysterious fears of our nature and awaken thrilling horror – one to make the reader dread to look round, to curdle the blood, and quicken the beatings of the heart". With this intention, the hideous corpse collected by her protagonist Dr. Victor Frankenstein in his laboratory came to life arousing feelings of fear and uncertainty, and becoming a symbol of transgressing boundaries between humanity and monstrosity. This inaugural text initiates a legacy of Frankenstein as "a living myth, a corpus of adaptations and responses that continues to grow" (Griffen & Lodell 2018, 225). Shelly's character has become a well-established figure in the world literature and well adapted to

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* Corresponding Author: n.abdelhafiz@aou.edu.eg

different sociopolitical contexts. Furthermore, Frankenstein's monster has become a source of infinite interpretations, from metaphor of creation and innovation, to a figure that arouses fear and terror of human's trespassing forbidden boundaries.

Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013) is one of the most recent adaptations of *Frankenstein* that appropriates the monster figure to represent the new social realities of the twenty-first century. These realities that emerged due to globalization, rise of technology, advanced wars and terrorism led to the rise of a posthuman condition¹. The posthuman condition is a complex interdisciplinary concept that was influenced by theorizations in science, philosophy, critical and literary studies that focus on decentering human of the privileged position as well as recentering the human's other whether marginalized humans, hybrids or even non-human beings as posthuman subjects. Jeff Wallace defines this multi-faceted concept as,

a critique, both of an essentializing conception of human nature, and of human exceptionalism, and is generally characterized by discourses of the dissolution or blurring of the boundaries of the human, whether conceptual and philosophical (as in the 'decentering' of the human in 20th-century structuralist and post-structuralist or scientific and technological (as in biotechnologies, genetics and cybernetics). (2010, 692-3)

By focusing on the human's other, critical posthumanism redefines the parameters of subjectivity and proposes other visions of the self. Rosi Braidotti states that "sexualized, racialized and naturalized differences, far from being the categorical boundary-keepers of the subject of Humanism, have evolved into fully fledged alternative models of the human subject" (2013, 37-8). These alternative models embraced by critical posthumanism, encompass the dehumanized humans, those who are deemed as sub-humans for their difference from the norm in terms of race, color, gender, religion, or sexual orientation, as well as a wide umbrella of non-human others, including animals, monsters, plants, objects, and machines. Cultural posthumanism rejects the unitary, autonomous, fixed subject of humanism, and aims to replace it with a more complex and relational subject framed by difference. In this respect, posthuman subjectivity includes "the postbiological, the mechanic, the cyborg, the net-worked, the uploaded, the synthetic, the schizophrenic, the alien, the monstrous, the wired, and the weird" (qtd. in Wilkie 2011, 176).

This paper aims at exploring manifestations of posthuman subjectivity in a recent adaptation of *Frankenstein*, namely *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013) by Ahmed Saadawi in the light of critical posthumanism. The paper claims that the monstrous figure of Whatitsname in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is a posthuman subject that deconstructs the humanist subject position and presents an alternative vision. In Saadawi's text, the monstrous figure violates the natural law of humanity and erases the boundaries between humanity and monstrosity, indicating that both are cultural and historical constructs. *Frankenstein in Baghdad* reflects the liminal position of the posthuman subject, as it represents the predicament of the posthuman condition with its representation of transgressed boundaries between life and death. Through revisiting the global narrative of *Frankenstein*, the paper focuses on decentering human identity as highlighted in Michel Foucault's criticism in *The Order of Things* (1982), investigating

the dialectics of the posthuman condition of transgressing life and death boundaries in the light of Foucault's concept 'bio power', Achille Mbembe's 'necro-politics', Giorgio Agamben's 'bare life', as well as exploring the possibility of reaching posthuman subjectivity as pursued by Rosi Braidotti's *The Posthuman*, and Ellen L. Graham's *Representations of the post/human: Monsters, Aliens and Others in Popular Culture*,

