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Neo-Orientalist Narratives: Worlds in Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*

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Abstract:

Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* garners global acclaim as an inventive adaptation of Mary Shelley's novel. It attracts researchers and critics who have emphasized the work's grotesque and haunted atmosphere, violence, and war. However, other vital and pertinent themes and symbols are disguising behind tragic anecdotes and bloody revelations. Amid this, an absurd and chaotic dystopian Iraq emerges, where individuals from diverse backgrounds and positions mirror the ugly, ambiguous, and sinister aspects of life. Characters and their behaviors and actions elucidate degraded faculty and perception—a degrading picture of the entire country where all performances collapse. This paper argues that Saadawi propagates these tokens in an effort to portray neo-Oriental worlds and their sordid incidents. He sides with neo-orientalists who present the Orient from similar perspectives. The literary, aesthetic, and intellectual lexicon the writer pens is not a description but indeed a definition of land and its people. The paper investigates this trend by adopting some perceptions of neo-Orientalism as elaborated by Ali Behdad and Juliet A. Williams and contributing a deeper and novel understanding. After introducing the writer and discussing characteristic features of neo-Orientalism, two sections analyze the contents of the work. In the "Dystopian Institutions" section, I examine how Saadawi renders public and social services irrelevant to people's demands and needs. I dissect the individuals' behaviors and actions in "Human Degradation."

Keywords: the American invasion of Iraq, dystopia, Frankenstein, Iraq civil war, Neo-Orientalism, violence.

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1. Ahmed Saadawi and the Neo-Orientalist Trend

Iraqi novelist, poet, and documentary filmmaker, Ahmed Saadawi (b.1973) served as a correspondent for BBC Arabic Television Channel during the sectarian civil war. Through reports and observations in Baghdad, he developed a sense of a storyteller, retaining central events, names, and detecting political, social, and cultural problematic issues afflicting Iraqi society. These venture points are evident in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* he published in 2013 whose English version appeared in 2018. Saadawi divides the novel into nineteen titled chapters, each with five untitled subsections, employs the flashback technique, and narrates events by first-person point of view. With some exceptions to the regions and areas mentioned, the main incidents take place in the Al-Bataween district of Baghdad and its nearby neighborhoods. The work focuses on the atmosphere, ordinary people, their lives, businesses, and daily routines during the bloody and turbulent period of 2005 and early 2006. The journalistic technique of selecting specific events, reporting on them, and generalizing criticism creates suspense and authenticity. The work documents real place names, references ethnic gestures, cites actual terrorist attacks, and depicts the harrowing incidents and personal decisions that many people have faced, including the choice to flee or emigrate. Following the American invasion, sectarian violence ravages Baghdad and other parts of Iraq. Saadawi utilizes this turmoil as a plausible pretext to introduce neo-Oriental figures, both ordinary and official, portraying them not as victims but as active participants in the chaos. His work exhibits traits of neo-Orientalism.

Neo-Orientalism has gained traction and amassed significant momentum over the past eventful decades. To begin with, the prefix *neo* implies a rapport between current and classical versions of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and underwrites up-to-date portrayals of Arabs and Muslims in forms of stereotyped categorizations. In 2003, in the preface to *Orientalism*, Edward Said analyzed the international and local developments marked by escalating terrorism, bigotry, and the Western aggressiveness exemplified by the Iraq invasion. He appeared to caution against what he termed "a belligerent neo-Orientalism" (p. xix). The dramatic, yet inevitable shift of concern and interest in the Orient from archeological, architectural, philological, anthropological, philosophical, and historical research centers to Western political and cultural strategy institutions enforces the emergence of neo-Orientalism. Indeed, the early seeds of neo-Orientalist discourse were disseminated in theses of prominent Western thinkers like Samuel

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Huntington, Francis Fukuyama, Bernard Lewis, Daniel Pipes, Bernard-Henri Georges Lévy and others. They entrench the doxy that Arab and Muslim countries clash with Western values and principles—lacking all virtues of democracy, human rights, and prosperous living. These countries are transformed into a world whose religion and ideology must be encountered, a theme Huntington advocates in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* that other writers take for granted. Triggered by the tragic attacks of 9/11 and their successive series of so-called War on Terror, Islamophobia, and Arab diaspora, the term enters academia and political study circles. While Orientalism was invented by a combination of colonization and imperialism, cultural discrepancies, religious biases, and collective ideological identities breed neo-Orientalism. Certain events in the Orient help intensify Islamic (forgotten) dogmas:[1] the War in Afghanistan, the Iraq invasion, the emergence of fundamentalism, the confrontation between religiosity versus secularization, the collapse of totalitarian political powers,[2] and, the Arab Spring. After decades of failures and setbacks by totalitarian regimes to improve economic and social conditions, and in the absence of authentic parties to fill the political voids left by these regimes, fundamentalist, ethnic, and narrow-minded factions seize the opportunity to assert their claims to rule and control.

