A Psychoanalytic Reading of Ahmed Saadawi's Novel Frankenstein in Baghdad

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Abstract:

The characters in Ahmad Saadawi's novel *Frankenstein in Baghdad* experience a state of psychic splits. This paper aims, as the title promises, to provide a psychoanalytic reading of the novel. It delves deep into the psyches of the characters to elaborate on how the characters suffer from psychic splits that rift each of the characters into two different people, this is applicable to almost allthe characters in the novel. Foremost among these are Brigadier Sorour Magid, Mahmoud al-Sawadi, Saidi, Hadi the junk dealer, Elishva and the Whatisitsname. Each of these, among others, is psychoanalytically divided into two. This turns out to be a phenomenon that engulfs almost all of the characters in the novel and can, therefore, be dubbed "collective unconscious". Readers will, more often than not, see a profile of the characters. Through this reading of the novel, however, the two psyches of each personality are exposed and this provides a venue for better understanding of the novel. Psychoanalysis is the critical approach adopted. The paper avails itself from the theories, concepts and ideas of such psychoanalytic critics as Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan and Carl G. Jung. The paper responds to the following three questions: how is A. Saadawi's novel *Frankenstein in Baghdad* exposing of the state of psychic splits the characters, and the Iraqi people at large, have been experiencing? Who is the Whatisitsname? To what extent can the overwhelming state of split identities, as depicted in the novel, be described, in C. Jung's terms, as collective unconscious?

Key Words : Ahmed Saadawi, Frankenstein in Baghdad, Psychoanalytic approach.

قراءة لرواية أحمد سعداوي فرانكشتاين في بغداد من منظور التحليل النفسي

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ملخص البحث باللغة العربية:

هذا البحث هو قراءة لرواية أحمد سعداوي فرانكشتاين في بغداد من منظور التحليل النفسي. يسبر البحث مشكلة ما يمكن تسميته بالانشطارات النفسية. فشخصيات الرواية، على اختلافها، يجمعهم قاسم مشترك و هو انشطار الذات. فكل شخصية هي في حقيقتها شخصيتين مختلفتين، و هذا ما يلقي البحث الضوء عليه. المنهج النقدي المتبع في الدراسة هو منهج التحليل النفسي و يهدف الى الكشف عن علة منتشرة بين عموم الشعب العراقي كما تصوره الرواية. هذه العلة هي انشطار الذات و التي تجعل من كل شخصية شخصان مختلفان. يجيب البحث عن ثلاث أسئلة: كيف تكشف رواية أحمد سعداوي فرانكشاين في بغداد عن انشطارات الذات كما هو الحال بالنسبة للعميد سرور و محمود السوادي و علي باهر السعيدي و اليشوا و الشسمه ؟ من هو الشسمه ؟ الى أي مدى يمكن وصف ظاهرة انشطار الذات هذه بكونها لاوعي جمعي؟

كلمات مفتاحية: أحمد سعداوي – فرانكشتاين في بغداد – التحليل النفسي.

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Ahmed Saadawi's novel *Frankenstein in Baghdad* provides a distinct exposure of the psychic ailments (disorders) that engulf almost all of the characters in the novel. Even though they are not themselves aware of the problem, the characters in the novel suffer from split psyches, traumas they cannot deal with and knots they cannot resolve. The novel shows, to quote T. S. Eliot, but "a heap of broken" (Ellmann 459) psyches. Such is a phenomenon that blights contemporary Iraqi personality in general and can, in a sense, be termed collective unconscious (Bressler 127)[1]. The novel is, thus, a representation of what can be dubbed psychic fractures that have befallen the Iraqi character, noticeably ensuing the American invasion of Iraq that took place in 2003, the aftermaths of which the Iraqi people is still undergoing. Importantly, despite being an essential facet of the novel and an indispensable venue to understanding the characters this aspect has escaped the attention of critics and researchers alike.

The novel has been explored through a variety of lenses and critical stances and studies including realism (Yusuf), the postcolonial (Teggart), the comparative and the grotesque (Alhashimi). The novel was also discussed as a dystopian novel (Los Angles Review). It has not, however, been explored through psychoanalytic lenses. This is what this paper proposes to do. The psychological dimensions of the work, essential to proper understanding and evaluating the novel, will be explored and investigated. The paper will respond to the following three

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[1] The term is applied here to refer to the psychic problem that overwhelms the Iraqi people in general, as depicted in the novel. Lacan employed the term to refer to "part of the psyche [that] houses the cumulative knowledge, experiences, and images of the entire human species" (Bressler 127).

questions: how is A. Saadawi's novel *Frankenstein in Baghdad* exposing of the state of psychic splits the characters, and the Iraqi people at large, have been experiencing? Who is the Whatisitsname? To what extent can the overwhelming state of split identities, as depicted in the novel, be described, in C. Jung's terms, as collective unconscious?

The Factual and the Fictional: A Background

This paper proposes, as the title promises, to provide a psychoanalytic reading of A. Saadawi's masterpiece *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. The novel was published in ٢٠١٣; the next year, it won the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF). In 2017, it won the French prize The *grand prix de l'Imaginaire* (GPI), the "grand prize of the imaginary", awarded for science fiction works. It is worth remarking that the barriers between the real and the imaginary in the novel seem to blur and vanish. It is characteristic of the work that the real(istic) and the imaginary usually seep into and merge with one another. Woolf's comment, "fiction here is likely to contain more truth than fact" (Woolf) seems applicable here. This exquisite intermingling enriches the novel's dimensions. The novel captures the gothic of reality and the reality of gothic as will be explained.

Prior to getting to grips with the novel, it is appropriate to elaborate briefly on the writer and the critical approach adopted. Ahmed Saadawi is a versatile writer. He experimented with different genres and tropes. He wrote novels, poetry and scenarios. He is also a journalist and he produced tens of documentaries. As a novelist, he remarkably employed the journalistic and the documentary side by side with the fictional, as will be explained. Of significance to this study is the fact that a number of Saadawi's fictionalised characters represent the author and his community as will be discussed in more detail.

