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**Folklore and Superstition in Ahmed
Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013):
Shaping Collective Identity amidst War**

Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial
fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master's Degree in
Literature and Civilization

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Declaration

We, Rayyan Abdellaoui and Abderrazek Seghiour, hereby solemnly declare that the dissertation we have been working on, entitled “Folklore and Superstition in *Frankenstein in Baghdad: Shaping Collective Identity Amidst War*”, is our own, to the limits of our knowledge. It has not been submitted before to any other institution, or university or degree, while all sources that we have used and quoted from, have been indicated by means of complete references. This work is to be carried out, and completed at Mohamed Boudiaf University, M'sila, Algeria.

Candidate 01 Signature

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Date

19/06/2025

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my beloved family and friends:

to my beloved mother zoulikha.

to my dearest father kaouider.

to my lovely brothers, sisters.

to my partner Abderzak seghiour.

I would also dedicate this work to my intimate friends with whom I shared beautiful moments.

RAYAN ABDELLAOUI

Dedication

First and foremost, I would like to praise Allah the Almighty, SWT, for His blessing given to me during my study and in completing this dissertation.

I dedicate our work to my lovely family members, friends and colleagues;

to my beloved, mother FATIHA.

to the soul of dear father MOHAMED, May Allah bless him and give him Jannah.

to my sweet family; AHLEM, RAHIL and ELINA.

to my brothers and sisters.

to my dear teachers and classmates.

to Rayan, for his ambition, hard work, and support.

to my dear colleagues.

Finally, I dedicate this work to the brave souls who have perished and those who endure unimaginable suffering in times of war in Palestine. May this research serve as a small tribute to your enduring spirit and unyielding strength.

ABDERRAZEK Seghiour

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Abstract

This dissertation explores how Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013), employs Iraqi folklore and superstition to interrogate the construction of collective identity during the chaos of the U.S.-Iraq War (2003–2011). By reimagining Mary Shelley's Gothic novel within a contemporary Middle Eastern context, Saadawi's novel critiques the fragmentation of Iraqi society under occupation, using the figure of the Whatsitsname. Therefore, this study aims to uncover first, how Saadawi repurposes the role of Folktales and superstitious beliefs, as elements to cope with trauma, to formulate collective identity and to preserve collective memory. Second, to trace how non-western epistemologies are prioritized and third how the author highlights the link between traditional narratives and oppressed communities, to achieve these goals, the study relies on theories of collective memory, collective trauma, and postcolonial Gothic literature, following folkloric stories and superstitious beliefs of Iraqi people, who negotiate shared identity in the absence of a strong national background. The monster becomes both a metaphor for Iraq's political fractured body that seeks revenge from the old regime and a folkloric manifestation, a symbol of resilience and resistance. This dissertation asserts that Saadawi's novel *Frankenstein In Baghdad* is full of events that link the postwar Iraqi reality with superstition and folkloric stories to build a collective Iraqi identity, and help them cope traumatic war horrors.

Key words: Folklore, Superstition, *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, Collective Identity, Wartime, collective trauma.

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General Introduction

Folklore and superstition in literature mirror humanity's collective psyche and existential anxieties (Smith 15). From ancient oral traditions to postmodern novels, these elements extend beyond borders, revealing universal themes of fate, fear, and the human desire to explain the inexplicable (Jones 78). In Europe, precisely in Greek and Roman Antiquity, Homer's *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid* explored divine intervention, prophecies, and encounters with mythical creatures like the Cyclops (giant one-eyed creatures) (Homer 9.105-566; Virgil 3.570-691). Oracles like the Delphic Pythia was often consulted by her people, to understand their destiny or to avoid misfortune (Parke and Wormell 1: 32-58). They believed she was endowed with supernatural powers due to her direct link to the god Apollo (Parke and Wormell 1: 42). In Slavic folklore, Russian and Eastern European tales, as seen in Gogol's *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka*, feature witches, Domovoi (house spirits), and the sinister Baba Yaga, embodying fears of the unknown and moral lessons (Gogol 67). Similarly, blend magic, fairy realms, and omens, symbolizing the interaction between the real and the mystical (Warner 120) these are the seeds of repurposing folktales to question its other functions.

Not so far, on the Asian continent, spirits, karma, and cosmic balance are spiritual beliefs to explain the unknown, mentioned in Indian epics the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* that intertwine divine avatars (e.g., Krishna), curses, and reincarnation, presenting Hindu concepts of karma and dharma (Buck 102). Folktales like the *Panchatantra* use animal fables to impart wisdom (Panchatantra 10). Another Asian civilization that enriched the book of folktales is China, *Chinese Mythology: Journey to the West* is a mixture of Taoist and Buddhist cosmology, with demons, immortals, and monkey king Sun Wukong embodying the struggle for enlightenment (Wu 1: 1-15). Folk religions and ancestor worship support superstitions about luck and

misfortune for Arabs, *Arabian Nights*: This inspiring Arabic text (via Persian and Indian roots) intertwines jinn, enchanted objects, and fate (qadar), reflecting Islamic and pre-Islamic beliefs in destiny's inescapable grip (Haddawy xv-xx) such beliefs always lead concerns of communities, even with the existence of religious beliefs.

