

## **Dehumanization, Fragmentation, and Trauma of Identity in Frankenstein in Baghdad by Ahmed Saadawi**

**Ahmed Hussein Abbood Altaai**

General Directorate of Education in Karbala

**Abstract:** Benefiting from Frantz Fanon's theories, the present research analyzes how Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* represents the internalization of violence undergone by the colonized, where the brawl for justice is linked with feelings of anger, muddle, and anguish. At the core of this novel lies Shesma, a surreal figure, a stitched-together corpse that exemplifies the disjointed identity and cooperative trauma of a country struggling with the consequences of war and colonialism. This study maintains that Shesma is regarded not only as a real symbol of the bodily and mental wounds left by foreign occupation but also as a deep criticism of the cyclic spirit of violence in postcolonial societies. Shesma's body functions as a multifarious spot of confrontation and recovery due to typifying the dichotomy of the colonized subject's experience, struggling for freedom while concurrently dealing with the lingering threats of trauma. Moreover, this article inspects the themes of physical revulsion and phantom justice that pervade the novel, enlightening how Saadawi creates a story that disapproves of the basic grounds of radical violence. Saadawi also asks his readers to challenge the ethical uncertainties and moral predicaments encountered by people in a society where violence has become regularized and where the search for identity is tense with disintegration. By placing *Frankenstein in Baghdad* in the framework of Fanon's work, this study shows the close association between trauma, identity, and the sociopolitical situation of contemporary Iraq. Eventually, it contends that Saadawi not only blames colonialism and the constant violence that originates from it but also ratifies the Fanonian contradiction, demonstrating how the fight for freedom can be both a base of authorization and a foundation of suffering. Thus, this paper leads to a better understanding of the intricacies of postcolonial identity and the permanent influence of trauma in a world full of fight and displacement.

**Key words:** Dehumanization, Fragmented Self, Postcolonial Disorder and Moral Ambiguity, trauma of Identity, Violence.

### **1. Introduction**

Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013) is a significant literary answer to the violence, fragmentation, and moral disorder after the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. Happening in a war-ravaged Baghdad, the novel mixes magical realism, political allegory, and horror in order to tell the story of a creature, Shesma, assembled from the body parts of bombing victims, who rises to look for justice for the dead.

The main character in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is Shesma, sometimes referred to as a "nameless" figure in Arabic or transliterated as "what-its-name." Shesma is a twentieth-century version of Shelley's Frankenstein's monster. In this version, a man called Hadi Al-Attar decides to create a corpse from the recently collected flesh of Baghdad victims of suicide bombings and sectarian violence, whose bodies were torn to pieces and never given a proper burial. If at all possible, he wants to give the corpse a respectable burial instead of being thrown in the street and treated like trash.

According to Elayyan (2017), after his flatmate, who lives in an old house with him, is killed in a suicide bombing, Hadi is forced to construct the monster, for he gets fed up with gathering his friend-shattered remains. His body starts to blend in with the bodies of other victims. As a result, he decides to follow up the bombing explosions to collect human body parts and get them stitched to form a monster dubbed by Frankenstein. He intends to grant the dispersed bodies a dignified burial (p. 160).

In *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, the monster is actually created through the accumulation of body parts from victims of violence in the devastations of war in Baghdad. The character Hadi collects these body parts and stitches them together in order to create a complete body, which then comes to life as a vengeful being searching for justice for the victims. This novel is thus about the effect of war and violence on human beings and communities and the idea of communal responsibility for the consequences of severe clashes. Now, this study is going to examine the novel by using Frantz Fanon's postcolonial views, concentrating mainly on how violence works as a reaction to occupation, and how identity and humanity are renovated in a disjointed postcolonial setting.