Once Saadawi commented that, "in writing, there is some space between the conscious and the unconscious that gets formed without the writer's own expecting of this" (Alnajar). This speaks of the author's awareness of the psychic dimension in the process

of writing and, hence, the psychoanalytic approach can well prove a means worthy of probing the fathoms of the text. An inner (psychological) conflict rifts the novel's characters. A dividing line splits each of the characterers and leaves readers' conceptualisation of each character only profile-like. It is characteristic of the psychoanalytic, critical stance adopted that it offers tools adequate enough to ushering researchers into probing and gauging the fathomless recesses and dark, unexplored and unheeded domains that the character, sometimes even the author himself, is not really aware of.

The duality of each of the figures in the novel is centric to each character's excruciating sense of restlessness and unease. The characters in the novel are in a state of endless endeavor in search of *their selves*, which prove to be unattainable and inaccessible. To give one example, Brigadier Sorour Majid has always wanted to be someone else other than himself, someone beyond his own reach, or to be Farid Shawwaf, a journalist who writes for *al-Haqiqa*. The senior and the junior astrologers Brigadier Majid employed also undergo similar experiences. In his turn, Mahmoud al-Sawadi does not know who he really is, i. e. he knows nothing about his origin or tribe, and, even more, he aspires to become another person, namely Ali Baher al-Saidi, the magazine's editor-in-chief and Mahmoud's boss. In his turn, Ali Baher al-Saidi, who is usually referred to as Saidi, wants to be another person; namely Mahmoud al-Sawadi. Old Elishva, Umm Daniel as she is sometimes referred to, was deluded by the picture of her saint. Further, she wants the Whatisitsname to be her lost son Daniel and, in his turn, the Whatisitsname wants to be her son. Of all the characters discussed in this article, only Abu Anmar remained consistent with himself to the end of the novel. He is shown as an antithesis to all the other characters discussed. The problem of loss of identity gets even further complicated with the ideas of roaming souls that the novel implies the streets of Baghdad surge with and, and, even more grimly, with the concept of reincarnation the novel proffers. One should, indeed, be careful enough while reading the novel as the

author sometimes writes about ghosts or souls without making this clear to his readers. This, probably, emanates from the writer's belief that it is familiar for souls to co-exist with the living and wander through the streets of Baghdad:

> He [i. e. Hasib's lost soul] could see the river too, deep and black in the darkness. He wanted to touch it. He had never touched the river. He had lived all his life far from it. He had driven over it, seen it from a distance, and seen pictures of it on television. But he had never felt the coldness of the water or tasted it. He saw a man in a white vest and white shorts floating faceup in it. What bliss! He must be looking at the stars, clear in the night sky. He was drifting slowly with the current. Hasib moved toward him and looked into his face. "Why are you looking at me, my son?" the man said. "Go and find out what happened to your body. Don't stay here."

> He saw another dead body, floating facedown in the water. It didn't say anything. It just floated slowly, in silence. (Saadawi 31)

The quotation above is important in that it tells us about bodyless souls and soulless bodies in Baghdad. Souls wander in search of their bodies, or even any other dead bodies that can provide vessels for such roaming, lost souls. A soul gets particularly lost when the body is torn into tiny pieces so that nothing of the body remains. In Hasib Mohamed Jaafar's case, the soul went back to the spot where the bombing took place but the soul did not find any remains of the body, "he recognized his burned boots but couldn't find his body" (Saadawi 31). Readers are told "the coffin that was taken to the cemetery in Najaf was more of a token" (Saadawi 29), i. e. an empty coffin. It is worth remarking that it was Hasib's soul that "settled in the body that Hadi had assembled in his shed" (Saadawi 174). Elsewhere, Elishva tells the Whatisitsname that her husband Tadros, "buried

an empty coffin for Danny against her wishes" (Saadawi 51). Her son was taken to fight in the Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988) twenty years ago and has not come back. Elishva adds that her husband and relatives "buried a coffin containing only some of Daniel's clothes and pieces of his broken guitar" (Saadawi 51). Throughout the novel readers come to infer that Baghdad is a city of wandering ghosts, one with soulless bodies and bodyless souls and souls that endevour to find bodies and bodies that wait for souls to seep into. New creatures rise but these defy identification.

Readers of the novel are told about "the increased killings" and the "dead bodies [that] littered the streets like rubbish" (Saadawi 125). Gruesome as it sounds, it should be mentioned that the novel depicts everyday life in Baghdad. The events the novel depicts have their counterparts in real-life Baghdad. Thus, both the living and the dead experience unending and unresolved states of loss. This accounts for the recurrence of such words as "ghost(s)" (Saadawi 14, 50, 54, 68, 72, 92, 93, 115, 152, 165) and "ghostly" (Saadawi 90, 91, 92) that proliferate throughout the novel. In parallel with life, death exists. At the cemetery Hasib's soul finds a teenager in a red T-shirt and a necklace (another soul) who told Hasib to go and stay close to his body. The soul of a buried body, thus, warns another bodyless soul. Hasib('s lost soul) goes to the cemetery in hope of finding the body but it was in vain. Hasib tells the teenager that his soul disappeared:

> "How did it disappear? You have to find it, or some other body, or else things will end badly for you."
> "What do you mean?"
> "I don't know, but it always ends badly that way."
> "Why are you here?"
> "This is my grave. My body's lying underneath. In a few days I won't be able to get out like this. My body's decomposing, and I'll be imprisoned in the grave till the end of time."

Hasib sat next to him, perplexed. What should he do? No one had told him about these things. What disaster could he expect now?

"Maybe you haven't really died and you're dreaming. Or your soul has left your body to go for a stroll and will come back later," the boy said.