While sharing common ground, the traditions of African ancestors, tricksters, and oral wisdom show distinct characteristics. West African griots (www.britannica.com/art/griot), for example, preserve ancestral traditions through narratives and songs, as seen in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe 7-8). These oral traditions prominently feature trickster figures like Anansi the spider and ancestral spirits, which function as links between the living and the divine (Pelton 60). Similarly, Egyptian mythology, found in sources like *The Book of the Dead* and the tales of Isis and Osiris, explores themes of resurrection, divine judgment, and heka (an ancient Egyptian term signifying the deification of magic and medicine). These Egyptian traditions significantly influenced later Near Eastern and Greco-Roman cultures (Assmann 78), which explain finding the same folktales in many ancient civilizations.

Latin American magical realism blends the supernatural with the real. Literary works like Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Isabel Allende's curanderos (healers), fuse Indigenous beliefs; they incorporate Catholic saints and pre-Columbian ghosts, also critique colonialism and the impact of modernity (García Márquez 101). Contemporary authors globally repurpose folklore too. They address urgent modern issues. Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*, for example, shows old-world deities clashing with modern distractions (Gaiman 50). Likewise, Helen Oyeyemi's *White is for Witching* uses Haitian spirits haunting a British house (Oyeyemi 80). These spirits symbolize migration and cultural dislocation. Mariana

Enrriquez's *The Dangers of Smoking in Bed* blends Argentine urban legends with political trauma (Enrriquez 45). Together, these diverse works demonstrate how folklore remains a vital, adaptable language for confronting global realities from inherited violence to contemporary crises.

In Arabic literature, for instance, oral traditions like *ḥikāyāt* (folk tales) and mystical Sufi poetry link the ordinary with the metaphysical. Folklore and superstition have long enriched Arabic literature, acting as lenses for exploring the interplay between the human and the divine, the rational and the mystical, and the collective fears and aspirations of Arab societies (El-Shamy 10). Rooted in the oral traditions of pre-Islamic Arabia, these elements evolved into sophisticated literary motifs that reflect the region's spiritual pluralism, cultural identity, and existential pursuits (Kilito 35). An example for that pluralism is the tribal life and its strong societal bounds.

In modern Arabic literature, folklore and superstition have been repurposed to cope with colonialism, war, and identity crises. Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz intertwined folk beliefs into his *Cairo Trilogy*, using omens and curses to critique societal stagnation (Mahfouz 210). Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani's *Men in the Sun* employs the myth of the ghoul, a desert demon, as a metaphor for political betrayal (Kanafani 70). Similarly, Saudi author Raja Alem's *The Doves' Necklace* resurrects jinn as a mythical entity to dissect the clash between tradition and modernity in Mecca (Alem 150-155). In Iraq, literary works like Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, rework superstition to critique post-war chaos, transforming a scavenged corpse into a vengeful "monster" animated by collective trauma. Gulf authors, such as Kuwaiti Taleb Alrefai, use Bedouin folktales of desert mirages and cursed oases to interrogate the dissonance between rapid urbanization and ancestral memory (Alrefai

80-85) the idea is reflecting the rejection of the new lifestyle, which empties Bedouins' homeland, transfers it into ghost land.

The destabilized events that affected the Middle East in early 2011 (the so-called "Arab Spring") turned the Western world's attention to the crises that were taking place in this region and to the impact they had on other countries (Lynch 3). One of the tools for such diagnostics is modern Arabic fiction. The narrative of these events needs a subjective point of view of an individual, who lived the experience. In addition, the translation of Arabic literature has recently gained popularity as a counterpoint to media reports (Allen 201). In other words, a new eastern style of Arabic fiction has been developed and challenged the western style in portraying events in the eastern hemisphere.

Similarly, in times of conflict and instability, cultural narratives are used as a tool for societies to navigate chaos and find meaning amidst devastation (Assmann 15). In other words, using literature as a vessel through which they express their pain and preserve their collective memory, as a result, they explore their identities. Folklore, superstition in shaping identities in societies is undeniable; it is echoed in modern interpretations in innovative ways (El-Shamy 200). A good example is *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (translated by Jonathan Wright), which is the main topic of this research. Written by Ahmed Saadawi, born in Baghdad (1973), an acclaimed Iraqi novelist, poet, and screenwriter. Winner of the 2014 International Prize for Arabic Fiction, he is the author of a poetry collection, *Anniversary of Bad Songs* (2000), and several successful novels, including *The Beautiful Country* (2004) and *Indeed He Dreams or Plays or Dies* (2008). His numerous awards include selection for the Beirut39 project in 2010, which named him one of the 39 best Arab authors under the age of 40.

Frankenstein in Baghdad forces readers to explore wartime identity. It centers on The Whatsitsname, a monster that is made from scattered body parts. It symbolizes Iraq's fragmented society, composed of different ethnic and religious groups, struggling to reunite its shared history (Saadawi 45). It also navigates conflicts to rebuild a national identity (78). Its communal unity collapsed under violence, chaos, and profound loss that consequently destroyed societal bonds (102). The novel showcases collective trauma which fundamentally reshapes societal cohesion. It alters the very meaning of national belonging. In short, Saadawi uses the monstrous creation to illustrate the hard, incomplete process of forging unity from the shattered pieces of a nation ravaged by conflict (180) the monster becomes a metaphor for united Iraq, it gives Iraqis voice and unity.