Monstrous Subjectivity in Human/ Posthuman discourse

Historically, monsters were perceived as human others; a monster is everything that human is not. Based on its origins the term referred to "“a mythical creature that is part animal and part human,” “something extraordinary”” (Zigarovich 2018, 264). During the Middle Ages, monsters were seen as deformities that can be produced by the unnatural activity of nature. Later definitions of monsters focused on its attributes such as ugly, frightening, misshapen and disfigured, and they are deemed as “a biological anomaly” (Graham 2002, 50). In all cases, monsters were perceived as markers of difference, and if human nature is equated with the norm, monsters are “that which is other than whatever the norm maybe” (Braidotti 1994, 80). They symbolize impurity, distortion and abnormality. Apart from being associated with mythical creatures, people with distinctly non-normative bodies or with disabled forms were defined as monsters throughout western history. Having human shapes with abnormal or disfigured forms, monsters serve as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen states in his study, *Monster theory: Reading Culture*, “disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration... a form suspended between forms that threaten to smash distinctions” (1997, 6). Being reanimated corpse, with his appearance as “a hideous phantasm of a man” (Shelly 1996, 39), Shelly's monster was no exception from the previous descriptions. From the moment of his creation, the monster was considered a threat to humans' perception of themselves, as “his name coincides with that distorted reflexive predicament of oneself in a way that cannot be assimilated” (Butler 2014, 40)

Michael Foucault's book *The Order of Things* provides a useful framework for understanding the dialectics of humanity/monstrosity. By focusing on categories like madness, sexuality and criminality in studying what it means to be human, he destabilizes the essential accounts of human nature, and affirms that human nature is rather constructed within a network of definition, culture, and control. In this respect, a subject “is constructed by rather than controlling, its language, culture, and technologies” (Pelt 2002, 307). In her reading of Foucault's critique, Elaine Graham demonstrates that representations of the human must be understood as disciplines with the powers of constitution, and those located on the boundaries of the human, almost/human, as the unruly felon, the hysterical woman, the penitent sinner are not ontological states but products of the quest to make human behavior both more intelligible and more manageable to those in power (2002, 40-45). These previous examples of dehumanized humans share with monsters their deviance from the essential human norm and the fixed order. Foucault identifies the unnatural with the extraordinary in the figure of monster as he remarks in his lectures on *Abnormal* that the human monster exists not only as a “violation of the laws of society but also a violation of the laws of

nature” (2003, 56). Foucault’s and Graham’s arguments imply that both humanity and monstrosity are cultural constructs, and not naturally born. In doing so, they reject the universal ideal of man and individuality as being part of the natural law of humanity. In a similar vein, in her article, “Bovine Anxieties, Virgin Births, and the secret of Life”, Teresa Heffernan restates the same arguments.

Both humanity and monstrosity are not miraculously brought to life in the vacuum of his laboratory but constructed in and through a complex world of conflicting narratives, where self and other, non-human and human, monster and doctor are open to constant renegotiation and interpretation. (2003, 124)

These critiques open the door to legitimize the alternative identities such as that of monsters. As Foucault states, “thus against the background of the continuum, the monster provides an account, as though in caricature, of the genesis of difference” (1973, 157). In doing so, he attempts to “canonize the monstrous” (Barr 1996, 22) as an example of alterity. Foucault’s anti-humanist legacy is deeply connected with critical posthuman ideologies that have alternative views about the human and the new formations of subjectivity or new models of the self. Unlike traditional humanism in which self/other dualism is one of its philosophical foundations, and the basis by which the category of others of class, race and sex was created, posthuman thought centers on erasing all the boundaries that separate both entities, by placing humans along with the non-human other whether animal, insect, plant, object, or machine as posthuman subjectivities. It even proposes that forms of artificial life can transcend the human project and gives an alternative vision of humanity as the contemporary science and biotechnologies affect our lives and have altered dramatically our understanding of what counts as a human today. Challenging the idea of natural self, the posthuman subject is understood as “local, fluid, contingent, and as contesting and rending the hierarchal binaries of nature/culture, self/other, male/female, human/nonhuman” (Heffernan 2003, 118). Posthumanism celebrates hybridity that breaks these western binary oppositions and seeks difference as a basis. According to Braidotti, the posthuman visualizes the subject as “a transversal entity” (2013, 82) that blurs the boundaries between “bodies, genders, species and representations” (2013, 60). In this light, subjectivity is not fixed entity, or based on order rather it is a process of autopoiesis or self-styling, which involves complex and continuous negotiations with dominant norms and values and hence also multiple forms of accountability (Braidotti 2013, 35). Furthermore, posthuman subjectivity is relational, as stated by Donna Haraway, since being is brought into existence by relation, we exist in subtle companionship with others, ‘To be one is always to become with many’ (qtd. in Wallace 2010, 697). Another feature of the posthuman subject is multiple belongings. Rejecting humanist individualism, the posthuman ideology celebrates a sense of collectivity that connects between self and others, including the non human others. Multiplicity or collective self is closely related to the concepts of assemblage and agency that are central notions in posthuman ideology, and they contest the human’s autonomy and free will, and consider humans as amalgamation of different factors continuously affecting and affected by others. Hayles refers to the posthuman’s collective heterogeneous quality saying if “human essence is freedom from the wills of others,” the posthuman is “post” not because it is necessarily unfree but because there is no a priori way to identify a self-will that can be clearly distinguished from another-will” (1999, 4).