"I hope to God you're right. I'm not used to this. I'm still young, and I have a daughter, and . . ."

"Young! You're not as young as me!" (Saadawi 31)

In post-war Baghdad, certainty has recessed and a whole-scale tumult of skepticism about all's identities and existence has permeated and dominated everyday life. Ridiculously enough, real-life incidents in Baghdad sound more like the supernatural the novel depicts. Thus, truth and fantasy often converge, commingle and merge. Ironically, thus, the supernatural seems sometimes more credible than the real. In a symposium held in Egypt, A. Saadawi, speaking of the horrible incidents his *Frankenstein* presents, said, "it was not imagination…but real". Saadawi, further elaborated that in 2005, a young man was kidnapped, by a terrorist gang, and torn into pieces each of which was thrown in a different neighbourhood. In the morning, people in the city were horrified by the sights of such pieces in the streets and tried to make them into a complete corpse. On another occasion, as related by Saadawi himself, a sum of one hundred unidentified corpses were found killed in the streets, and the doctors in the forensics department were overwhelmed by feelings of disdain rather than sympathy. It was completely disgusting, acknowledges Saadawi. What made it even worse, other new unidentified corpses were found. "Extremely horrible but not imagined incidents," tagged Saadawi (alnajar). It may be appropriate here to refer to the fact that A. Saadawi, the author of the novel, then a journalist, went to the morgue to see the corpse of one of his friends that was killed in an explosion. Saadawi, together with others, was told by the morgue worker to gather some parts and pieces and take them to bury as a corpse. This factual event is fictionalised in the novel:

Aziz explained that after the explosion, Hadi had gone to the mortuary to collect the body because Nahem didn't have any family other than his wife and young daughter. Hadi was shocked to see that the bodies of explosion victims were all mixed up together and to hear the mortuary worker tell him to put a body together and carry it off—take this leg and this arm and so on.

Hadi collected what he thought was Nahem's body, then went to the Mohamed Sakran Cemetery with Nahem's widow and some neighbors. (Saadawi 182)

The factual and the fictional, thus, comprise the making of the novel.

Split Psyches :

It is the crisis of identity as well as the overwhelming sense of loss of identity, more than anything else, that troubles the characters of the novel even though a number of them are not themselves aware of this very fact. This proves to be the problematic, unresolved knot of essence that is inseparable from that of existence itself.

To begin with, important to understanding the character of Brigadier Sorour Majid, head of Tracking and Pursuit Department, is the fact that the brigadier has always aspired to becoming another person. Throughout the novel, it becomes clear that he wanted to be a different person at a different place. Despite being a brigadier, he was kept out of the limelight so much that the department he headed seemed isolated from other departments; it is like a prison even though the office is very well furnished. The brigadier always believed he was more efficient than all those he served, the government regimes and the American forces, and that he, therefore, deserved a much better position. He believed higher ranks did not deal with him with due respect as they should. Further, those in higher positions did not heed his reports and

predictions about forthcoming explosions and terrorist actions, and this drove him mad, he would be "devastated" when he heard on the news that the explosion had taken place despite his warning, ""Idiots. When they identify the car bomb, they prefer to run away rather than dismantle it," he would always say" (Saadawi 176).

Brigadier Majid has suffered greatly from his oppressed and never fulfilled wishes. He suffered from being stuck in a place he never felt he belonged to, and, more importantly, always looked forward to becoming a different person. He always dreamed of appearing on TV screens, and every time when he sees Farid Shawwaf on television screens, Brigadier Majid wishes he were Farid Shawwaf so that he would appear on television screens. Further, he always admired Farid Shawwaf's suits and wishes he got the chance to wear suits as neat as Farid's. When he gets back to himself, however, he remembers that it is not possible for him to do so and that these are only vagaries and reveries. This afflicts him with a sense of disappointment. Within himself, Brigadier Majid would often identify with Farid Shawwaf not only because he has long wished to appear on TV screens or because he admired the way the man on the screen dressed but also because he believed he knew better what the man on the screen should (not) say. He sometimes, thus, interfered with what Farid said on television screens:

> He felt instantly that this was the kind of sentence the well-dressed man on television might have said—the man who always wore suits the brigadier coveted but knew he would never wear as long as he was stuck in his office at the Tracking and Pursuit Depagrtment. (Saadawi 171)

More striking even is the fact that Brigadier Majid coveted the Whatisitsname himself because "the criminal was a television star, and when the brigadier caught him, he too would immediately become a celebrity" (Saadawi 171).

Idiosyncratic about Brigadier Majid's personality is that he once witnessed his fear floating out of his mind and he stretched

out his hand to get hold of it. The character's psychic ailment gets worse when "without thinking, he stretched out his arm to grab the "familiar of his fear" by the neck, but when he opened his eyes, he couldn't see anything between himself and the ceiling" (Saadawi 93). This is crystallisation of fear that unconsciously resided at the back of Brigadier Majid's mind even though he always asserted he never feared the Whatisitsname and that he would definitely catch him with his own hands. This crystallisation of the his fear, together with the brigadier's own reaction, asserts that the unconscious side of his mind exposed the brigadier's pretention of fearlessness.

Eccentric about the brigadier yet is that he depended on astrologers, parapsychologists and fortune-tellers in predicting and fighting terrorism. Indeed, he employed a "whole team" (Saadawi 205), and paid them salaries from his own pocket, to predict bombings, "the government and the Americans information extracted from playing cards, and with sand, mirrors, rosaries made of beans, and so on" (Saadawi 177). The team, "enslaved the djinn and familiar spirits and made use of Babylonian astrological secrets and the sciences of the Sabeans and the Mandeans to find the aura of the name surrounding the body of the criminal (Saadawi 91).