Scholars attempt to comprehend neo-Orientalism within a plausible framework. Concentrating on the Middle East, Dag Tuastad (2003) observes how the U.S. lobbies and figures play roles in producing neo-Orientalist rhetoric. He finds a kinship between Robert Kaplan and Samuel Huntington whose writings and presuppositions help the hegemonic Western power disseminate "distorted images of dominated people" that he calls "barbarism thesis" (p. 591). The 9/11 tragic attacks sustain this circulation. Contextualizing neo-Orientalists within the American-led trend of labelling Arab Muslims and Islam with violence and aggressiveness, who stand in antagonist stance against the West, Tuastad diagnoses the present state between "modern Western state versus peripheralised peoples" the very incarnation of neo-Orientalist parlance (pp.594; 597). Mubarak Altwaiji (2014) sees the term geographically confined to Arab world

[1] With rising rhetoric of Al-Qaida and related fanatical groups, certain Islamic vocabulary items reappear not in their countries of origin, but rather outside: Jihad, Fatwa, Sabaya, caliphate, just to name but a few.

[2] Starting with Saddam Hussein, it extended to Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, Muammar Al-Gaddafi, Ali Abdullah Saleh, and Muhammad Hosni Mubarak, ultimately reaching Bashar Al-Assad, who lost significant portions of Syria and was eventually overthrown.

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with exclusion of other parts such as Turkey. He assumes that neo-Orientalism discourse typifies a continuous, deliberate narrative of traditional Orientalism and hence "serves the political hegemony and neo-colonial interests of people who are aware of the need to produce images of aggression and terrorism on the targeted nation" (p. 321). Dismissing notions of hegemony, power, and peripherality, Ali Behdad and Juliet A. Williams (2010) define neo-Orientalism as "a mode of representation, which while indebted to classical Orientalism, engenders new tropes of othering" (p. 2). The writers trace this "mode" in Iranian memoirs by Azar Nafisi, Roya Hakakian, and in Christopher de Bellaigue's memoir. They discover "ahistorical historicism and the claim to journalistic truth, two of the most important tropes of neo-Orientalism" (p. 6). Behdad and Williams have also noted that Middle Eastern writers and intellectuals living in the Orient or abroad participate dynamically in the discourse of neo-Orientalism, and "play an active and significant role in propagating it" (p. 2). They have used "their native subjectivity and new-found agency in the West to render otherwise biased accounts of the region seemly more authoritative and objective." I adopt this understanding and add that local neo-Orientalists encompass heterogeneous persons, who may belong to religious, political, ethnic, and secular movements. The expatriate groups consist of elite, educated individuals and refugees residing in various parts of the Occidental world. Moreover, besides updating its rendering, investing in religious and cultural disparities, and attracting local participants, neo-Orientalism applies and follows the paradigm of its forerunner and generates the same binary of opposition of *us* versus *them*. Its platforms and theorists are still in the West, and Orientalist intellectuals live either there or still at home, mimic neo-Orientalist modes and demonize Oriental intellect and people. The Oriental diaspora infuses force and power by enabling those practitioners to comment on and judge various upheavals and dilemmas faced by their citizens of origin. In this manner, both local and expatriate neo-Orientalists exert a patriarchal authority over Oriental subjects and regions. European and American centers and media provide them a voice, enabling their practices to disseminate neo-Orientalist narratives globally. Unlike traditional Orientalism, neo-Orientalist discourse conclusively cultivates tropes of islamophobia, terrorism, and peripherality.

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Furthermore, I argue that the central and pivotal tenet neo-Orientalism strives to convey is the complete disintegration between the utopian world of the West (the Occident) and the dystopian Orient (the East). Saadawi represents its domestic exerciser. He devises "new tropes of othering" and leads readers to a no man's land of dystopia. Baghdad is stripped of its vitality and healthy conditions. Despite their efforts to live, both women and men transcend their human domain into a bestial environment where perceptions, behaviors, and duties falter and cease. The plot centers on Hadi, the junk dealer and people living in Al-Bataween; among them is Elishva, who symbolizes Christians in Iraq. Spiritually devastated by the tragic and terrorist death of his colleague and friend, Hadi determines to avenge by forming a body from victims' pieces. As he tells the story in Aziz the Egyptian coffee shop, the news spreads widely and a young journalist, Mahmoud Al-Sawadi, discloses the tale and the creature launches the task of punishing the criminals. The creatures' name is Shesma (Whatsitsname) is given by Hadi. Now the government decides to bring him into justice and here comes the role of Brigadier Sorour Mohamed Majid whose team and means of investigation astonish readers. Later, Shesma's mission is deviated, the authorities capture Hadi instead, and Mahmoud abandons Baghdad. Hadi's project of restoring justice ends in a fiasco. Levels of "new tropes of othering" that *Frankenstein in Baghdad* delineates are scrutinized in the following sections.