Through his novel set in 2005, Saadawi illustrates the circle of violence in his home country, marked as the aftermath of political and social issues. Through tracing the lives of characters living in the Bataween neighborhood (Saadawi 24). The main character, Hadi the junk dealer, loses his best friend, Abdaki, in a suicide bomb explosion (25). Hadi enters into deep trauma and decides to gather the rest body parts of his friend, then stitches them together with the body parts of other victims who perished in terror attacks (35). The full corpse then is haunted by a lost soul of a hotel guard who died in another explosion (48). The unification of the corpse with the lost soul creates a metamorphous monster (50). Hadi gives it the name of the Whatsitsname, the 'Shesma' that literally means in Arabic Iraqi dialect 'what is his name' (55). The creature becomes a central character that reflects the cocktailed identity of Iraqis during the post-2003 war (65). Each part of this Iraqi "Frankenstein" represents a section of the multicultural communities living in Baghdad that share the same history, culture, and language but differ in religion, race, and ethnic belonging

(75). The monster becomes a killer seeking vengeance on those it sees as wrongdoers, later on, he becomes a criminal whose aim is to kill to survive (120-150). The end of the story showcases the amount of sectarian violence and corruption in post-invasion Iraq (180) unexpectedly, the coming of the monster doesn't end violence, rather it creates unending cycles of violence.

This research makes significant contributions to several interconnected scholarly fields. It advances Cultural Trauma Studies by demonstrating how folklore and superstition function as vital mediators of trauma, offering distinct pathways for resilience within affected communities. Within Postcolonial Literary Criticism, the study provides crucial insights by centering non-Western narratives of identity formation, specifically those emerging from contexts marked by occupation and civil war, thereby challenging dominant Western paradigms (Bhabha 25). Furthermore, it enriches Memory Studies by illustrating the complex ways literary texts codify, preserve, and contest cultural memory in highly unstable environments (Halbwachs 40). The background established in this study underscores the critical necessity of re-examining the construction of wartime identity through the dual lens of folklore and superstition, setting the stage for a nuanced analysis of their dynamic interplay in shaping collective consciousness and navigating historical rupture. Therefore, this dissertation is aiming to study the role of folklore and superstition in shaping collective identity in Ahmed Saadawi's "Frankenstein in Baghdad".

The study thoroughly applies key theoretical frameworks to contextualize the literary representation of folklore and superstition. It deploys concepts from cultural memory studies, to analyze how texts preserve and reshape collective pasts, utilizes postcolonial theory to interrogate power dynamics and identity construction within contexts of domination and resistance, and employs trauma studies to understand the

psychological and social impacts of violence as mediated through cultural forms. Central to this application is a focused engagement with critical concepts such as hybridity and invented traditions, which provide essential analytical tools for decoding the text's complex negotiation of individual and collective identity amidst the profound ruptures and uncertainties of crisis. This multifaceted theoretical approach illuminates the intricate ways literature functions as a site for processing historical experience and articulating emergent forms of belonging.

This dissertation establishes its foundation upon key theoretical frameworks concerning folklore, superstition, collective identity, and collective trauma. By applying these analytical lenses, it specifically highlights diverse methodological techniques for measuring the role Folklore and Superstition play in formulating communal self-conception during periods of intense conflict and its aftermath. This framework serves three primary research purposes: First, it analyzes how folklore and superstition shape the collective Iraqi identity, targeting the specific ways Iraqi people navigate profound societal trauma while forging new identities in the wake of the post-2003 U.S.-led invasion and its destabilizing consequences. Second, it examines how the literary text reflects the complex intersection and tension between modern realities and traditional belief systems. Third, it critically evaluates the broader cultural and political impact of this interplay in transforming the collective identity of Iraqis following the war.

Research Questions

Research main question;

How do folklore and superstition in wartime literature mediate the construction of collective identity?

Research Sub questions;

1. What tensions arise between cultural preservation and reinvention in these narratives?
2. How do non-Western storytelling traditions challenge Eurocentric trauma discourses?

Literature review

Folklore in postwar societies transcends its role as cultural heritage, functioning instead as a dynamic mechanism for processing collective trauma. Alessandro Portelli argues that oral traditions and folkloric monsters serve as “narrative prostheses” for societies unable to articulate trauma through conventional discourse (Portelli 63). In *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, the Whatsitsname—a stitched-together corpse animated by victims’ body parts—exemplifies this concept, embodying Iraq’s fragmented national identity. Pierre Nora’s theory of *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) is reconfigured here; folklore becomes an alternative archive where marginalized voices preserve counter-histories of war (Nora 17). This aligns with Cathy Caruth’s assertion that trauma is an event “not fully experienced at the time but returning to haunt the survivor” (Caruth 4), as the Whatsitsname’s cyclical vengeance mirrors Iraq’s unresolved violence.

In destabilized societies, superstition evolves from a dismissed belief into a critical survival strategy. Veena Das theorizes that everyday rituals become acts

of “descent into the ordinary”, a form of resistance against erasure (Das 7). Baghdad’s residents in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* attribute unexplained violence to the Whatsitsname, exemplifying Clifford Geertz’s interpretation of superstitions as “cultural texts” laden with symbolic meaning (Geertz 452). Jean and John Comaroff expand this framework with their concept of “occult economies”, wherein supernatural explanations fill spaces created by political and economic collapse (Comaroff and Comaroff 22). The Whatsitsname’s myth, spread through rumors, demonstrates how communities weaponize folklore to navigate chaos, transforming irrational fears into collective coping mechanisms.