In their turn, the senior and the junior astrologers that Brigadier Majid employed to predict explosions and other terrorist actions in Baghdad had some problems with identities, and they were ready to change identities. Like Brigadier Majid in this respect, the junior astrologer believed "he was superior to his superior", i. e. the senior astrologist (Saadawi 175). He, therefore, did his best to spoil and destroy the senior astrologer's plans so that he could replace him. He succeeded in ruining the plans and predictions of the senior astrologer as the latter admits, "It's all because of my stupid assistant. He's my enemy, and he's destroyed me" (Saadawi 208). The junior astrologer's attempts to displace and replace his superior, however, led to catastrophic ends: Brigadier Majid lost his position and was forced to retire (Saadawi 221) and the

astrologers were "all fired" by the brigadier (Saadawi 208). The junior astrologer felt triumphant when he saw his senior astrologer leaving. He looked at his master, "in his new guise, with a certain disdain, as if he wanted to remember this moment well—the moment when the senior astrologer fell off his perch and became just an ordinary person" (Saadawi 209).

With a pair of scissors, the senior astrologer cut off his long beard that swung from side to side so that he would appear like a religious man. That was to be the senior astrologer's "new image" (Saadawi 209). He, thus, gave up one personality and put on another. The quotation below tells us about how one can easily, so to speak, slough one's identity and feign a new one, to quote T. S. Eliot, "[t]o prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet" (Ellmann 450). The senior astrologer gave up his old personality when he was leaving the department headed by Brigadier Majid and got into another, completely different, person. The change was, indeed, drastic as the narrator makes clear:

> The senior astrologer went back to his room. He calmly packed his bag, then went into the bathroom and rubbed his beard with soap and water to get rid of the hair gel. He took out a small pair of scissors, cut off half his beard, and trimmed it to suit the appearance of a religious man. That was to be his new image. (Saadawi 209)

Mahmoud Al-Sawadi, one of the novel's main characters, and a main narrator of the novel, provides a good example in this respect. Mahmoud's are more complicated problems with identity. He was deeply shocked when he discovered after reading the records of his father, after the latter's death, that they were not Arabs or Muslims. This left Mahmoud and his brothers at stake as the world turned into a hazy one with nothing clear or fixed about their "origins", "religion" or identity (Saadawi 97):

> One of those things was the family name Sawadi, which Mahmoud's father, an Arabic teacher, had invented, completely ignoring the usual name that

> indicated tribal affiliation. Many people started referring to the family house as the house of the Sawadi clan. But Mahmoud's father's death meant death for the invented family name as well, because Mahmoud's brothers reverted to their tribal name, which they were proud of. But Mahmoud, outraged by the ruthless way they had tried to expunge their father's life story, retained the Sawadi name and established it as the name by which he was known in newspapers and magazines. (Saadawi 97-8)

Furthermore, Mahmoud and his brothers were deeply shocked by what their father confided in his notebooks:

> Mahmoud heard them say things about origins and changing religion and so on…But Mahmoud sometimes remembered some of what his father had written and tried to piece it together with scraps of information that had been suppressed forever, in an attempt to understand things, even if there was no longer any way to verify the information. (Saadawi 98)

What shocked Mahmoud and his family more than all else was that after the death of their father, they discovered that their father had two distinctly different personalities: a covert one and another overt one. The former was jotted down by the father in his secret diaries and archives, i. e. the twenty-seven notebooks of "secret confessions" (Saadawi 97), which the family discovered after the father's death. The latter, overt one, is mask-like that the father would put on among his family and community throughout his whole life. He succeeded in concealing the former of these two, which can be taken to represent the id, the irrational, instinctual…part of the psyche" (Bressler 122) with all its dark, oppressed desires and recklessness:

> There were passages about the times his father had masturbated when he was married, about the women

he dreamed of sleeping with, some of them old women from the neighborhood. What he said in his diaries couldn't be squared with the way people saw him in the Jidayda district of Amara. (Saadawi 97)

The latter overt identity, concerned with the father's social image, is the serene, respected one and can, therefore, be taken to stand for the ego, "the rational, logical, waking part of the mind" (Bressler 123), that observes the societal norms and regulations. Mahmoud's comment above on the dual, contradictory identities his father kept throughout his whole life is of great significance to this study; in his community, he was much-respected, "but maybe that wasn't an image Mahmoud's father liked very much. It was an image that had been imposed on him and that he had finally managed to live with, but only by expressing his real self in his secret confessions" (Saadawi 97).

Such were secrets that rocked the foundations of al-Sawadi family, destabilised Mahmoud's life and afflicted him with an overwhelming sense of loss of identity. In a talk with Hadi al-Attaq, in Chapter Eight entitled "Secrets" (Saadawi 90), Mahmoud agrees with Hadi to tell him a top secret in return for Hadi's informing him about the Whatisitsname:

> "I'll tell you something. I don't think my family were originally Arabs. We weren't Arabs or Muslims," he said.
>
> "Then what were you?"
>
> "I think my great-grandfather or my great-great-grandfather was a Sabean who converted to Islam for the woman he loved. My father wrote all this down in his diaries, but my brothers and my mother burned them after he died."
>
> "So, what's the problem?"
>
> "It's a big problem. We're not real Arabs."

> "I was saying in the coffee shop that my great-grandfather was an Ottoman officer, but now I don't know whether that was just a lie." (Saadawi 93)

It may escape the attention of many readers why Mahmoud chose to equate the great secret of the Whatisitsname with the secret of identity rather than anything and everything else; he is a Whatisitsname in that he lacked a sense of tribal belonging and identification and in the sense of loss he internally experiences. He was struck when Hadi did not realise the grimness and the weight of the secret that he never told anyone, even his closest friends, about.