## **2. Statement of the Study**

In postcolonial literature, the relationship between violence, identity, and justice is still a serious area of investigation (Loomba, 2015, p. 70). Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is regarded as a significant representation of these themes, yet its complications have not been analyzed aptly. The novel richly shows the cyclic spirit of violence and the subsequent fragmentation of identity experienced by people in battle-weary societies. In spite of the rich theoretical outline delivered by Frantz Fanon's work, there exists a gap in understanding how Saadawi's plot not only disapproves of the socio-political situation of contemporary Iraq but also includes profounder moral questions regarding the renovation of identity and ethics after dehumanization. This study seeks to fill this gap by using Fanon's views to examine the complex strains between colonialism and the search for justice, eventually meaning to describe the brawls and likelihoods of reclaiming humanity in a splintered universe.

## **3. Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because by inspecting the novel's depiction of dehumanization, fragmentation, and trauma of identity, the present research will emphasize the permanent influence of colonial and postcolonial violence on personal and cooperative identities. In fact, the significance of this study is thanks to its aim to reveal how Saadawi's story goes beyond mere political criticism and addresses deeper subjects of justice, morality, and the restoration of identity in a setting characterized by confusion and grief. By using Fanon's perceptions, the study shows the cyclic nature of violence and the mental consequences of living in a ruptured society. What's more, this paper accentuates the usefulness of literary works in understanding the present matters of identity and justice.

## **4. Theoretical Framework: Fanonian Theory**

Frantz Fanon, a key intellectual in postcolonialism, is well-known due to his books *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). His concepts generally revolve around the mental and cultural features of colonialism, chiefly the identities of colonized individuals. Fanon contends that colonialism produces a weighty feeling of alienation and disintegration amongst the colonized, as they struggle with their enforced identities and the dehumanization that originates from colonial domination.

Fanon accentuates the significance of retrieving agency and identity through a procedure of psychological decolonization. He suggests that the colonized people have to defy and disassemble the internalized racism and inferiority complex imparted by colonial governments. This conflict is vital for attaining factual freedom and self-definition. Furthermore, Fanon supports the inevitability of violence in the fight against colonialism, inspecting it as a purifying tool for the colonized to repossess their humanity and proclaim their individuality. Fanon's ideas present a context for understanding the brawls of characters as they deal with the legacies of colonialism and the pursuit of self-identity.

Now, the present research will benefit from Fanon's theories. In his books and particularly *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon discusses the ways by which a black is referred to and socially identified by the white based on their race or skin color. What is remarked in *Black Skin, White Masks* depicts the challenging experiences undergone by Fanon himself as a black man living in a world controlled by white people. This issue enables the white community to enforce a racial image on black people (p. 83). This image which is established by the white man's eyes (Fanon, 1952, p. 84) has its origins in colonialization. In fact, and as mentioned before, this problem is not only about black people, but also includes any non-white colonized subject.

*The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) is another significant book by Fanon, published in 1961, which presents a powerful critique of colonialism and imperialism. The book focuses on the process of decolonization and the violent struggles that often accompany it. Fanon contends that colonialism is not simply a structure of political and financial dominion, but a classification of cultural subjugation that corrodes the identity and self-possession of the colonized. He assumes that colonialism creates a binary amid the colonizer and the colonized and that it is only through violence that the colonized are able to recover their pride and power.

The book closes with a demand to action for the multitudes of colonized people to rise up and fight for their own emancipation. Fanon says that the only way to get free from colonialism is to defeat it entirely and to build a different society that is exempt from the binary of colonizer/colonized. All together, *The Wretched of the Earth* is an important book that has had a substantial influence on postcolonial research, critical theory, and anti-colonial activities all over the world.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Violence as a Response to Colonial Oppression

In studying *Frankenstein in Baghdad* by Ahmed Saadawi through Frantz Fanon's theories, chiefly with reference to violence as a reply to colonial subjugation, it is vital to figure out the byzantine nature of violence in postcolonial backgrounds. Fanon, in his significant book *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961, pp. 14-21), articulates an unfathomable link between colonialism and the spiritual, collective, and political concerns of violence. He recommends that colonial suppression desensitizes the colonized, robbing them of their identity and right, and that violence becomes a fundamental, though appalling, reaction to repossess that autonomy and regain sense of worth.