Saadawi’s novel disrupts Eurocentric trauma narratives by centering non-Western storytelling traditions. Homi Bhabha’s theory of hybridity— particularly the “third space” where identities are negotiated— resonates in the Whatsitsname’s composite form, a metaphor for Iraq’s sectarian divisions (Bhabha 37). While Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* posits nationalism as the glue of collective identity (Anderson 5–7), postwar Iraq illustrates how shared fear replaces unity. The monster’s ironic claim to being the “first true Iraqi citizen” underscores the impossibility of cohesion in a fractured state, critiquing Anderson’s model through a lens of perpetual crisis.

The novel’s magical realism aligns with Tzvetan Todorov’s definition of the fantastic a sustained hesitation between natural and supernatural explanations (Todorov 33). The Whatsitsname’s existence blurs myth and reality, exemplifying Rosemary Jackson’s argument that the fantastic exposes the “unsaid and unseen of culture” (Jackson 4). Fredric Jameson frames such narratives as “national allegories” (Jameson 69), wherein the monster’s body literalizes Iraq’s “necropolitics” (Mbembe 40) — the state’s reduction of citizens to disposable fragments. By embedding trauma in a folkloric

framework, Saadawi forces readers to confront war's absurdity through a lens that realism alone cannot achieve.

While scholars have extensively analyzed folklore in Latin American (e.g., García Márquez) and African (e.g., Achebe) postwar literature, Arabic narratives remain underrepresented. Saadawi's novel addresses this gap by interrogating how Iraqi folklore mediates identity in the shadow of the 2003 invasion. Existing trauma theory, dominated by Western case studies, often overlooks the syncretic role of jinn, curses, and oral traditions in Arab societies, a gap this research seeks to fill. In short, Folklore and superstition are not archaic remains but living tools for reconstituting identity amid war. *Frankenstein in Baghdad* demonstrates how mythic narratives encode collective trauma, challenge colonial discourses, and reimagine belonging. Future research could extend this framework to post-*Arab Spring* literature, where folklore similarly negotiates modernity and memory, presenting a strong model to challenge Eurocentric trauma models. Therefore, this study is divided into two chapters; the first chapter establishes how cultural traditions preserve memory when institutions collapse. The second chapter applies this framework to the novel, showing Elishva's rituals as psychological resistance and Hadi's tales as communal myth-making. The Whatsitsname's hybrid body, declaring itself "the first true Iraqi citizen," embodies Bhabha's third space of cultural negotiation. Through de Certeau's tactics of resistance, the analysis reveals how rumors and superstitions challenge official narratives. Unlike previous scholarship focused on historical allegory, this study highlights the novel's innovative use of cultural memory. In other words, it demonstrates how Iraqis weaponize tradition to reassemble identity amidst chaos, with the Whatsitsname embodying both fragmentation and resilience. This approach offers new insights into postwar literature's engagement with folk epistemologies.

CHAPTER ONE

**Socio-historical and Theoretical
background**

**Folklore and Superstition as elements to
formulate collective identities during
wartime.**

Introduction

From ancient epics to contemporary novels, folklore and superstition have served as interpretations to humanity's deepest fears, moral dilemmas, and existential struggles. These narrative traditions reveal a universal impulse; the need to explain chaos, impose meaning on suffering, and preserve collective memory in the face of confusion. In modern literature, particularly in postcolonial societies, folklore is no longer merely a remain of tradition but a dynamic tool for confronting trauma, negotiating identity, and resisting erasure. This chapter examines the interplay of folklore, superstition, and collective identity in wartime literature, drawing on interdisciplinary theories to illuminate their function in societies navigating crisis. As such, the discussion is framed in three main theories; first, folklore as Collective Memory, Second Superstition as Survival Strategy, and third, The Fantastic as Political Allegory. Thus, Theoretical lenses— from postcolonial hybridity (Bhabha) and narrative identity (Ricoeur) to trauma theory (Caruth), necropolitics (Mbembe) — ground this analysis. By interrogating these themes, the chapter establishes a foundation for understanding how wartime literature repurposes folklore to confront violence, reimagine identity, and interrogate the very notion of collective belonging in the aftermath of destruction. This framework not only contextualizes the broader study but also reveals a central paradox; in war, folklore and superstition are simultaneously remains of the past, functioning as adaptive languages for survival. Their study reveals not just how societies remember, but how they exist.

1. Historical and political context of *Frankenstein in Baghdad*

Understanding *Frankenstein in Baghdad* requires an awareness of the historical, political, and cultural context in which it is set. The novel portrays Iraq under U.S. occupation, a period marked by international and local conflicts, leadership changes, and deep-seated sectarian divisions. Although these divisions existed before, they intensified in the late 20th century due to political oppression, war, and shifting power dynamics, for decades, Iraq was shaped by ethnic and religious tensions. Particularly between Sunni and Shia Muslims, as well as the Kurdish population. Saddam Hussein's rule (1979–2003) was defined by aggressive campaigns against political opponents, including Shia and Kurdish communities. His regime launched a brutal war against Iran (1980–1988), used chemical weapons against Kurds in the Anfal campaign (1987–1988), and violently crushed uprisings in the 1990s, leading to mass killings and widespread suffering. These long-standing divisions played a significant role in Iraq's destabilization after 2003.