Like almost all characters in the novel, Mahmoud al-Sawadi has been dissatisfied with being himself. Like most of them again, he tried to be someone other than himself. Specifically speaking, he aspired to be his boss Ali Baher al-Saidi. Both consciously and unconsciously Mahmoud acquired traits that characterised Saidi's identity:

> He had put on weight. He shaved every day. He wore suits and ties and colored shirts, though he and his friends Farid Shawwaf and Adnan al-Anwar used to make fun of such men, associating suits with politicians and civil servants, as well as with the militiamen in natty suits who would jump out of their vehicles in the middle of the street to drag people out of their shops or cars and beat them up or abduct them. (Saadawi 147)

In his endeavor to reach his goal of identifying with Saidi, Mahmoud al-Sawadi followed exactly in the footsteps of his boss to be a "carbon copy" of him (Saadawi 183). In his book *Sigmond Freud: An Introduction*, W. Hollitscher explains that the mechanism by which a person identifies himself with "a model may obviously lead to extremely different behaviour patterns; and these will depend on the characteristics of the model" (89). This applies to Mahmoud's persistent imitating of his boss.

More than all the other characters in the novel, Farid Shawwaf was keenly monitoring the trajectory of Mahmoud's process of transformation and (re)identification. He was scathingly critical of Mahmoud's attempts in this respect. Further, as the narrator tells us:

> Farid Shawwaf made fun of the transformation of his old friend and thought that Mahmoud had started to cross to the other side. When Mahmoud laughed off such talk, Farid admonished, "You're getting more and more like them. You're trying to be one of them. Anyone who puts on a crown, even if only as an experiment, will end up looking for a kingdom."
>
> Mahmoud now very much resembled Saidi. One day, sitting behind Saidi's desk and talking to his colleagues, he noticed he was even holding a cigar the same way Saidi did, as if it were a thick pen. He also peppered his speech with "my dear" and "my friend" just like Saidi. (Saadawi 147)

So much did Mahmoud absorb Saidi's character that he actually unconsciously acted in the same manner, as suggested by the second paragraph of the quotation above. Preceding this phase of full identification, there came a time when Mahmoud realised he was getting into, to adopt Saadawi's word, a cloning of Saidi. Thus, though he started to imitate Saidi, largely consciously, this imitation turned into a full identification with Saidi and Mahmoud, unconsciously, became another Saidi in whatever he said or did. Almost all the staff in the magazine looked at Mahmoud as another Saidi, especially after Saidi travelled abroad. All of them, except for Farid Shawwaf, looked up to him as the "big boss" and a typical image of Saidi himself (Saadawi 183). Only Farid Shawwaf kept looking at Mahmoud as, so to speak, a metamorphosed cloning of their boss Saidi.

Mahmoud always felt the urge to defend himself against Farid's looks and attacks, "[y]ou have to understand, Farid Shawwaf. I want to be like him, not be his underling" (Saadawi 92), Mahmoud

explained. Mahmoud knows well that he is not honest enough about this claim and that his infatuation with Saidi's personality and identity, together with Mahmoud's own willingness to obliterate his stigmatising past, has impinged on his old identity. He conceded to this, "Mahmoud looked at himself in the mirrors that were everywhere, but what he saw meant nothing. All he saw was Saidi and his network of relationships" (Saadawi 66).

That al-Sawadi has endeavoured to imitate and identify with his boss Saidi can be justified somehow on the grounds of the former's aspirations and ambitions to accomplish a notable reputation and get into becoming a notable, public figure like his boss. What is really difficult to account for is that Saidi himself has always aspired to become Mahmoud. This may, however, be because of the astrologer's prophecy, told to Brigadier Majid, that Mahmoud would become one of Iraq's most prominent figures, "prime minister of Iraq" (Saadawi 227). It may also be because Saidi, after having left Baghdad, was accused of having stolen thirteen million dollars (Saadawi 228) so that he wanted to escape from the stigmatising present. Saidi wishes he and Mahmoud would exchange identities:

> Mahmoud kept drinking steadily. Then he noticed Saidi giving him a strange look. He was smiling as he drank and looked as if he wanted to say something.

> "How I wish I was in your place," he finally said. "If some power could arrange for us to change places. But it's too late for that."

> Mahmoud gaped in amazement. The words alone were like the wave of a magician's wand, fulfilling his impossible dream. He wished he had the courage to answer Saidi by saying that he too wanted to become him, that he wanted to change places with him, that his life would mean nothing unless he became like Saidi, if he didn't, at some later stage, turn into Ali Baher al-Saidi. (Saadawi 85)

This is one of the most important quotations as it captures and exposes the essence of the article's psychoanalysing of the rift that fissures the psyches of the characters in the novel. The characters try to be other selves, ones other than who they really are.

At this point, it can be noted that Ahmed Saadawi, the novelist, has put a lot of himself in the two characters of Mahmoud al-Sawadi and Saidi. One buzzle to figure out here is that consisting in the names of the three of Saadawi, Sawadi and Saidi. The three names have almost the same sounds. Through a game of shuffling the letters of the names, the author tried to hide his personality. This is not a coincidence; A. Saadawi is a consummate and connoisseur novelist who manipulates the characters and the events in his novels adroitly.

Of all the psychic splits that divide the characters of the novel into twos, Hadi's own was notably so striking that it was diagnosed by his close friend Aziz the Egyptian, the owner of the local coffee shop. Hadi, the junk dealer, is "the creator of the Whatisitsname" (Saadawi 2), around whose story and existence the novel revolves. More than one time, Aziz diagnosed Hadi as seeming to be a person with two faces or two masks (Saadawi 21); to him the psychic rift that ailed Hadi was noticeable enough. Aziz associated Hadi's psychic disorder directly with the traumatising killing, in a terrorist explosion, of Hadi's friend and business partner Nahem Abdaki:

> The shock of Nahem's death changed Hadi. He became aggressive … He kept to himself for a while, and then went back to his old self, laughing and telling extraordinary stories, but now he seemed to have two faces, or two masks—as soon as he was alone he was gloomy and despondent in a way he hadn't been before. He also started drinking during the day and always had quarters of arak or whisky in his pocket and the smell of alcohol on his breath. He grew dirtier, let his beard grow longer, and rarely washed his clothes. (Saadawi 21)

Essentially, the lines above point out that Hadi got two selves: the "old one" (Saadawi 23), i. e. the one he had before the killing of Nahem, and a new, traumatised one that he had after the accident. He is the same person but, so to speak, two-selved. Elsewhere in the novel, the same event is elaborated on. Hadi was deeply shocked by the sight of bits of "victims [that] were all mixed up together" (Saadawi 182). The mortuary worker told Hadi to collect some of the human parts in the mortuary and take them, "take this leg and this arm and so on" (Saadawi182), since the body, like many other bodies, was already torn into pieces as a result of the explosion (Saadawi 182).