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In this context, monsters are easily identified as posthuman hybrid relational and collective subjects, emanating from unnatural origins and disturbing the natural order. From a posthuman perspective, monsters represent becoming posthuman in terms of the new social realities of technology dominance, wars and globalization. The monster is not a deformity but a hybrid creature with fluid identity that transgresses all boundaries between human and non-human, as argued by Elaine L. Graham in her book, *Representations of the Post/human*: "monsters serve both to mark the fault lines but also, subversively to signal the fragility of such boundaries" (2002, 12). Moreover, with dissolution of many categories in our modern age, the monster's hybrid subjectivity becomes an ideal negotiation between life/death, male/female, and subject/object which is at the heart of posthuman construction. Thus, monsters inhabit a critical posthuman position which is characterized by multiplicity and hybridity. The next section will present a different reading of the monstrous subjectivities as posthuman beings in the light of a recent adaptation of *Frankenstein* that presents Shelly's Frankenstein's monster in a new light.

Becoming Posthuman: Power of Collective Monstrous Subjectivity in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*

**It was a complete corpse that had been left in
the streets like rubbish. It's a human being,
guys, a person (25)**

What is meant to be a monster? What separates humans from monsters? If human identity is a result of processes of self making, can the monsters, as products of the same processes of becoming, claim humanity? Ahmed Saadawi raises these questions in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013), the winner of the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (2014) that was long-listed for the 2018 Man Booker International Prize (2018) and shares with Shelly's *Frankenstein* the same anxieties about humanity/monstrosity but within different socio-political contexts. The novel recreates this timeless figure of the monster in Whatsitsname, an assemblage of body parts of victims of the escalated violence in Baghdad. Saadawi's figure functions as "a macabre analogy for the thousands of civilian Iraqi deaths during the US 2003 invasion and the Iraqi civil war that followed" (Murphy 2018, 273). Reading *Frankenstein in Baghdad* from a posthuman perspective provides a new interpretation for the monster, highlighting the monstrous figure Whatsitsname as an example of a hybrid posthuman subjectivity that blurs all the boundaries between genders, races, and species and between humans and non-humans, and life and death. In addition, it deconstructs the human subjectivity as being racial, exclusive, and discriminatory and launches a harsh attack against human conditions that allowed such a figure to be created, signaling the failure of human subjectivity.

Frankenstein in Baghdad is set in 2005 post the American invasion of Baghdad, where "death stalked the city like the plague" (*FB*² 6), and where explosions, bombs and different manifestations of violence became the harsh reality of Iraqis' everyday life. Amid "this festival of ruin and destruction" (*FB* 11), Hadi Al-attag, a junk dealer who suffers a personal trauma of losing his friend in one of the daily

explosions, manages to reconstruct a human body out of those killed in Iraqi bomb explosions. His purpose is to stitch the dismembered body parts of the victims into one corpse, instead of being left in the streets, “so it wouldn’t be treated as rubbish, it would be respected like other dead people and given a proper burial” (FB25). According to Haytham Bahooora, Hadi’s project is well justified as it represents “a macabre effort to memorialize the dead by retrieving their body parts rather than letting them be swept away and discarded, forgotten forever” (2015, 195).

Meanwhile, a subsequent explosion shook Baghdad and led to the death of Hasib Mohamed Jafaar, a young Iraqi guard. While Hassib’s body was shattered into thousand pieces to the extent that his coffin only includes “his burned black shoes; his shredded, bloodstained clothes; and small charred parts of his body” (FB 33), his restless soul found its destination in composite body lying down in Hadi’s house:

With his hand, which was made of primordial matter, he touched the pale, naked body [the Whatitsname] and saw his spirit sink into it. His whole arm sank in, then his head and the rest of his body. Overwhelmed by a heaviness and torpor, he lodged inside the corpse, filling it from head to toe, because probably, he realized then, it didn’t have a soul, while he was a soul without a body. (FB 40)