Colonialism, as Fanon describes, brings about dehumanization, where the colonized folks are lessened to unseen and ignored individuals. This repression produces a break in identity, as the colonized have to deal with a world that refutes their humanity. In *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, the character of Shesma, the stitched-together corpse, is a touching allegory for this dehumanization (Murphy, 2018, p. 274). Shesma's scrappy body mirrors the dissolution of national identity and the trauma imposed by violence, both exterior and interior. The violence undergone by people in war-ravaged Iraq is not just bodily but also mental, resulting in a communal trauma that is revealed in numerous ways such as societal discontent and individual misery. Saadawi (2018) says,

Where had these two men come from? No one gave much thought to the question because the area had plenty of outsiders who had moved in on top of each other over many decades; no one could claim to be an original inhabitant. (p. 27)

Fanon believes that violence can be a purifying reply to the misery caused by colonial authorities. It is a tool through which the colonized can proclaim their presence, retrieve their identity, and defy the domineering constructions that aim to overpower them. In *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, the violence portrayed is both a reaction to the instantaneous revulsions of war and an image of the historical heritage of colonialism and imperialism. The novel demonstrates how the characters cope with their identities in a setting blemished by violence, where regaining one's body and freedom often includes challenging the threat of violence itself. Teggart (2019) refers to the setting and says,

The novel's Baghdad is a complex mixture of the natural and the supernatural, featuring rampant suicide car bombings, souls searching for bodies, storytellers meeting for coffee, nights filled with gunfire, journalists meeting with prostitutes, streets filled with dead bodies, families grieving their

lost ones, government officials employing astrologers, and many other contradictory, Gothic, violent, and even sentimental moments. (p. 2)

Shesma's search for equality is representative of this fight. As a figure born from violence, Shesma stands for the unsettled anger of a society that has been recurrently mistreated. The act of sewing together different parts of bodies signifies the effort to build a unified identity from the disarray of disintegration. This violence, though, is not without its costs; it reveals the cyclic nature of violence that Fanon defines, where the oppressed may become the oppressor in their search for self-determination. This is why it is noted,

There were serious things happening, and Hadi was merely a conduit, like a simple father or mother who produces a son who is a prophet, a savior, or an evil leader. They didn't exactly create the storm that followed. They were just the channel for something that was more powerful and significant than themselves. (Saadawi, 2018, p. 89)

Fanon refers to the irony intrinsic in radical violence. Whereas it can act as a means of deliverance, it can also preserve violence that weakens the objectives of the revolution. In *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, Saadawi shows this contradiction through the character of Shesma, whose reality as a violent entity leads to questions about the ethics of looking for justice through violent ways. The story makes the reader think about the inferences of violence as a reaction to repression: can it actually result in freedom, or does it only reproduce coercion it pursues to pull apart?

## 5.2. The Fragmented Postcolonial Subject

As stated before, in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, Saadawi depicts a gripping investigation of the fragmented postcolonial subject through the perspective of trauma, identity, and the permanent impacts of colonial and existing violence. Fanon's work maintains that colonialism not only overcomes countries but also strongly affects the soul of the colonized people. The fragmented postcolonial subject appears as a direct result of this mental and communal displacement (Hudis, 2015, pp. 62-98).

Owing to colonial coercion and constant battle, people often find themselves dealing with diverse identities, fragmented experiences, and a feeling of estrangement from their own selves and societies. Saadawi (2018) refers to this issue by stating, "Not many people came back looking the same as when they left" (p. 50). This disintegration is not only an individual calamity; it echoes more important social ruptures that stem from historical traumas, cultural displacement, and the violence of both colonial and postcolonial systems.