It should be acknowledged that Nahem's death was, so to speak, the last straw that made Hadi's mind, that had actually been burgeoning, like a boiling cauldron, with fearful and worrying ideas, burst in such a way. "He swore and cursed and threw stones after the American Hummers or the vehicles of the police and the National Guard" (Saadawi 21). Hadi, we are told, had actually gathered bits and pieces of human bodies that were killed in previous terrorist explosions and pieced and stitched the parts together and, from the bits of different bodies, could make up a whole body of a human being. Counterparting with its fragmentary physical structure, the psyche of the new being, in its turn, was fragmentary. This can be described by the words of the gothic being Mary Shelley's Frankenstein created as "shattered spirit" (Shelley). In his book *The Intervention of the other: Ethical Subjectivity in Levinas and Lacan*, David R. Fryer comments exquisitely on the point of how disfigured person, or what Freyer terms "fragmented body", can well result in "a certain level of…disintegration in the individual" (48). The corpse was complete, but not whole; it looked gothically grisly and dismal. Hadi explains what he decided to do with the newly compiled corpse, "I wanted to hand him over to the forensics department, because it was a complete corpse that had been left in the streets like trash. It's a human being, guys, a person," he told his listeners

at Aziz's coffee shop (Saadawi 23). But later on the same day, Hasib's bodyless, lost soul found the corpse and got into it.

Hadi's story of the Whatisitsname functions like a motif. It crosses and recrosses throughout the novel bringing about some main stream of action, a unity, around which other actions go in parallel and intersect at different points of the novel's course of action:

> Hadi's listeners were completely wrapped up in the story. New listeners risked missing the pleasures of the story if they insisted on challenging it right from the start. The logical objections were usually left to the end, and no one interfered with the way the story was told or with the subplots Hadi went into." (Saadawi 23)

Later in the novel, Aziz gives a similar account of what he believes has befallen Hadi as the former comments on the drastic changes that happened to the latter on losing his friend. As told by the narrator, "Aziz and some of those sitting there knew that Hadi had written Nahem out of it and put the Whatsitsname in his place" (Saadawi 182). Listener's to Hadi's story about the Whatisitsname, however, were not ready to believe the story even though they were so much absorbed in the details of the story of the Whatisitsname, which Hadi told at Aziz's coffee shop, simply because they knew that it was the other, traumatised Hadi that told the story. To them, the story was a distorted version of Hadi's own shocking experience after the death of Nahem.

It was only quite late in the novel that Elishva reached an epiphanic moment of disillusionment at which she figured out important findings about the picture of the saint she has been devoted to and has often "knelt next to" (Saadawi 198). That she almost always looked at her saint's "beautiful face" (Saadawi 198) made her ignore or overlook many of the other important details in the picture. One such detail is the fact that her saint wore the clothes of a warrior, not those of a saint. Realising such details about the picture disturbed Elishva greatly and demolished the idea

of innocence she has always associated her saint with, "You're tormenting me," she said…You haven't killed this dragon, have you, you warrior?" she said, then waited patiently for his answer. She stood up, still staring into the handsome face of the silent saint (Saadawi 165). Finally, she decided to look at him as two different people: the one she has whole-heartedly been devoted to and pleading, and the other a fighter with secular mundane apparel and military paraphernalia. The face stands for the first and the body stands for the second. Having marked this essential contradiction, which, to her, marks a psychological flaw rather than anything else, old pious Elishva, surgeon-like this time, decided to interfere by dividing the picture into two parts. Before leaving her house to emigrate to Australia to live with her daughters, she decided to take the picture of her saint with her but, at the last minute, she made up her mind to cut off the head of the saint and leave the rest of the body. She cut off the head (face), the part of the saint she admired and dedicated her life to, and left behind the rest of the body as she discovered that it is void of purity. In so doing, she meant to set apart what is religious and sacred from what is secular:

> It had lost some of its former grandeur, but now she could see the saint's face up close—his fine eyebrows and glistening red lower lip. She thought of rolling the picture into a tube and adding it to her other treasured possessions, but then she had another idea. She went into her room and fetched some large sewing scissors, then went back and knelt next to the picture. She … started to cut into the picture, making a long straight line across until the tips of the scissor blades were close to the saint's head. Then she cut in a circle, making a kind of halo around his beautiful face. When the circle was complete, she removed the face. This was the part she liked. (Saadawi 198)

It was Elishva's ceaseless and demanding wish of becoming a mother that led her to accept the Whatisitsname as her son Daniel. On seeing him, she called him her son and fetched him the clothes

of her son Daniel that have been kept in the chest of drawers for twenty years.