The hybrid corpse came to life reanimated by Elshiva, an elderly Christian woman and Hadi’s neighbor. Upon seeing the living corpse, she thought it to be her disappearing son, Daniel, who never returned from his military service after the Iran-Iraq war twenty years ago. Saadawi describes the process of the creature coming alive metaphysically “with her words, the old woman had animated this extraordinary composite—made up of disparate body parts and the soul of the hotel guard who had lost his life. The old woman brought him out of anonymity with the name she gave him: Daniel” (FB53). The now living corpse embarks on a mission of vengeance for the Iraqi victims who constitute his corporeal body, so that they can rest in peace. However, he discovers that to renew his body, he needs to be provided with new body parts. Thus, the corpse continues the series of killing and death which leads to a vicious cycle of violence, terrorism and death.

Composed of different dead body parts, Whatsitsname is a living dead, a creature that challenges the natural order of nature. In Shelly’s original story, Frankenstein’s creation was described as “a mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch” (1996, 40). When “the miserable monster” disturbs Frankenstein in bed, he was terrified by the “demonical corpse” (1996, 40). Likewise, Saadawi’s creature with his stitches on the face and the neck has “dreadful appearance” (FB 53) that was described as “the most horrible thing...it is hard to believe God would create such a face; just looking at it was enough to make your hair stand on end (FB 53). Shelly’s creature is incorporated in Saadawi’s monster, a technique used by the writer to signal the universality and the adaptability of the original figure. In fact the legacy of Frankenstein is so evident in the text to the extent that some characters, while hearing Hadi’s narrative, drew a comparison between the two figures. Although Hadi named the creature Whatsitsname, he was given the title Frankenstein in Baghdad by Ali Baher El-Saidi, a local magazine editor, in the article that covered his story describing him as an urban legend. It is worth noting that the name “Frankenstein” here, like in many other adaptations, is used interchangeably to denote the creator, the creature and the text. This intentional blurring of the three entities can have different interpretations. It

can designate that the word Frankenstein itself has become “a figurative emblem for any and all concepts hybrid, composed of multiple sources” (Griffen & Lodell 2018 225), or refer to the idea that is recurrently implied in the text that monstrosity is not an exclusive attribute to the created being; rather it can refer to the dehumanized humans living in such conditions.

In his article “The Queer and the Creepy: Western Fictions of artificial Life”, Ross Chambers proposes a reading of those monstrous figures in different literary texts throughout history starting with the original *Frankenstein* to argue how these figures claim agency and subjectivity through assemblage, a central concept in posthuman ideology. Chambers claims that these figures came to life via “phobic plot” in which a genius human, who manufactures artificial creatures, loses control of what he created and for most of the time the consequences are disastrous, due to the fact that these characters are considered a supplementation of the natural, they constitute a threat as they imply a lack in the original. Their existence shows human vulnerability, and poses a threat to the characters on the physical and psychological levels. Thus, they are considered a representation of otherness, as “a product of artifice”, they lack “the divine spark that links humans to gods” (Chambers 2005, 28-30). In creating artificial life, Chambers appropriates Gilles Deleuze's and Felix Guattari's concept “assemblage” or “agencing” to denote two meanings; first, the concept refers to “the kind of unholy tinkering that goes on in the various laboratories of the Brainy Nerd figure who creates artificial life” (2005, 23), while simultaneously it signals “the loss of control to which the tinkering gives rise as an abdication of authority that is the necessary condition of the coming to consciousness of the suppressed knowledge”(2005, 23). In other words, agencing is both “a synthetic act of assemblage, the putting together of synthetic or artificial life, and to a rhetorical and performative effect. Something strange and unexpected emerges from narration that is supplementary to the narrative and its syntax” (Chambers 2005, 24). The second meaning refers to the author as an agent who loses authority over the text, and the narration comes as a form of “textual assemblage” (2005, 23), so the non-human figure only claims its voice in fiction via language utterances. Reading *Frankenstein in Baghdad* in the light of the above model of agencing, one can see that the figure of Whatsitsname is a true embodiment of assemblage. His body is composite of corpses; he came to existence via “phobic plot” through fusion of “what is normally distinct” (qtd. in Csetenyi 2018, 159), disparate body parts, and a roaming spirit. The authorial voice he gained throughout the novel challenges his status and gives him textual agency. Furthermore, his appearance signals human's loss of control in the context of Iraqi chaotic status.