2. Dystopian Institutions

Emulating neo-Orientalist motifs, the novel amplifies the dystopia from state, urban, individualistic, and pluralistic perspectives. Dystopia encompasses a range of abstract and physical parameters and describes a dysfunctional society. The connotations of the annunciation draw attention to disorder and abnormality, highlighting the disappearance of norms, security, and law. According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, the term "dystopia" originates from Greek, with its two parts meaning "bad, abnormal" and "place," respectively, combining to signify "bad place." *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* (2001) defines dystopia as a condition in which people together experience wretched, dehumanized, and dreadful lives—an anti-utopia world—a society characterized by human misery, as squalor, oppression, and disease (p. 611). *Oxford Dictionary of English* (2006) attaches to the term the settings where "everything is unpleasant or bad, typically a totalitarian or environmentally degraded one" (p. 545). Moreover, in such a place, life is extremely difficult and a lot of unfair or corrupt things happen (*Longman*, 2014, p. 556). On

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the other hand, literary dictionaries elucidate circumstances and milieus of a dystopian state which exemplifies an "unpleasant world." The inherent impossibility of utopia gives rise to its opposite: dystopia, and among the works embodying political dystopia is George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (Baldick, 2001, p. 74; Cuddon, 1998, p. 959). These definitions refer to the term's abstract and immaterial connotations—outer conditions of society and inner states of human beings. *Frankenstein in Baghdad* exhibits blatantly how officials, international forces, habitat, characters, and social ties metamorphose the capital into a quintessential dystopian arena. Chaos, turmoil, and eventual disorientation paint a comprehensive picture of life for Baghdadis.

Unlike Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer* (2013), which delves into reflections on Iraq's past and present history, Saadawi's work presents an ahistorical status quo and does not address the social and political crosscurrents responsible for violence and terror. The novel begins in medias res, with explosions and acts of terrorism that devastate Baghdad immediately following the American invasion, and attributes to Baghdad elements of a "bad place" which lacks genuine authorities and real security measurements. It opens with an official report assessing the performance and duties of the Tracking and Pursuit Department. The report recommends dissolving the Department and classifying and preserving all its investigations and findings. Under Brigadier Sorour Mohamed Majid's supervision, this governmental agency constitutes a clashing unit between international coalition forces led by the Americans and the Iraqi side. Its members are astrologers and fortune-tellers who predict serious security incidents that may take place in Baghdad and nearby regions. Saadawi insinuates a couple of shocking facts: Americans handle the security issue with a great deal of carelessness and irresponsibility; the Iraqis take the matter of security and peace not as a priority, but rather let things take care of themselves. This leaves Christians with one option—migration. Almost all Christians abandon Baghdad, heading towards the north or abroad. In a conversation between Elishva and Nader, who persuades her to leave, Nader describes Baghdad in the following dystopian lines: "Well, you know, life's getting hard here. What use is the house if life is hard? Fear, death, anxiety, criminals in the streets, everyone watching as you walk past." The surreal scene haunts people, even in their dreams: "Even when you're asleep, it's nightmares and jumping in fright all the time. The whole country's starting to look like the Jewish ruin next door" (Saadawi, 2018, p.

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200).[3] This description diagnoses problems and indirectly blames state authorities. Gradually but steadily there grows a sense of distrust and disbelief in Iraqis and Americans. It is Hadi who conclusively articulates this feeling too early. He receives news of the death of his colleague and is sad: "The shock of Nahem's death changed Hadi. He became aggressive. He swore and cursed and threw stones after the American Hummers or the vehicles of the police and the National Guard." Moreover, Hadi "got into arguments with anyone who mentioned Nahem and what had happened to him. He kept to himself for a while" (p. 23). Targeting Iraqi authorities and American troops is Hadi's condemnation that they have failed in their task to protect both civilians and the country.

Saadawi delves into the internal workings of Iraqi security institutions. He examines the pivotal role of Brigadier Majid, who represents a type of official that establishes networks both within and outside the governmental framework. Although he was a Baathist and served in the previous regime, Majid manages to reenroll and attain a position in new Iraq. The brigadier had a colonel rank in the intelligence system of the previous Iraqi army, got an exemption from the de-Baathification regulations, and was supported by the Americans (p. 72). He also forms connections with individuals returning to Iraq after the invasion, who are riding the wave and amassing questionable fortunes, like Al-Saidi. But the brigadier's duty refers to a pertinent point; though he is an experienced, professional, investigates, and warns higher authorities, they simply ignore him. The position he holds and the responsibilities he undertakes define a gap between the Iraqi side and the American one. Majid is not trustworthy and many suspect him and as his work requires, as he is "spying on ordinary people, there [are] people spying on him and reporting on him to the government parties, which [do] not look kindly on him because of his past" (p. 76). Even when he offers solutions and suggestions to improve security and stability, normally officials disregard them. A good example of such mistrust happens when the brigadier's team prepares a report on an imminent terror attack on Imams Bridge, the occasion of the ceremonies celebrating the anniversary of the death of the Imam Musa Al-Kadhim. The report is released at noon, but later that same day, the television broadcasts news of a massacre that took place on Imams Bridge. "The brigadier was frustrated that he hadn't been able to do anything to prevent the disaster." What agitates him most is that he provides:

[3] All the subsequent references to the novel are taken from this book.