At this point, it is appropriate to pose the question who is the Whatisitsname? To start with, the Whatisitsname is the most important character in the novel. It is noteworthy, however, that this character resists definition and identification. People differed greatly about how they saw him. Some people saw him as "the only justice there … in this country" (Saadawi 110), "the savior" (Saadawi 122) with a "prophetic" (Saadawi 113) and "noble" (Saadawi 107) mission; the "image of God, incarnate on Earth …that they were forbidden to see" (Saadawi 126). As the Whatisitsname admits, "they believed I was the face of God on earth" (Saadawi 129). Others, however, saw him as a mass destructive power. To those, he was the "Criminal Who Has No Name" (Saadawi 211), "they're accusing me of committing crimes, but they don't understand" (Saadawi 110). He was also "the monster" (Saadawi 220), "an agent of foreign powers" (Saadawi 220), "Criminal X" (Saadawi 171). He was even seen as "the black hole and the Great Azraeel, the Angel of Death, who would swallow up the whole world under the protection of divine grace" (Saadawi 126).

On rising upright, Hadi's newly created being, the Whatisitsname, must have asked the question, to quote Ted Hughes's question in "Wodwo", "What am I" (Ellmann 1276). This indicates that prior to the sense of belonging, and prior to all else, there comes the sense of the need for identifying oneself. This sense of, so to speak, selflessness overwhelmed the new being that did not even know his name. His endeavor was triggered and empowered by the obsessive preoccupation of identifying himself. He initiated his pursuit of self-discovering and identifying; a journey that extended throughout the novel.

The creature left Hadi's shed that is, so to speak, the place of his birth. He climbed onto the neighbouring house of old Elishva, Umm Daniel, who did not hesitate to name him; "my son", "Danny" (Saadawi 15); The old woman, thus, "brought him out of

anonymity with the name she gave him: Daniel (44). It is, above all else, naming and identifying that gave Umm Daniel the right to own the new being; to identify is to own. Till the end of the novel, he never thought of her but as his mother, "my poor mother" (Saadawi 116). When he discovered he had a voice, he uttered his first words to calm the old lady down, "I'll be back. Don't worry, said he" (Saadawi 55).

The being's jealousy got kindled when he saw the picture of Elishva's son, Daniel, hung on the wall. Such was a highly complicated moment. He saw Daniel as a true rival. This somehow suggests the being's latent sense of jealousy which motivates a male toward a female. To employ S. Freud's term, this can be dubbed Oedipus complex in which there is a sexual attitude on the part of a child towards the parent of the opposite sex accompanied by a sense of rivalry towards "the one of its own [sex]" (Jones 46-7). Significantly enough, he saw his own image reflected on the outer glass of the frame of Daniel's picture. Psychoanalytically speaking, this marks the beginning of the "mirror stage" (Barry 114)[2] in the life of Whatisitsname. On seeing the reflection of his horrible image on the mirror, the Whatisitsname was completely appalled by his own image.

On vs within the frame represents the struggle between the one and the other of the two characters. The new being still understood that he was a mere reflection, and this provoked his jealousy. His seeing of his own reflection on the picture of the lady's son provoked the Whatisitsname's desire of displacing the old lady's son and so that he would get an "undisputed possession of his mother" (Baldick 275). He is ready to be Daniel; indeed, he sees himself to be Daniel (Saadawi 46). A moment of realisation, and a

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[2] According to Lacan, the term "mirror stage" refers to such a phase in a child's life, between six and eighteen months, "when a child recognizes its own reflection in the mirror and begins to conceive of itself as a unified being" (Barry 114). The term is employed here to refer to the Whatisitsname's moment of self-recognition on first seeing his image reflected on a mirror.

wish to displace and replace Daniel preoccupied the new being. This was followed by another, more traumatising moment.

The rift in the Whatisitsname's personality is a characterising feature. Noticeably, the Whatisitsname had a clear idea about his mission from the time he rose alive: it was to revenge those who caused the deaths of those whose body parts comprise his own body, those victims who were killed in bombings and suicidal actions:

> the Whatsitsname was made up of the body parts of people who had been killed, plus the soul of another victim, and had been given the name of yet another victim. He was a composite of victims seeking to avenge their deaths so they could rest in peace. He was created to obtain revenge on their behalf. (Saadawi 106)

Foremost among the criminals he targeted was the "Venezuelan mercenary" in charge of the security company responsible for "recruiting suicide bombers who had killed many civilians" (Saadawi 225).

Elemental to the psychic, so to speak, evolution of the Whatisitsname was that moment when he changed from seeing himself as a fragmentary being, made up of bits and pieces of human part, to seeing himself as a one, whole being. This is indicated by his looking at the mirror, again, and realising he has become a different person, "the Sophist…started applying makeup to suit my new identity" (Saadawi 128). The makeup hid all the scars and now he looked like an ordinary person. This followed the process of grafting his decaying and rotten parts with fresh parts from newly killed citizens; this time, however, the parts were taken from criminals not from innocents as it was done previously. His realisation of himself and his mission changed as the newly added parts meant a radical change not only of the Whatisitsname's seeing of himself but also of his seeing the world. In Chapter Ten, the Whatisitsname acknowledges that, "I killed the militia leader and fifteen people who were defending him" (Saadawi 130). More

importantly even, he says, "I killed the Venezuelan mercenary" (Saadawi 124). This, as he acknowledged, marked the end of his mission. He knows well that "[a]ccording to the schedule that I have, my mission ends tonight. I'll get hold of the Venezuelan mercenary officer at a hotel in Karrada…then leave this horrible world of yours (Saadawi 123). Having accomplished his mission, he is, thus, expected to "melt away" (Saadawi 125). He, however, got blighted with a sense of individuality and love of life and that spoiled his mission, "I'm now taking revenge on people who insult me [as a whole (Saadawi (Arabic version) 209)][3], not just on those who did violence to those whose body parts I'm made of," said the Whatsitsname (Saadawi 150). Only then, he killed innocents for new, compensatory spare parts, and he easily justified his own killing of innocents (Saadawi 131). His mission changed from being that of revenging the deaths of those whose body parts comprised him to killing for living. Importantly, he asks himself, "In retribution for this victim, who should I exact vengeance on?" (Saadawi 131). Now he cares more about himself than he does about those he was supposed to avenge their deaths, "the Sophist sat me down on a chair in front of a dressing table and started applying makeup to suit my new identity (129)" (Saadawi 129). The creature's gestalt conceptualisation of himself maximied his self-recognition. He no more thought of himself as being formed from parts of innocent victims. He saw himself as one whole individual, and henceforth, his vision of his mission vanished.