From a posthuman viewpoint, the monster's subjectivity does not emerge from being a single individual, but rather a relational collective entity of multiple belongings, or “a collection of humans” (Kiaee and Sabeeh 2019, 95), resulting from processes of self making, construction and reconstruction. The creature's agency stems from being a reflection of Hadi's wish to dignify his friend's death, being projection of Elshiva's obsession of her lost son, and Hasib's and other victims' desire to avenge their deaths. Whatsitsname, via its body and purpose, is a representation of collective subjectivity reflecting a desire in political change. What adds to his complicated subjectivity is the fact that he was described

throughout the story as the one who has no name. His anonymity has much significance in the world of post war Iraq created by Saadawi. It signifies the huge human losses that have become mere numbers in the official records. Hadi's description of the Whatsitsname reveals the tragedy of the endless casualties of violence, as "it wasn't really a corpse, because 'corpse' suggested a particular person or creature, and that didn't apply in the case of the Whatsitsname" (FB 80). His lack of naming hints at "a lack of definitive identity" (Graham 2002, 64). In fact, the creature's identity was shaped according to the end it serves; thus, he became Frankenstein to Ali Baher al-Saidi, "an urban legend" to Mahmoud the journalist and people's enemy according to Brigadier Sorour, the director of the Tracking and Pursuit Department. Furthermore, having no name means that he may be Muslim, Sunni, Shiite, Christian, Bahaaist, rich, poor or a combination of all these Iraqi sects. The figure's namelessness demonstrates that he "does not belong to one individual or ethnicity", which opens the door for multiple significations: "it is none of us, yet all of us" (Kiaee and Sabeeh 2019, 95- 6). In this respect, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* brings a posthuman perspective to investigate this key moment in Iraq's social and political crisis.

Whatsitsname's collective identity represents in a way "the model Iraqi citizen" (Bahooora 196), as he states: "—I'm made up of body parts of people from diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, tribes, races and social classes — I represent the impossible mix that never was achieved in the past. I'm the first true Iraqi citizen" (FB 146). Whatsitsname's hybrid subjectivity reflects a critique of sectarianism and violence and expresses a collective desire of a unified identity, reconciliation and secured life. However, the fact that this model citizen is only achieved through a monstrous subjectivity casts doubts on the possibility of achieving it in reality. As an example of Iraqi's fragmented and shattered identities after US invasion, Whatsitsname shows the failure of achieving pluralism, and thus serves as a metaphor for "the failed national project" (Bahooora 2015, 196) that reflects the impossibility to transcend the religious, ethnic and sectarian differences. Not only does the hybrid corpse signify the failure of national project, but it also deconstructs the humanist project as well for being a source of exclusion, racism and terrorism.

In addition to the collective identity, one of the features of posthuman subjectivity is erasing the boundaries, and embracing hybridity. As a product of nature-culture compounds, Whatsitsname is a disturbing hybrid, incorporating human and non-human features. In *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, the boundaries between human and non-human are not secured, and the thin lines between humans and monsters are not fixed. Whatsitsname is monstrous, not for the horror he arouses, but for he exposes the instability of the foundations of human subjectivity and the fragility of civilization. Challenging the natural order of things, hybrid's problematic identity stems from the fact that it "breaks the linear reproductive binary model that produces the same, allowing 'difference' to proliferate; the hybrid also displaces emphasis on the original and challenges the traditional understanding of nature" (Heffernan 2003, 118). In this case, if Whatsitsname's monstrosity should disqualify him from being human, his authorial voice, intentions, and actions destabilize this claim. It is worth noting that while in the original *Frankenstein*, Frankenstein was the name of the creator, in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* like many other adaptations, Frankenstein is the monster. This intentional transfer of the name from creator to the creature consolidates the "confusion/fusion" (Heffernan 2003, 125) between humans and monsters. Furthermore, there are references in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* that the monster is humanized, while humans become

monstrous. Like Shelly's creature, Whatsitsname is a monster that ascends to humanity via acculturation; he speaks human language, retains cognitive functions and memory, has emotions and seeks to find justice in unjust world. In the context of Iraqi's terrible political and social conditions, he becomes a representation of the superhero who escapes the police and journalists to punish the criminals, announcing "I am the answer to the cries of the forlorn" (FB136), and justifying his actions

I killed the Venezuelan mercenary in charge of the security company responsible for recruiting suicide bombers who had killed many civilians, including the guard at the Sadeer Novotel, Hasib Mohamed. I killed the al- Qaeda leader who lived in Abu Ghraib and who was responsible for massive truck bomb in Tayaran Square that killed many people, including the person whose nose Hadi picked up off the pavement and used to fixed my face. (FB 146)

Bahoor states that "the resurrected corpse/monster becomes a national sensation for citizens weary of the lack of security and searching for someone, or something, to rescue them" (2015, 195). If the monster's hideous birth and physical ugliness position him beyond the human culture, his actions reveal that he has good innate nature, rather than bestiality.