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valuable information, but the authorities [don't] make good use of it. He [has] sent reports on many criminals, after painstakingly identifying their locations, but not a single one [has] been arrested, or if they [are] arrested, then some officer in the National Guard or in the Ministry of the Interior would appear on television or in front of his subordinates and take all the credit for the success of the security operation, with no mention of the curious Tacking and Pursuit Department or of the diligent work by a team led by a dedicated and meticulous man called Brigadier Sorour Majid. (p. 106)

Majid has been in perpetual fear of being dismissed by an order signed by the prime minister or that the Americans would forsake him, delivering him directly to merciless greed of political parties (p. 108). Furthermore, his work and efforts were degraded for he

drafted predictions about explosions on the streets of Baghdad, picked up rumours and analyzed them, provided confidential advice to politicians who were forming alliances for the coming elections or thinking about entering into business partnerships. He would get upset when his rank and military career were ignored and someone from government headquarters would call him after midnight to ask how to interpret some dream. He spent much of his time on such nonsense. (p. 203)

After failing to capture Shesma, Majid was interrogated along with his team. He has been suspended and the department he headed is also disbanded. Clearly politics and corruption reign the scene. Ultimately Majid is obliged to retire, but again he gets into government service and works outside Baghdad "just as a security officer in the local police headquarters" (p. 260). Majid's career exemplifies the pervasive corruption that corrodes institutions. The government high profile decisions are not conclusive but subject to some interferences and subjective connections and influences.

Saadawi's approach of emphasizing dystopian institutions reaches Majid's team too. The team consists of violent, aggressive, unprofessional, and dishonest members. The novelist depicts their behaviors, procedures, and methods through Hadi's horrible interrogation and Mahmoud's. In addition to their unrealistic and unprofessional means of investigating and data collecting, the members of the Department intimidate the suspects, threaten them, and follow no rules of respecting human rights and laws of justice. As will be illustrated below, their work demonstrates the dysfunctional official personnel as a whole.

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3. Human Degradation

Frankenstein in Baghdad oscillates between disturbances and tumult, illustrating the collapse of rationality and logic. At times, meaning itself seems to vanish. Characters are constructed to reflect neo-Orientalist stereotyped people. Alarmingly, they find themselves in a dystopian matrix. This personal level is something Ahmed Saadawi sheds light on conclusively in Al-Bataween, which is populated by wretched people like the old Christian woman living by herself Elishva, the Salims, Abu Anmar, and Hadi. The atmosphere is not only haunted by memories of lost ones like Elishva's son, but increasingly sterile. The urban landscape suffers from negligence, ruined buildings, and absence of civil services. Al-Bataween incarnates anachronism and witnesses a lapse of time. People just pass their days and live on the margin of life. The novel shows no hint of a love story but presents fruitless women whose only concern is to survive. The district resembles a battlefield which indeed becomes literally so after the suicide car exploded near Elishva's house. Meters away from the area, and as with all other ones, human remains, burned pieces, and dirt fill streets and corners.

Dystopia lurks within characters' psyche. In this sense, Vieira (2010) argues that dystopia does not merely refer to imaginary places, but more profoundly to the texts and characters that exist within such environments (p. 17). Nobody is certain about anything and this uncertainty is a truism the novel transparently declares. Elishva thinks that her son Daniel (who was killed in the Iranian-Iraqi War) is still alive and confuses him with Shesma and her grandson respectively. She welcomes and talks with the mysterious creature, thinks he is Daniel, and even tells her neighbors that her son has eventually returned home. Her ecstasy is evident in cheerfulness and her clothes. Nonetheless, when one of her daughters' son arrives in Erbil and travels to Baghdad to convince her to go with him to Australia, Elishva also greets him warmly as he is the missing Daniel. Standing at the doorsteps of her house, she "look[s] up, the inched forward with labored steps until she [stands] in the lane in front of the young stranger, examining him in the full light of day. It [is] definitely him—the very same young man with the slight grey smile that was in the old picture in her sitting room" (p. 228). Believing her wish and prayers have been fulfilled, Elishva turns to her neighbors in the street for she wants "to be sure that everyone [is] a witness to her miracle. Here [is] her beloved son, come back to embrace her."

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Umm Salim and Abu Salim watch what people do and who comes and goes in the neighborhood. Umm Salim interacts with people, holds no consistent notions about them, and expresses various unrealistic judgments about her neighbors. Abu Salim's role in the work has been a local observer of events happening in Al-Bataween. Nevertheless, he sees but does not recognize, watches but does not analyze, and detects yet takes no action. Aziz the Egyptian—a friend of Hadi the junk dealer and an old member of the locality—is a passive eyewitness of what is going around him and in his coffee shop— A place that attracts local and foreign figures, serving as a hub for stories, information, and rumors. Aziz tries to protect Hadi, advising him to be careful and to stop mentioning Shesma, he remains, however, silent and quiet when the authorities announce Hadi is the criminal X. Aziz the Egyptian participates in one of the most ironic moments in the novel when the news comes saying Hadi is the wanted criminal and "people heard the news, the sky over Baghdad cracked with gunfire. Everyone [is] in a state of hysterical joy, especially in [Al-]Bataween. . . . what the government [says] must be true." Neighbors react cheerfully and

Umm Salim [comes] out and dance[s] in the street, rattling her golden bracelets on her white arms. Her husband look[s] on shyly through the crack in the door, his hands pressed into the pockets of his pyjama top. Veronica, the old Armenian woman, [comes] out to throw chewing gum and sweets on the heads of the children in the lane, and despite the black clouds that [are] gathering, people continue to dance in the streets and on the roofs of buildings for more than an hour. . . Everyone [is] happy, even Faraj the real estate agent . . . Aziz [sees] the spontaneous celebrations but still [isn't] convinced that Hadi [is] the criminal. It [is] impossible. But he [goes] to dance outside the coffee shop anyway. (p. 271)

Ahmed Saadawi pictures a chaotic, recurrent moment in Iraq history. Blind celebration and mad elation of an event require much attention and analysis, however.[4] While they are celebrating two bad omens are looming large: the dim rainy night and the perplexed Shesma gazing at them from a distance.