The Whatisitsname's sense of self-recognition is further enhanced by the fact that he came to recognise that he looked better than before. He came to think of himself as an ordinary human being, and this demolished the reason of his very coming into existence. This marked the being's discovery of a new self. It

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[3] This is in the original Arabic text but it is missing from the English translation. The Whatisitsname's new recognition of himself as a whole marks the beginning of a new transitional phase and that is why the words "as a whole" are crucially important here.

simply meant that the Whatisitsname passed through two phases that are poles apart: the first is that of the Whatisitsname's recognising of himself as a being representative of the innocent victims, a being bent on revenging victimisers, and the second is that of the Whatisitsname's recognising of himself as an individual. This second phase represents the other extreme of what the first phase was like. The first phase ends when the Whatisitsname kills the Venezuelian mercenary. "I have to find the real killer of Hasib Mohamed Jaafar so his soul can find rest," (Saadawi 106). This is supposed to mark the end of the Whatisitsname's mission. Decay, decomposition and vanishing of the Whatisitsname were supposed to follow the end of the mission the Whatisitsname as he himself acknowledges:

> I'm getting close to accomplishing my mission. There's a man from al-Qaeda living in a house in Abu Ghraib, on the edges of the capital, and a Venezuelan officer who's a mercenary with a security company operating in Baghdad. Once I've taken revenge on them, everything will be over. Except that things haven't been moving to a close in the way I had assumed they would. (Saadawi 121)

It was a moment of self-realisation that led Abu Anmar to make his most important decision of selling his Orouba Hotel and leaving Baghdad. It struck him that the place where he had lived turned out to be so strange to him that he felt alienated at the very place where he had lived for many years. Baghdad turned out into "a city he no longer recognized. After twenty-three years, the city had abandoned him, becoming a place of murder and gratuitous violence (Saadawi 190). This, along with Farag's offer of buying the hotel, led Abu Anmar to a further important reflection on himself. He realised how he has turned from being a man on top of the world, the "king" (158) in Betaween, the neighbourhood where most of the action takes place, into a penniless person. He found it impossible to share the ownership of the hotel with a person who was quite poor and mean when Abu Anmar was at his prime. When Abu Anmar told his hotel guest Hazem Aboud about his

tight financial situation and about Faraj's offer of partnership, Hazem said, "[t]hen accept Faraj's offer". This triggered Abu Anmar's memories of the past:

> "No, impossible. I will not work under this criminal. I will not let him humiliate me at my age. I was the king in this area when he was renting houses to whores and pimps. I was king."
>
> Abu Anmar leaned down to take a massive photo album from the big drawer in his wooden desk. There were black-and-white pictures of Abu Anmar in a suit and tie, looking thin and young. In one he was standing next to a basketball team from Maysan Province, in another sitting next to some short-haired girls who were in a church choir from Mosul. There were pictures of celebrities and people who had once been famous but who nobody but Abu Anmar seemed to know.
>
> "So, what will you do? Will you just go on like this till your savings run out?" asked Hazem. (Saadawi 158)

That moment of realisation was so agonising to Abu Anmar that he decided to leave the place.

Even though it can be attributed to different reasons each of the characters above experienced some psychological rift in one way or another. Only one character can be said to have been psychologically immune to such a problem, i. e. Abu Anmar who has been going through "financial straits" (Saadawi 151). He resorted to great history, represented by his album of black-and-white pictures and the large green picture of his family tree hung in the lobby of his hotel (Saadawi 213)[4], to remind him of his past and origin and he stuck to who he is.

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[4] This is mentioned in the Arabic version but it is not mentioned in Jonathan Wright's translation of the novel.

Conclusive to this reading of Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is that psychic splits are a phenomenon that can be dubbed collective unconscious. The characters, for different reasons though, are not at ease with themselves and each, except for Abu Anmar, seeks transformation into becoming another, different person. In its entirety, thus, the novel reveals a nation's (the Iraqi one) identity that is rifted and at stake.

The novel surges with people, as well as souls, that suffer from a state of loss of identity. It is true that throughout the novel, the characters, living and dead ones, endeavor to (re)identify themselves. The novel is, thus, exposing of a vortex of the vicious circle of lack of identification the Iraqi nation has undergone since the time it was colonised by the United States of America. It is a vortex that drains almost all of the novel's characters. This complies with Hans Bertens' assertion that a literary text cannot be considered in vacuum, apart from the culture that produced it. To Bertens, a literary text is by no means the product of an individual author, "but rather the product of a much larger culture that speaks through the writer" (158).

This article has taken to its focal interest the inner intermingling of thoughts that preoccupy the characters. It is out of the struggle with the self, more than with others, that the characters' outlooks on life are mainly formulated. The paper fathomed the depths of the psychic splits that fissure the characters. Even though such splits lie deep within the psyches of the characters they largely affect the ways in which each character looks at and thinks of the world. It is the psyche that has been mainly dwelt on and explored throughout this research. The dialogues provided are but few and, likewise, few are the spoken words. By navigating through the minds of the characters through the accounts provided by the omniscient narrator of the novel, the paper has targeted unexpressed thoughts that matter more importantly to psychoanalytic critics. The paper has mainly drawn on and explored the unuttered thoughts, looks, gestures, actions and reactions, as it is the case with Brigadier Majid, the astrologers, Mahmoud al-Sawadi, Ali Baher al-Saidi, Hadi, Elishva and the

Whatisitsname. The domain the reader of this research is ushered into is mainly that of the thought-but-not-expressed ideas.

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