The U.S.-led invasion in 2003, which removed Saddam Hussein's regime, marked the beginning of Iraq's struggle with occupation, revolt, and sectarian violence. The rapid dismantling of state institutions and security forces created a sort of emptiness, leading to widespread chaos. Without a functioning government or security apparatus, consequently violent clashes spread across Baghdad and beyond. The invasion, instead of bringing stability, caused a series of conflicts that divided the country apart. The years after 2003 saw a dramatic rise in sectarian conflict. Sunni and Shia militias engaged in violent revenges, leading to mass displacement and countless civilian deaths. The collapse of state institutions allowed extremist groups to gain power, ending in the rise of ISIS in the 2010s. Iraq's infrastructure, already weakened by years of war and sanctions, weakened further. Public services collapsed, the economy declined, and corruption spread through every level of governance. The 2003 invasion of Iraq had

extensive negative consequences, affecting the country's security, politics, economy, and society, while also contributing to regional instability.

The invasion of Iraq in 2003 significantly altered the country's sectarian balance, primarily due to the collapse of Saddam Hussein's Sunni-led regime. The new Shia-majority government, with support from Iran, marginalized the Sunni Arab community, supporting sectarian divisions within Iraq's political life. The establishment of a political system based on sectarian quotas allowed sectarian parties to dominate the political scene. These divisions were further deep-rooted through shifting political alliances and the rise of sectarian militias, deepening the country's internal divisions. One of the most tragic outcomes was the loss of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi lives due to violence and sectarian conflict. Civilian casualties rose as the country was led into chaos, with bombings, assassinations, and clashes between armed groups becoming a daily routine. Entire communities were trapped in the conflict, and the absence of a stable government only worsened the humanitarian crisis. According to a study published in *The Lancet*, an estimated 601,000 Iraqi civilians died because of violence by 2006, most of them due to the rise of sectarian violence following the 2003 invasion. This study highlighted the devastating impact of the conflict, including both direct and indirect deaths caused by violence and its aftermath (*The Lancet*) U.S invasion in Iraq is like a plague causes many deaths and dislocations.

The invasion also triggered one of the largest displacement crises in modern history. Millions of Iraqis were forced to flee their homes, either seeking refuge in other parts of the country or crossing borders into neighboring nations such as Syria and Jordan. Families were uprooted, social structures collapsed, and many refugees faced harsh conditions in overcrowded camps or foreign cities where they struggled to rebuild

their lives. Internally displaced people, lacking security and basic necessities, found themselves in constant uncertainty (Weiss 2018). By 2003, Iraq's economy had severely declined, leading to widespread poverty and social distress. Education became unaffordable for many, with nearly a quarter of school-age children dropping out to work. Literacy rates dropped drastically, and child labor, including begging and street vending, became common. The agricultural sector struggled due to sanctions, and the country remained heavily reliant on food imports. The food rationing system, while crucial, became inefficient and corrupt. Additionally, Iraq's once strong healthcare system collapsed, with hospitals underfunded, overwhelmed by waterborne diseases, and plagued by corruption, as doctors demanded bribes and patient charges increased. This created a culture of dependency and further exacerbated Iraq's socio-economic problems.

The Collapse and Displacement of Iraq's Middle Class: In the 1990s, Iraq's middle class, once thriving during the oil boom of the 1970s, faced severe hardships from sanctions, war, and dictatorship. While the 1970s were viewed as a "golden period," by the late 1980s, the middle class's prosperity was undermined by foreign borrowing, and by the 1990s, sanctions and hyperinflation further eroded their stability. Many sold their assets to survive, and the value of the Iraqi dinar fell, while salaries failed to keep pace with inflation. A significant brain drain occurred as professionals fled the country, seeking refuge in neighboring Arab states or the West. After 2003, the collapse of Iraq's middle class deepened as the country faced widespread displacement, destruction, and instability following the invasion. The invasion and subsequent instability worsened the economic and social breakdown. Many Iraqis were displaced, including former middle-class professionals, due to rising attacks, lack of security, and economic disintegration. As a result, Iraq's once-prosperous middle class was virtually wiped out, further fragmenting the social fabric and leaving a lasting impact on the country's post-war

recovery (*Substack*) political and economic situations worsen Iraq fragmentation and nourished sectarian violence.

After the collapse of law and order following the invasion, Iraq's government databases became one of the first targets of corruption and destruction. Security elements of the former regime, hidden as militias, methodically destroyed files and records across nearly all ministries, aiming to eliminate any evidence that could be used against individuals or organizations. The destruction delayed the reestablishment of the government, making it difficult to restart normal operations. Despite efforts by some individuals to protect key records, many ministries were robbed and burned. The scale of the destruction suggested significant reconstruction and organization, with insiders from the former government and security agencies likely organizing the robberies. The corruption and destruction aimed not only to create chaos but also to benefit financially. These consequences of war transcend to the destruction of Iraq's social fabric, the rise of militias, and the endless cycle of violence that are at the heart of *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. The novel captures this miserable reality, portraying a society struggling to make sense of death, justice, and survival in a country surrounded by invasion and oppression (Allawi 127) in the heart of these chaotic settings, Iraqis depend on storytelling to preserve their memory.