[4] Iraqi history witnessed such tumultuous moments before: the bloody downfall of the monarchy, killing the first president, and other incidents.

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Another degenerated psychic state is reflected in Shesma. Hadi randomly patches pieces of different victims' bodies he gathers from terrorist explosions and names it Shesma —literally means the one whose name is unknown. The figure needs some deep analysis. As a character and symbol, the employment of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein in Saadawi's work dramatically demonstrates a distinct form of othering. As both an attribute and notion, Frankenstein foregrounds the disorder of neo-Orientalist conceptualization developed into multiple, clashing denotations: Elishva calls him Daniel, Tracking and Pursuit Department describes him the "One Who Has No Name" (p. 107), Mahmoud calls him "Frankenstein" (p. 256), and eventually Iraqi side "Criminal X" (p. 269). Moreover, he is more a concept than a figure whose existence now perplexes people since each denomination thinks Shesma embodies its fierce opponent: "Fear of the Whatsitsname continue[s] to spread. In Sadr City they [speak] of him as a Wahhabi, in Adamiya as Shiite extremist." Officials and Americans also reach different judgments for "the Iraqi government describe[s] him as an agent of foreign powers, while the spokesman for the US State Department [says] he [is] an ingenious man whose aim [is] to undermine the American project in Iraq" (p. 259). Othering Shesma and portraying him an enemy depict the prevailing chaotic situation in Iraq.

Second, Shesma's noble mission progresses into an indiscriminate project of killing and punishing both the evil and the good alike. At the beginning, he has a lofty assignment of ensuring justice: "Whatsitsname [is] made up of the body parts of people who [have] been killed, plus the soul of another victim, and [has] been given the name of yet another victim." Moreover, he is "a composite of victims seeking to avenge their deaths so they could rest in peace. He [is] created to obtain revenge on their behalf" (p. 125). And as Mahmoud puts it, Shesma is "on a noble mission and [has] to carry it out with as few complications as possible" (p. 126). "Complications" have nevertheless happened in which he moves from Al-Bataween and resides in another district where he gathers supporters. In the Assyrian quarter in Al-Dora, Shesma faces setback. A group of heterogeneous figures join him for different reasons and causes and each one contradicts the other. The group consists of the Magician, the Sophist, and the Enemy. The Magician had already worked with the previous regime but now dedicates his service to this mission because Shesma typifies "vengeance against anyone who has wronged" (p. 139). Being good at persuasion, the Sophist promotes threads whether they are good or evil. While the Enemy is an officer in the

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counterterrorism unit who supplies Shesma with equipment, tools, and information he requires to carry out a given job, such as locating a place, providing identity cards, and bringing vehicles for going around Baghdad. In addition to these three figures, there emerge other three minor ones who play roles in undermining the camp. The young madman believes that Shesma is the prototype of new Iraqi citizen; for the old madman Shesma represents the evil preceding the advent of the savior; the eldest madman takes Shesma as the savior incarnate (p. 140). These differing opinions emphasize not only the absence of a national compass but, more importantly, the presence of strife and crises

Shesma must replace his falling parts and new flesh from new victims must be given (p. 129). All close assistants replace falling parts with new "spare parts" and the Magician convinces the others that the body from which these "spare parts" come is of a victim who is a saint and whose soul now seeks revenge (p. 145). Now physically and mentally Shesma has been distorted for he is composed of parts of the innocent and the criminal. He therefore, undergoes an inner conflict that reflects his confusion and plight and causes him to kill an innocent old man and take his eyes. Although he knows the man is innocent and he ends his life without a reason, Shesma justifies the horrible act by saying this is "a sacrificial lamb that the Lord has placed in my path" and the poor man is to die anyway in that dangerous street, and what he does is just to "hasten his death" (p. 155). Another fatal event occurs in the camp. After dividing the building according to the ideologies each group advocates, conflict and turmoil arise as each group claims a story. Saadawi hints at a similar condition of dividing districts and regions in Baghdad according to sect or faction, showing how this division turns neighbors and citizens into enemies. Hence, due to grave differences of opinions, aims, ideology, and attitudes, Shesma's camp witnesses eventually a civil war among its members who slaughter one another. The only one remains is the young madman whom Shesma also eliminates. Shesma finds himself lost and alone and does not know what to do. He knows that:

his mission was essentially to kill, to kill new people every day, but he no longer [has] a clear idea who should he killed or why. The flesh of the innocents, of which he was initially composed, [has] been replaced by new flesh, that of his own victims and criminals. He [thinks] if he [takes] too long avenging the victims in whose name he [is] acting, the body parts he [has] taken from them would decompose in situ. It would be the end of him, and he would be free of this world.