In *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, the character of Shesma is assumed as an accurate and figurative depiction of fragmentation. Shesma's body, made of diverse disjointed parts, signifies the communal trauma of a country torn apart by war, religious violence, and foreign attack. Each piece of Shesma denotes a different story, a different identity, and a different experience of misery, revealing how the postcolonial subject is often a mixture of incongruent and incompatible identities.

Shesma's existence causes diverse questions regarding the nature of identity in a ruptured society. The act of sewing together the body echoes the despairing effort to establish unity from confusion, stressing the brawl to retrieve freedom and identity in a world that has dehumanized people (Teggart, 2019, p. 2). This procedure of recovery is filled with challenges, as it embraces challenging the unsettled traumas that linger to disturb both the personal and the communal.

According to Fanon, the mental magnitudes of colonialism bring about a deep feeling of estrangement and interior battle in the colonized subject. In Saadawi's novel, this fragmentation is palpable in the characters' brawls with their identities and their interactions with one another, "We try to avoid meeting one another, although we are moving around in search of one another" (Saadawi, 2018, p. 117). The violence imposed upon them, both bodily and emotionally, forms a setting where faith and association are hard. Characters in the novel often find themselves struggling with such feelings as wrath, misperception, and depression, echoing the suppressed violence that Fanon refers to.

The fragmentation of identity also causes a crisis of belonging. In a society where religious partitions and the wounds of war rule the society, people often feel detached from their culture and community. This withdrawal is wretchedly revealed in the contacts of characters who are incapable to find solidity in their communal experiences of trauma. The brawl for identity becomes a personal challenge, as the fragmented person copes with a world that sounds unwavering to uphold their rupture.

Regardless of the distressing spirit of fragmentation, Saadawi's novel also displays the power of the postcolonial people. Shesma's exploration of autonomy is a crucial metaphor for the fight to recover identity while getting through dehumanization. The character epitomizes the desire to defy the violence that has affected their life, looking for not only integrity for the dead but also a sense of fitting and pride for the living. This pursuit for uniformity in the middle of fragmentation is an important subject in Saadawi's text.

### **5.3. Dehumanization and the Struggle to Reclaim Humanity**

In the selected novel, Saadawi has linked the themes of dehumanization and the fight to retrieve humanity. Fanon claims that colonialism leads to objectification, where the colonized are regarded as "the Other," stripped of their personality, and without the full scale of human experience. This dehumanization is not just psychological because it is also palpable in social structures and the real experiences of people.

In *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, the violence and anarchy caused by war and foreign attack result in dehumanization. The characters, predominantly Shesma represent the fears of a society that has been torn apart by war. Shesma's existence is a witness to the loss of independence; it epitomizes the trauma of a whole country and the expurgation of personal identities in the middle of the viciousness of war. The act of producing Shesma from dissected parts denotes the destruction of humanity.

The mental consequences of dehumanization are serious and complex. Fanon accentuates that the internalization of oppression causes a crisis of identity amid the colonized. In Saadawi's narrative, characters struggle with feelings of irrelevance, estrangement, and desolation as they defy the violence that has degraded them. The ubiquitous atmosphere of terror and suspicion also aggravates their struggles as verified in this quote, "Every day we're dying from the same fear of dying" (Saadawi, 2018, p. 101).

For example, the characters' communications often disclose their interior fights and the burden of unsettled trauma. The violence they go through can bring about weakness, where the fight for endurance surpasses the wish for self-possession. This inner conflict is demonstrated through the character of Shesma, who, regardless of being a creation of violence, tries to proclaim justice. The longing to retrieve humanity becomes a dominant theme, as characters cope with their disjointed identities in a world that refutes their reality.

The attempts to repossess humanity are prevailing motifs in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. Saadawi depicts this struggle as both an individual and shared struggle. For the characters, repossessing their humanity includes challenging the violence that has formed their existence and looking for respect in a society that has made them imperceptible. Shesma's journey is a metaphor for this renovation. Saadawi also underlines the significance of community and cohesion in the battle to regain freedom. In a scrappy society where trust is unusual, the characters are supposed to cope with their associations with one another to find a sense of belonging and collective purpose.