2. Folklore, Superstition, lenses to study Collective Identity

This chapter establishes a theoretical foundation for understanding how folklore and superstition function as mechanisms for negotiating collective identity in postwar Iraq. Drawing from interdisciplinary scholarship in postcolonial studies, collective trauma theory, and collective identity theory, this framework explores three interrelated axes: first, folklore as a source of collective memory, second, superstition as a survival

strategy in destabilized societies, and third, the role of mythic narratives in reconstituting fractured identities. Folklore in postwar contexts transcends its traditional role as cultural heritage; it becomes a dynamic tool for processing trauma and asserting agency. Scholars like Alessandro Portelli argue that oral traditions and folkloric monsters act as “narrative prostheses” for societies unable to articulate trauma through oral narratives and collective memory (Portelli 115). In chaotic settings, where state-sanctioned histories are contested or erased, folklore offers an alternative archive. Pierre Nora’s concept of “*lieux de mémoire*” (sites of memory) is reformed here, folklore becomes a stage where marginalized voices preserve counter-narratives of war (Pierre 17). Many literary works exemplify this process. As a superstitious narrative during war are made by victims, for instance, tales that embody the notion of “collective corporeal memory,” where the violated body becomes a site of communal mourning and accusation. Another way to portray this idea is Homi Bhabha’s theory of hybridity—particularly the concept of the ‘third space,’ where cultural identities are negotiated—finds resonance in the use of folktales as tools of resistance against the oppressing colonizer. These narratives symbolize a revolt against the essentialist binary of colonizer/colonized cultural identity” (Bhabha 37) that is to say fighting the colonizer intellectually, using his epistemologies against him. Then knowing the self to resist essentialism.

2.1 Folklore as Embodied Counter-Memory, (Portelli, Nora, Bhabha, Craps)

Folklore has long been a reservoir of collective memory, a narrative space where myth, legend, and supernatural iconography are the channels through which communities convey cultural values, fears, traumas, and aspirations. In the context of war, displacement, or colonization—where history is necessarily fragmented or politically repressed—folklore is not only a cultural practice, but also a political and psychological necessity. Here, Alessandro Portelli presents an essential conceptual framework for

grasping how folklore interacts with collective memory and trauma. Perhaps the most significant contribution of Portelli is his use of the concept of "narrative prosthesis" — a concept he borrows and reworks to investigate ways in which marginalized or traumatized communities express memories that are impossible to convey in mainstream historical discourse (Portelli 105) that is to say finding an artificial way of communication to replace the natural ones. For Portelli, legends and folktales frequently stand in for traumatized or unwritten experience and this leads him to the central implication of the work in hand. They provide a framework for a community to deal with loss, grief or hope, two abstract ideas, through the allegory and symbolism of another myth. In this sense folklore is not part of the past, but an active and living way of making contact with our shared wounds.

The term narrative prosthesis is a reference to the symbolic use of stories, particularly those with monstrous or fantastical characters, as replacements for psychic wounds or historical atrocities that cannot be directly portrayed. Portelli insists that these "prosthetic" narratives are not scientific reconstructions, but emotional truths and public experiences that official records frequently overlook. In fractured societies wracked by war, trauma, and systemic violence, the collective psyche often lacks the language or institutional room to process its grief. In doing so the creation of figures both monstrous and mythical are used as a mechanism for communities to speak the unspeakable. The monsters, ghosts or spirits found in folklore frequently stand in for the returning of the repressed, symbolizing unresolved dark pasts and collective moral guilt of repressed peoples. Figures serve as psychological stand-ins and storytelling tools through which communities reexamine traumatic experiences in a relatively safe metaphorical world. Portelli's theory of narrative prosthesis gains considerable value amidst post-conflict literature where authors heavily apply folkloric nuances deeply within fractured

narratives. Folkloric forms serve as reminding devices preserving collective memory of a group and give symbolic form to empower its cultural identity. By anchoring trauma within monstrous physiques, a community mysteriously expresses pain and quite strongly reclaims narrative agency over its very own story. Folklore serves as a healing outlet and discusses issues by challenging dominant narratives and preserving marginalized subaltern perspectives effectively nowadays.

Alessandro Portelli's concept of narrative prosthesis sheds light on folklore operating as collective memory in societies affected by historical erasure or deep trauma. Folkloric monsters and oral traditions aren't merely imaginary creations but rather psychological tools for survival deeply surrounded in cultural heritage. Communities process trauma pretty effectively by projecting deep internal wounds onto rather symbolic external figures. Many literary works embody this function particularly visibly where myth and memory blur reflecting postwar chaotic haunted landscape pretty vividly. Folklore transforms into a vibrant means for recalling stuff that escapes formal documentation an affective repository preserving lived experiences of anguish loss heavily fragmenting identity. Folklore takes on a deeper role in postwar societies where truth is obscured, history is rewritten, and public memory is fractured—all of which undermine official narratives and weaken the foundations of shared historical understanding. In such environments, folklore is no longer just a cultural tradition passed from one generation to another; it transforms into a counter-archive—a space where alternative histories are preserved and transmitted. It becomes a vital means of remembering, a way of keeping alive the stories, wounds, and lived experiences of marginalized communities whose voices have been pushed to the periphery. Through songs, rituals, oral stories, and symbols, these communities carve out their place in history, resisting the silence imposed by dominant narratives.