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But he [isn't] sure this [is] the right choice either. . . he [thinks] he should exploit this distinctive talent in the service of the innocent—in the service of truth and justice. (p. 193)

He ends up as a criminal himself, caught in a cycle of slaughtering just to survive. On the very last page of the work, readers see Shesma staring and waiting in a dark nook on a rainy night. Confounded and speechless, he is left with no other option than standing still. The degradation of the whole project Saadawi blames the individual and society because Shesma commits mistakes and cannot direct his assignments. Society on the other hand forms no unified guidance and support. Each group desperately, whether religious or ethnic, follows its narrow interests instead. State power, which is responsible for these "bad" situations, does nothing. Does society have an outlet? The novel says no.

Saadawi degrades exaggeratingly two other figures. They contrast each other professionally. One is intellectually capable and performs his job in a good way, yet cannot accomplish his responsibilities. The other is physically unfit and lives in poor conditions, yet performs a unique role as a seeker of justice. Nevertheless, he cannot fulfill it either. The first one is Mahmoud Al-Sawadi, who undergoes dramatic changes in the novel and is exposed to various incidents. He could be that transparent link between Al-Bataween and Baghdad on one hand, and the Iraqi government and Americans on the other. An ambitious young journalist from Al-Amara in southern Iraq, living in Abu Anmar's Orouba Hotel, and works at A-Haqiqa Magazine, he uncovers the inner workings of security and politics, finding evidence and information about how the country has been governed and by whom. Relationships he has had and establishes are shrouded in mystery and ambiguity. His relationship with Al-Saidi, the owner of Al-Haqiqa Magazine and who has connections with politicians and officials, makes him an experienced journalist. He has been overtly ambivalent about Al-Saidi. Arriving from abroad after the invasion with an Islamic background, Ali Baher Al-Saidi owns expensive cars and buys land estates in affluent areas of Baghdad (p. 96). Hence, he represents those emerging in post-2003 Iraq, individuals with suspicious relationships with Iraqi officials. He regularly welcomes Nawal Al-Wazir who is "a film director, or so she claimed" (p. 41) and their relationship is unstable and lacks trust. The analogy between Al-Saidi and Majid cannot be overlooked for both men have changed their previous affiliations and beliefs. They have failed to perform their duties as a security officer and a journalist, respectively. They exploit the current

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situation and alter their attitudes. Al-Saidi is an Islamist and his friend a previous Baathist, yet the former is a "lapsed Islamist and abandoned his ideas when he was living abroad." The latter is "a lapsed Baathist." They exemplify newly emergent figures in Iraq after the fall of the former government.

Al-Saidi takes Mahmoud with him to meet the brigadier and during their conversation they speak about increasing violence and crimes and discuss the civil war "as if it were a film they were waiting to see in the cinema. They were laughing. So things definitely won't get too bad. If I stay close to Saidi," Mahmoud thinks, "I can be sure that things won't go badly, at least for me" (p. 75). There is a suggestion that people like these men, whom Mahmoud knows well, have the ability to protect themselves and evade danger effectively. Moreover, Mahmoud Al-Sawadi reports a dialogue between Al-Saidi and Majid:

Saidi and the brigadier had gone over all the country's problems, and unlike those in power, they seemed to know the solutions. There was stupidity and shortsightedness among the new rulers. Solutions were readily available. All these problems could be solved in half an hour, at least in theory, if people genuinely had the will to solve them. (p. 76)

Men like Al-Saidi and Majid do care about their own benefits and pay no attention to what people and the country have been undergoing. Corruption, greed, and exploitation dominate the scene. The novel puts an ambiguous end to Al-Saidi for he suddenly disappears and leaves Iraq and later has been accused of stealing "thirteen million dollars of US aid money" (p. 244). Theft, treason, and unpatriotic characterize this figure and those he represents.

Indeed, Mahmoud is the only one who knows he is uncertain about everything. It is Mahmoud who lives in Al-Bataween, reports Hadi's stories, and has the voice of Shesma recorded. Yet he ironically exposes Hadi and Shesma to the authorities and it is he who eventually leads to the victimization of Hadi. Not only Al-Saidi flees Baghdad, but also Mahmoud does the same. Mahmoud recognizes the security and political tense issues, has seen the officials of these vital sectors, and on the other hand he lives among ordinary people in Al-Bataween. Nevertheless, what he has really revealed is only the story of Hadi and Shesma. He therefore signifies those who know but are either reluctant to disclose truths or unable to do so. Although the novel concludes with Mahmoud's astonishment at the official announcement regarding the real criminal, he leaves Baghdad and returns to Al-Amara. This may not be a passing gesture, but rather a

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clear message Saadawi conveys: there exists no solution in that Oriental region.