### **5.4. Moral Ambiguity and the Collapse of Ethical Systems**

Moral ambiguity signifies circumstances where the difference between right and wrong is indistinct, bringing about moral quandaries and indecision in ethical judgment. In *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, the turmoil of war and violence creates a setting where traditional moral agendas are confronted. The characters often deal with a world where their movements can be regarded as both vindicated and ethically dubious. For example, the central character, Hadi, tries to create a creature from the body parts of victims due to a longing for freedom. This act can be inferred as a reaction to the dehumanization imposed by war.

The social collapse in post-invasion Baghdad causes a failure of moral standards. Residents have to make decisions that would characteristically be regarded as immoral, such as disloyalty, violence, or involvement in slaughters. This moral ambiguity echoes the interior conflict that people encounter when social structures that distinguish right and wrong crumble. Using Fanon's theories, mainly his ideas regarding decolonization and the psyche of the oppressed, we can contend that the characters' ethical ambiguity is based on their trauma and estrangement. Fanon speculates that colonized people often cope with their identity in a world that degrades them, and distorts their sense of morality. In Saadawi's story, this can be noticed in how characters validate their actions in a place filled with violence and repression.

Additionally, in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, the regularity of life is devastated, resulting in a society where survival often overcomes moral concerns. The characters' attempts to preserve their humanity within disarray mirror the breakdown of social standards. The failure of ethical systems leads to the breakup of identity among characters. As moral faiths corrode, people are left facing many identities, often formed by trauma. Characters also waver between being victims, wrongdoers, and survivors, worsening their fragmented sense of self.

It can be concluded that the formation of the "monster" is a metaphor for the magnitudes of ethical failure. The monster actually echoes the monstrous nature of a world where human life is reduced to mere parts in a cycle of violence. Shesma himself is regarded as the clearest symbol of the cyclical nature of violence. His incentives are clear: he means to revenge the deaths of his body's composite victims so as to bring them peace (Saadawi, 2018, p. 130). Therefore, in an attempt to find this peace, he kills. A few murders are not enough, though. In fact, in order for Shesma's search for justice through violence to continue, he ends up needing more flesh to endure (Saadawi, 2018, p. 135).

His life and his mission are reliant on death. His body's creation is the outcome of violence, his mission includes contributing to violence, and his yearning to live requires more violence, "Nothing in me lasts long, other than my desire to keep going. I kill in order to keep going.' That was his only justification" (Saadawi, 2018, p. 267). This agrees with Fanon's view that the repressed can become the oppressor in their search for identity and liberty. As a result, Saadawi's narrative means to discuss what is moral in a world lacking ethical rules.

## 6. Conclusion

To put it briefly, Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is considered an influential novel that captures the thoughtful themes of dehumanization, fragmentation, and trauma of identity in the framework of postcolonial violence. By using Frantz Fanon's theories, this study has depicted how the novel not only disapproves of the socio-political realities of contemporary Iraq but also explores the ethical magnitudes of identity restoration after systemic callousness.

By showing the cyclic nature of violence and its emotional consequences, Saadawi's text agrees with Fanon's declaration that the colonized subject is often left in confusion, struggling with a broken sense of self. The characters' brawls to retrieve their humanity in the middle of turmoil emphasize the vital necessity for justice and ethical lucidity in a fragmented society.

Finally, this paper stresses the implication of literature as a tool for analyzing the convolutions of the human experience while going through difficulty. By placing *Frankenstein in Baghdad* in the outline of Fanon's theories, we reach a reflective understanding of the long-term effects of violence and the strength of the human soul, which confirms the dynamic role of narrative in affecting our perception of justice, morality, and the likelihood of a restored identity in a splintered world.

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