Thinkers like Pierre Nora, Homi K. Bhabha, and Stefanie Craps offer key insights that help explain how memory can exist beyond formal historical discourse. Their theories illuminate how folklore becomes a site of resistance, mourning, and cultural negotiation, especially when people confront the lasting effects of trauma, colonialism, and state violence—contexts in which official history often fails to reflect the full reality of those who suffered. Pierre Nora, through his influential concept of *lieux de mémoire*, or “sites of memory,” explains that when *milieux de mémoire*—the lived, organic environments of memory—can no longer be sustained, societies begin to depend on constructed, symbolic spaces to maintain a sense of historical continuity. According to Nora, when “real memory” is suppressed, fractured, or deliberately erased, it does not disappear but instead attaches itself to symbolic forms, objects, and stories that take on the burden of remembrance (Nora 7). In times of war, particularly when state mechanisms fail—or choose not—to document collective suffering, folklore serves as an alternative archive of memory, functioning in the way Nora defines symbolic and narrative memory sites. In the case of Iraq, where official records have frequently excluded or manipulated the realities of war, occupation, and sectarian violence, folklore has taken up the task of carrying communal memory. Through oral storytelling, mythologized figures, and culturally rooted symbols, it safeguards experiences of loss, oppression, and resistance that are otherwise marginalized. These “sites of memory” should not be seen as static memorials; rather, they are active and continuously shifting expressions through which communities keep their pasts alive in forms that remain emotionally and culturally meaningful.

After the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, many stayers relied on oral traditions, songs, and ritual performances to preserve the memory of the murders, especially in countryside communities where official memorials were absent or distrusted. These informal and

symbolic practices—such as Kwibuka remembrance ceremonies—function as lieux de mémoire (sites of memory) in Pierre Nora’s sense, serving as alternative archives for marginalized war narratives when formal histories are erased or distorted (Nora 7). Rather than depending solely on state institutions, survivors use local customs and folklore as dynamic tools to keep collective memory alive. These cultural expressions become crucial symbolic anchors, ensuring that trauma is not forgotten but instead actively remembered, and transformed through ritual, and community narrative.

Building on Nora’s idea understanding of memory, Homi K. Bhabha offers the concepts of “hybridity” and the “third space” as key theoretical tools for interpreting how identity is shaped within postcolonial and post-traumatic societies. The third space, as Bhabha describes it, is a cultural in-between zone where the clear-cut division between colonizer and colonized is destabilized, allowing identity to be redefined through negotiation and transformation (56). Within this framework, oral storytelling and folktales can be seen as active vehicles of hybridity. They stitch together native traditions and foreign elements, blend mythical motifs with lived realities, and fuse memory with imagination—thereby giving marginalized or subaltern groups the capacity to reconstruct identity in ways that reflect their own cultural logic. In the context of postwar Iraq, where identity has been fragmented by layers of colonialism, authoritarian rule, occupation, and sectarian divides, folklore offers a symbolic means of reconciliation. Through hybrid narratives that intertwine magical realism, folk elements, and Islamic cosmology, Iraqis are able to reclaim control over cultural memory, pushing back against dominant narratives and affirming complex, layered identities.

Further developing these theoretical frameworks, Stefanie Craps introduces the concept of “collective corporeal memory,” which shifts attention away from purely textual or narrative forms of remembrance toward the human body as a primary site

where trauma and historical experience are inscribed. According to Craps, the violated or wounded body—especially within contexts marked by war, genocide, or forced displacement—becomes a shared site of mourning, protest, and memory (Craps 87). Rather than remaining confined to individual pain, this embodied memory speaks on behalf of an entire collective, transforming personal suffering into a symbolic representation of national or communal trauma. In folklore, this corporeal memory is often given form through spectral figures, dismembered bodies, or mythical beings that visibly carry the marks of violence and loss.

To sum up, these representations serve not only as reminders of past atrocities but also as emotional and symbolic expressions of unresolved grief. In this sense, folklore becomes more than just a narrative practice—it becomes a lived, felt experience, grounded in the physical and emotional realities of those who have endured trauma. The body, marked by harm, takes on the role of a moving archive—its presence evoking memory beyond words, reaching into the realms of the visual, the mythic, and the affective.

2.3 Superstition Reimagined and the Power Dynamics of Myth

Superstition often dismissed as irrational, takes on new significance in contexts of systemic collapse. In postwar countries, practices like believers' devotion to sacred entities or storytellers' obsessive oral narration reflect Veena Das' concept of "descent into the ordinary," where daily acts of survival become radical resistance (Das 7). Clifford Geertz's interpretive anthropology further illuminates this: superstitions are "cultural texts" to be read for their symbolic utility. When suffering people blame their political leaders for unexplained violence (Geertz 452), they engage in what Jean

Comaroff and John Comaroff term “occult economies,” where supernatural explanations fill voids left by political and economic instability (Comaroff and Comaroff 22).