Hadi Hassani Aidros is a pivotal character and embodies motifs Ahmed Saadawi emphasizes. If Al-Bataween symbolizes a typical popular Baghdadi district, then Hadi represents the ordinary citizen who bears signs of suffering, state negligence, and poverty, as his vulgar living apparently designates. Indications of his intellectual, artistic, literary, and responsible merits appear throughout his thoughts and actions the novel unfolds. He is over fifty and "always disheveled, with an untrimmed forked beard, a body that [is] wiry but hard and energetic, and a bony face with sunken cheeks" (p. 23). Working as a junk dealer, Hadi has a keen interest in historic and precious antiques related to Iraq's political and ethnic heritage. He preserves artifacts from the monarchical era, Hebrew inscriptions, Christian holy statues like that of the Virgin Mary, and Islamic verses. Intending to trade them later, he keeps them in good and intact conditions. Hadi has a talent for storytelling that deserves admiration too. Sitting among various patrons in Aziz's coffee shop, Hadi attracts curiosity and generates suspense among the audience listening to him. He develops a group of actual spectators whose demands and reactions he addresses. "To make the stories he told more interesting, Hadi was careful to add realistic touches," the narrator indicates, and "remembered all the details of the things that happened to him and included them every time he recounted his experience" (p. 17). A German journalist visits the coffee shop and describes Hadi's episode as a movie from Robert De Niro film and ironically links him with Hollywood (p. 18). Hadi continues to tell "extraordinary stories" that are neither repetitive nor boring; instead, they are captivating and engaging. He is creating more tales and maintaining the storytelling occasion, which becomes almost a literary ritual (p. 23).

Hadi might have enjoyed a better status in the past, and the novel provides brief glimpses of this period. Another relevant one is when he has been interrogated and says he did not commit traffic car violations but only in the past. Yet a decisive incident which turns Hadi's life upside down is the death of his partner. Some enough attention is given to the relationship between the two men. Nahem Abdaki is some thirteen years younger than Hadi, more religious and straight, but they appear "like father and son" (p. 22). Hadi calls Nahem the "Wretched,"[5] an attribution of the harsh and unbearable circumstances people like Nahem have been experiencing. Hadi's

[5] The book reads "Old Misery" which may not bring the direct translation.

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sensitive and passionate intellect has been permanently damaged by the brutal and dehumanized death of a friend, whose flesh and blood are mixed with his horse's—an act bluntly articulates the loss of Nahem's humanity (Elayyan, 2017, p. 160). Afterward Hadi has never been a normal man, but has always been sad and despondent (p. 23). This state drives Hadi's quest for poetic justice to avenge his friend's tragic death. Recognizing the chaotic circumstances and illogicality that Baghdad faces, he invents Shesma. He becomes consumed with the task of gathering and assembling human body remains scattered across Baghdad streets during waves of terrorist attacks. "'I made it complete so it wouldn't be treated as rubbish, so it would be respected like other dead people and given a proper burial,'" Hadi murmurs (p. 25). In one way or another, Hadi is "a simple father or mother who produces a son who is a prophet, a savior or an evil leader" (p. 103).

Unlike other characters in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, Hadi Al-Attag is determined to take action. He confronts the current situation head-on and seeks to alert people to the grave truth that something serious must be done. His resolve sets him apart and highlights his unique role in the narrative. Hadi performs a duty he feels morally obliged to accomplish. And unlike others, he has paid his life as a price for his awareness and actions—he paid it twice, one severely painful, the other fatal. The members of the Tracking and Pursuit Department savagely interrogate him about the crimes and events that have recently devastated Baghdad neighborhoods. They think that Hadi is the Frankensteinian figure in disguise. The interrogation develops into a severe beating attack. Two officers lift Hadi's arms while another officer punches him in the stomach like a "madman" and does not stop until Hadi vomits (p. 183). He can now neither stand up nor sit down, but lies in bed. After searching the place twice, the officers have found a small amount of cash Hadi hides; one officer takes the money and other things. Two officers take pieces of furniture, some antiques, a wall clock, and unique pictures of Iraqi historical periods. They even smash the statue of the Virgen Mary, and "they behave like thieves" (p. 184). Yet the episode is not over. They strip him naked and search for any stitching on his body, stab Hadi' arm, hip, and thighs. Hadi is now overwhelmed with pain and fatigue, believing that Shesma will suddenly appear to end his ordeal and slaughter the officers; but nothing happens. Two minutes after stabbing, "everyone left Hadi's house, taking with them the things they had stolen" (p. 185).