On the other hand, some Iraqi humans are transformed into monstrous entities that descended into savageness. For example, suicide bombers who killed Nahem (Hadi's friend), Hassib and hundreds of citizens in different explosions that occurred in the narrative have become merely death machines, with no trace of humanity. This point is emphasized by Braidotti as she states that violent acts lead to "increase of moral bestiality among humans" (2013, 110). Furthermore, humans who were gathering on the Imam Bridge to celebrate a religious event that ended tragically, were confused for "ghostly figures" (FB 106), implying the difficulty of differentiating between both entities. In the end of the story, Hadi was arrested and brutally tortured and left with disfigured face like his creation. Later, he was charged for the murders committed by Whatsitsname. Hadi's neighbors started to believe "that this frightening criminal had been living among them" (FB 279). Both Hadi and Whatsitsname could not be differentiated, hinting that the creator became the creation, and that both, as Foucault claims, humanity and monstrosity are complex constructs affected by many factors.

In the narrative world of *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, Whatsitsname becomes an embodiment of duality; he is human/monster, criminal/victim, and dead/alive. In this light, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is a novel that describes an "egalitarian blurring of differences" (Braidotti 2013, 109) which is in the heart of the posthuman ideology. After being a superhero seeking justice, he became criminal X whose mission transformed from avenging those whose corpses constitute his hybrid body, into "taking revenge on people who insult me, not just on those whose body parts I'm made of" (FB 185). With the decay of some of his body parts, he realized that "I would face an open ended list of targets that would never end" (153). He even has no shame in killing an old man and taking his eyeballs to replace his eyes. His noble mission of justice gets out of control, when he sustains the cycle of violence initiated by humans. In this sense, he assumes the role of human, but it is the failed humanity that he embodies. Al-Mustafa Najjar describes the

in-between position of Whatitsname, “No one is a pure criminal or a pure victim in the time of war: everyone has a bit of both”. This is the paradox of moral absolutism, thus by emphasizing the relativity of values he describes *Frankenstein in Baghdad* as “a novel that suspends moral judgment”, a novel that sustains the in-betweenness.

Perhaps, the best example of the state of in-betweenness and boundary crossing that the novel employs is Saadawi’s intentional blurring between forms of life and death within Iraqi context. Ideas of living death or unlivable life are central in Rosi Braidotti’s discussion of the posthuman in which she investigates that “posthuman vital politics shift the boundaries between life and death and consequently deal not only with the government of the living, but also with practices of dying” (2013, 111). Foucault’s “bio power”, Achille Mbembe’s “necro-politics”, and Giorgio Agamben’s “bare life” are central concepts evoked by Braidotti to explain the dialectics of life and death within the posthuman realm. While Foucault’s concept bio power refers to management of life and to the individual responsibility for the self-management of survival, biopolitics is the sovereign political power taking control of human’s life. Foucault argues in his lectures on biopolitics that sovereignty defines itself through the power to kill, “the right to take life or let live,” and that this right has been complemented through biopower with ‘the power to “make” live and “let” die’ (2003, 241). Human lives are commodities that can be managed, determined or dispose when necessary. Human subjects became posthumans in the sense of becoming animals or machines. In this sense, biopolitics is closely connected to necro-politics, which is defined as the power of administrating death as a mode of governance. Mbembe defines the term as “the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and population” (2003, 19).

Under the cover of war on terror and humanitarian aid, western coalitions initiated wars in countries like Iraq and Afghanistan that were characterized with total destruction of life that led later to spread of escalated violence, and civilian ethnic conflicts. These wars are posthuman in terms of using intelligent machines for mass destruction and inhuman/e for its association with brutality and mutilation of human bodies. These inhuman/e practices produce what Mbembe calls “semiosis of killing” leading to creation of multiple “death worlds” in which bodies of subjects who are deemed as other are worthless. Lives of the embodied subjects are reduced into what Giorgio Agamben calls “*homo sacer*, who may be killed and yet not sacrificed - the ‘bare life’” (1998, 8). It refers to groups of human subjects whose lives are worthless and can be excluded from the system. Bare life is not a “generative vitality” as Agamben argues, but “rather the constitutive vulnerability of the human subject, which sovereign power can kill; it is that which makes the body into disposable matter in the hands of the despotic force of unchecked power” (qtd. in Braidotti 2013, 120). Dehumanizing groups of humans belonging to different races, or classes was part of the western belief of who deserves to be categorized as human and who is reduced to subhuman status. This is described by Braidotti as “pejorative otherness” that classify those who, by being others, “are posited as the outside of major categorical divides in the attribution of Humanity....The reduction to subhuman status of non-Western others is a constitutive source of ignorance, falsity and bad consciousness for the dominant subject who is responsible for their epistemic as well as social de-humanization” (2013, 28). Similarly, Anthony Downey explains the same argument:

Lives lived on the margins of social, political, cultural, economic and geographical borders are lives half lived. Denied access to legal, economic and political redress, these lives exist in a limbo-like state that is largely preoccupied with acquiring and sustaining the essentials of life. the refugee, the political prisoner, the disappeared, the victim of torture, the dispossessed – all have been excluded, to different degrees, from the fraternity of the social sphere, appeal to the safety net of the nation-state and recourse to international law. They have been outlawed, so to speak, placed beyond recourse to law and yet still in a precarious relationship to law itself. (2009, 109)

Reading *Frankenstein in Baghdad* in the light of the above arguments provides a framework for analyzing Whatsitsname that evokes the sense of 'homo sacer'-'bare life' highlighted by Agamben, a liminal figure whose existence reveals how the distinction between human life, and bare life is very fragile. In doing so, Whatsitsname erases the boundaries between life and death and deems life as death. Through his corporeal body stitched from violence victims, "the novel explores the body as itself the site of conflict, and the manner in which contemporary warfare has given rise to forms of "living death" in Iraq." In doing so, Whatsitsname appears as "an example of unliveable lives that are created under geopolitical conditions of combined and uneven development" (Murphy 2018, 276).

In this context, Saadawi implemented Shelly's monster as a narrative tool for expressing the traumatic aftermath of warfare on Iraqis. Saadawi's narrative, like other Iraqi's post war fiction, aims to "articulate the unspeakable, lost, repressed, or deliberately silenced historical narratives of victims of structural violence...the terror of the everyday and the residues of unspeakable acts of brutality" (Bahooora 2015, 188). Depicting scenes of violence, torture and dismemberment in the narratives highlights how necro-politics was at work in the Iraqi's context, revealing new forms of inhumanity. These texts form a repertoire that locates violence as a consequence of legacy of long years of war, dictatorship, sectarian ethnic cleansing, exile, and starvation. It is not surprising that Saadawi resorts to the supernatural and monstrous mode via Whatsitsname, hinting to the fact that the creature is less monstrous than reality itself or as Bahooora suggests that it is in Iraq "the reality itself is monstrous and irrational" (2015, 188). In doing so, Saadawi constructs "an aesthetic of horror" (Bahooora 2015, 190), in which he draws a parallel line between the so-called unreal experience of Whatsitsname and the harsh gruesome reality of Iraqis.

To sum up, *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, with its engagement in the modern Iraqi context of war, sectarianism, violence and fear recreates the monster and presents it in a new light. The novel ends, with no resolution, except the fact that Hadi is arrested for crimes he did not commit and Whatsitsname is left fondling the old lady's cat in Hadi's residence. The novel's ending reflects its overall message that decenters the human subjectivity by negating the human and centers a posthuman monstrous subjectivity. *Frankenstein in Baghdad* represents a critique of the binaries characterizing the human subjectivity and the racial and exclusive sense of superiority that forms the foundation of all biopolitical sovereignty. Whatsitsname's hybrid, liminal, relational, multiple and collective identity reflects a posthuman

subjectivity that functions as a catalyst for change. Braidotti's statement: "Inhuman is not what it used to be" (2013, 109) is the best that describes the monster's position as a posthuman being. Unlike Shelly's original monster that was deemed as the evil other that should be removed, terminated or marginalized, Saadawi's Whatsitsname was welcomed in the context of the novel or as Heffernan phrases it "co-opted" (2003, 128) in the society. In Saadawi's narrative, Whatsitsname is not the evil other, rather a means for achieving justice that was absent for a long time in Iraq, claiming "I'm the only justice there in this country" (FB 130). Hadi, his creator observed after having a long discussion with Whatsitsname that "he wasn't looking for stardom or a chance to show off or display his strength. Nor did he intend to frighten people. He was on a noble mission and had to carry it out with a few complication as possible" (FB 132). In this way, he was elevated from being a thing or monster into a dignified symbol that "opens up new potentialities and possibilities characterized by hope which pluralizes its original trajectory both in aim and message" (Kiaee and Sabeeh 2019, 98).