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After their leave, Aziz the Egyptian and some neighbors hurry and help Hadi that night. Something profound and significant has been awakened in him now. His dignity, personality, and being all have been humiliated, and he has just realized his situation and decided to change it. As a response, he sets to himself a new plan—a fresh start. After healing, he determines to "shave his head and face and buy smart new clothes and leave this dammed Jewish ruin and rent a large, airy room in Faraj's new lodgings, then think about renting a shop to buy, sell and repair used things." He is even going to "find a wife who would put up with him and restrict his drinking to one session a week" (p. 192). Hadi does not live to see this plan become true. He falls victim to a terrorist suicide car explosion right at his doorstep. It afflicts him and disfigures his face. While he is still in the hospital, the supreme security commanders declare they have captured the dangerous criminal known as Shesma, along with many other aliases. They even project his picture with his name, Hadi Hassani Aidros, who lives in Al-Bataween. In late February 2006, they announced, the criminal had

confessed to all the crimes he [is] accused of, including leading a murder gang, dismembering his victims, and planting them in back streets around Baghdad in order to spread alarm and fear. He had planned the explosion at the Sadeer Novotel . . . On top of that, the criminal was implicated in acts of sectarian violence and in murder for hire on behalf of gangs and sectarian groups. (p. 270)

Hadi embodies the persona of a tragic hero, confronting his fate with the utmost power and courage that a human being can demonstrate. Despite being surrounded by a dystopian environment and daunting events, he exhibits a strong determination to persevere, assist others, and confront perilous circumstances. His trial and conviction reveal a fact neo-Orientalists would welcome: justice, human rights, and even truth, have no place or foundation in Iraq—a reality Hadi now knows for certain.

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Conclusion

Frankenstein in Baghdad presents neo-Orientalist portrayals in the form of a dystopian Iraq. Dystopia serves then a function and it is not an end in itself. It is utilized to introduce "new tropes of othering" that identify the degeneration and collapse of a central (Islamic) Middle Eastern country. Ordinary characters find themselves haplessly in perpetual states of absence of institutions, safety, law, and peace. Al-Bataween represents a sample of a historical area whose inhabitants can no longer control their lives or even alter them. With the presence of such miserable and unpleasant settings, escaping becomes not just an option but also an obligation Christians and others decide to embark on. This bold gesture of the changing demographic and ethnic balance an Oriental region undergoes enriches neo-Orientalist ideology.

Ahmed Saadawi vividly exaggerates the dysfunctionality of official and social foundations. Brigadier Majid's unrealistic security measures, coupled with his suspicious and questionable connections, epitomize the flawed and ineffective governmental efforts to ensure people's safety. Noble duties of journalism have been neglected and betrayed not only by Al-Saidi but also by Mahmoud since he exposes Hadi to the authorities and does not keep his word about not unveiling the story of Shesma. He simply abandons the capital and delivers Hadi to his fatal destiny. But the harshest criticism Saadawi puts targets the collective will of the multitude: society. Shesma has failed in his mission because those around him hold conflicting and opposing opinions and goals. The small civil war in Al-Dora serves as the novelist's depiction of the real sectarian civil war that lasted for several acute years. Furthermore, Hadi's tragic end ultimately condemns the whole society. Snatched out of their historical, political, and social contexts, Saadawi's neo-Orientalist representations foster unfit figures, state malfunction, and sectarian strife.

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سرديات الاستشراق الجديد:
العوالم في رواية "فرانكن شتاين في بغداد" للروائي أحمد سعداوي

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المستخلص:

تحظى رواية "فرانكن شتاين في بغداد" للكاتب العراقي أحمد سعداوي باهتمام عالمي بوصفها أعادة صياغة جديدة لرواية ماري شيلي الإنكليزية. يجذب العمل الباحثين والنقاد الذين أشاروا إلى الأجواء الغريبة والمخيفة، والعنف، والحرب الطاغية على العمل. ومع ذلك، تختبئ خلف الحكايات المأساوية وعمليات القتل الدموية مواضيع ورموز حيوية وذات صلة. من بين هذه المواضيع يظهر العراق الديستوبي: اي العبثي والفوضوي والفاقد للمعنى حيث يحاكي الأفراد ذوي الخلفيات والمواقف المتباينة حياة قبيحة وغامضة وشريرة. وبذلك تعكس الشخصيات وسلوكياتها وأفعالها تدهور الإدراك والفهم الانساني — صورة متدهورة لكل من الأرض والشعب حيث تنهار جميع الأداءات. يجادل هذا البحث بأن سعداوي ينشر هذه الدلالات من اجل تصوير عوالم الاستشراق الجديد وحوادثه البائسة. يساير ويصطف الروائي إلى حد كبير مع المستشرقين الجدد الذين يقدمون الشرق في نفس المنظور والرؤية. أن المعاني الأدبية والجمالية والفكرية التي يضمنها الروائي ليست وصفًا، بل تعريفًا وتقديما للأرض وشعبها. يستقصي البحث في هذا الاتجاه الاستشراقي الجديد من خلال تبني بعض التصورات حول هذا المصطلح التي وضحها علي بهداد وجولييت أ. ويليامز ويضيف فهم أعمق وجديد. بعد تقديم الروائي ومناقشة الجوانب والخصائص المميزة الاستشراق الجديد، يحلل قسمان اخران محتويات الرواية. في قسم "المؤسسات الديستوبية"، أتتبع كيف يجعل أحمد سعداوي المؤسسات العامة والاجتماعية غير معنية بمطالب واحتياجات الناس. في القسم الثالث أقوم بتحليل سلوك الأفراد وما يقومون به تحت عنوان "الانحطاط الإنساني."

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاستشراق الجديد، العنف، الحرب الأهلية العراقية، ديستوبيا، فرانكن شتاين، لغزو الأمريكي للعراق.