Conclusion

Since it was first imagined by Mary Shelly, *Frankenstein* has become a general reference for infinite interpretations and adaptations that continued incessantly in directions never anticipated by its writer. Shelley's *Frankenstein* is an example of how "certain prominent texts become dense centers of gravity, inevitably pulling the meaning of icons toward their influential formulations" (qtd. in Murphy 2018, 277). Appropriating Shelly's monster in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* reflects how it turns out to be a universal figure that can be adapted in any socio-political context. Like Shelly's original creature that is positioned as locus of fear and anxiety, Whatsitsname evokes the same anxieties but in a different context that resulted from the unstable conditions and escalated violence in Baghdad after the American invasion. Unlike Shelly's monster that arouses fear for being a threat to humans, Whatsitsname evokes horror in his exposure of "the instability of the ontological hygiene of the humanist subject" (Graham 2002, 12). The monster functions as a homo-sacer, a living dead that cannot be distinguished from real humans within the narrative. In this respect, the monster is not scary as Shelly's original creature, since the Iraqi's reality is scarier than the existence of a monster. If Mary Shelly's monster represented a threat to humanity, it is essential to read the adapted monster figure of Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* in the context of critical posthumanism that combines the modern human anxieties with the uncertain posthuman condition, reflecting dissolution of categories and disillusionment in humanity. In *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, Whatsitsname adopts a new critical position, a posthuman hybrid subjectivity with his liminal position between human and non-human. By embracing posthuman subjectivity, the text reconfigures the monster, the human's other, and presents it in a new light. Breaking lots of dichotomies, the novel embraces posthuman subjectivity that celebrates hybridity, collectivity and multiple belongings, bringing to the fore alternative visions of the future of humanity.

تهميش الإنسان وتشكيل الذات من منظور ما بعد الإنسانية: الذات الوحشية في رواية
(فرانكشتين في بغداد) (2013) لأحمد سعداوي

نعم عبد الحفيظ

منسق وحدة الأدب الإنجليزي واللغة الإنجليزية، الجامعة العربية المفتوحة، مصر

الملخص

أثار ظهور شخصية الوحش في رواية (فرانكشتين) (1818) لماري شيللي جدلاً كبيراً بين الفلاسفة والعلماء والمفكرين عن ماهية الوحش وعلاقته بالإنسان. ومع التقدم التكنولوجي وظهور نظرية ما بعد الإنسانية، أُعيد تقديم شخصية الوحش تقديمًا جديدًا بغرض إزابة الفروق بين الإنسانية والوحشية وإظهار الوحش كبديل للإنسان الذي جرد من إنسانيته بسبب الإرهاب والعنف المتصاعد نتيجة الحروب والإبادة الجماعية والتطهير العرقي الذي أعاد تشكيل واقع كثير من الدول مثل العراق، وتهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى دراسة تجليات الذات من منظور ما بعد الإنسانية في رواية (فرانكشتين في بغداد) (2013) لأحمد سعداوي المستوحاة من رواية (فرانكشتين) لماري شيللي. كما تناقش هذه الورقة شخصية الوحش في العمل، وتقدم رؤية بديلة ومختلفة عن الذات من منظور ما بعد الإنسانية. وترتكز في تحليل الأعمال الأدبية المذكورة على نظريات كل من نقد الإنسان لميشيل فوكو، وما بعد الإنسانية لروزي بريدوتي وإلين جراهام وجوديث باتلر. الكلمات المفتاحية: ما بعد الإنسانية، الذات، الوحش، تهميش، فرانكشتين.

Endnotes

¹Posthuman condition is often used interchangeably with critical posthumanism as both terms function “as a metaphor of the relational and hybrid contemporary human condition” (Farisco) that originated from the poststructuralist, postcolonial, and feminist criticism of the liberal humanist project. This condition led to transformation of humans into posthuman subjects. Both terms will be used interchangeably in the paper

² In the paper, FB is used as an acronym for Frankenstein in Baghdad in citation

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