Postwar identity is not static but perpetually reconstructed through myth. Benedict Anderson’s theory of “imagined communities” is critical here, though a number of critiques complicate it: oppressing people imagine themselves not through nationalism but through shared fear of the oppressive, making him such a mythic symbol of collective guilt (5-7). Paul Ricoeur’s work on narrative identity argues that individuals and communities “story themselves into being” (Ricoeur 198). Some folkloric legends, increasing through rumors and media, mirror this process. Yet, as Michel Foucault warns, myths can also be tools of power. Foucault shows how dominating groups nominate the elite’s narrative to fuel division, reflecting Faleh A. Jabar’s analysis of Iraq’s “retribalization” as both a coping mechanism and a weapon (Jabar 203).

3. War, Trauma, and Identity Formation

War as a vessel of fragmented identity, particularly in the context of post-war reality, acts as a catalyst for the disintegration of collective identities. The cyclical violence of the war, compounded by colonial legacies and sectarian divisions, creates a landscape where traditional markers of identity- family, religion, and nationality- are destabilized. As Cathy Caruth posits, trauma is an event that “is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time but returns to haunt the survivor” (Caruth 4). On the political level, this haunting is personified through the political crimes of dictators, a corporeal indicator of unresolved collective trauma. As a collective pain lived together by terrified societies, the collective fear embodies Stefanie Craps’ concept of “collective corporeal memory,” where the violated physicality of the dead becomes a site of communal mourning and accusation (Craps 92).

Trauma in wartime is not a singular event but a continuous, layered experience. People during chaotic settings grapple with fragmented selves, their identities worn by loss and survival. Their delusional belief in sacred symbols leads their hopes and fears, which could reflect Veena Das' notion of "descent into the ordinary," where daily rituals become acts of resistance against erasure (Das 7). The strong belief in spiritual *iconography* is a blend of faith and folklore that highlights how trauma drives individuals to anchor themselves in crossed cultural symbols. Similarly, the compulsive storytelling about the creatures mirrors Alessandro Portelli's observation that oral narratives serve as "prosthetic memory" for societies unable to process trauma through conventional means (63). The notion critiques the rebirth of sectarian identities as a response to systemic collapse. Faleh A. Jabar notes that postwar Iraq saw a "retribalization" of identity, where sectarian affiliations replaced national unity as a survival strategy (Jabar 203). The new regime seeks vengeance, targeting committers of violence regardless of sect, initially transcending these divisions, yet this ideology is co-opted by Sunni and Shiite groups to fuel mutual suspicion. This reflects Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities" reimagined through fear: citizens living in wars unite in their fear of criminals but fracture along sectarian lines when interpreting their actions.

Storytelling emerges as a mechanism to reassemble fractured identities. The role of traditional storyteller transforms the new regime into a folkloric antihero, a narrative device to process collective guilt. The new roller's stories, spread through rumors and media, exemplify Paul Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity, where communities "story themselves into being" (32). Yet, as Michel Foucault warns, myths can also be weaponized; the folkloric tale becomes a battleground for competing ideologies, mirroring the struggle to forge a cohesive postwar identity (30). The new society ideologies, requiring constant repair, symbolize the fragile, provisional nature of postwar

identity. Its existence parallels Jacques Derrida's concept of "hauntology" a ghostly presence that exposes societal fissures (10). Just as building a new house is a bricolage of the old house's foundations, postwar identity is a patchwork of trauma, superstition, and resilience. The chaotic settings and ruins serve as a metaphor for this process; identity is not rebuilt but renewed through folklore, even as the scars of war continue. Derrida suggests that identity in wartime is neither fixed nor rigid but a fluid, negotiated project (10). Through the lens of trauma theory and postcolonial critique, the novel reveals how war fractures selves and societies, inviting individuals to navigate identity through folklore, superstition, and narrative. The outcome, as both a product and critique of this process, uncovers the paradox of postwar identity: it is perpetually unfinished, a made-of-together entity resisting collapse.

4. Folklore as a Narrative Tool in Wartime Societies

In the aftermath of war, folklore goes beyond its role as cultural heritage to become a vital narrative tool for survivors to process collective trauma. Alessandro Portelli argues that oral traditions and folkloric tales act as "prosthetic memory," enabling societies to articulate experiences too fragmented or horrific for conventional language (Portelli 63). In folkloric monsters mentioned in modern novels, the legendary heroes exemplify this function. Made in a way that resonates with the collective pain of its people, the creatures become a narrative vessel for collective pain. For instance, civilians link unexplained deaths and disappearances to supernatural powers, transforming them into a folkloric scapegoat. This mirrors Cathy Caruth's assertion that trauma is "a story that cannot be told but refuses to remain silent" (Caruth 5), folklore becomes the medium through which silence is broken.

In societies destabilized by war, folklore empowers individuals to reclaim narrative control. The role of rumors and storytellers is not merely telling the truth; rather, it is the process of making it a part of people's lives. They function as a pain relief for their community. This reflects Walter Benjamin's concept of storytelling as a communal act, which "does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, but to embed it in the life of the storyteller" (Benjamin 91). By mythologizing the supernatural beings, the storyteller transforms random violence into a coherent but laughable story. This narrative reclamation parallels the real-world resilience of oral traditions, where folktales like *The Thousand and One Nights* have historically preserved cultural identity amid upheaval.

The folkloric heroes also expose societal support during wartime violence. As the creature's myth spreads, war-terrified people project their unresolved guilt onto it, blaming it for murders they silently forgiven or ignored. René Girard's theory of the scapegoat, a communal sacrifice to purge collective sin, resonates here (Girard 24). This reflects Judith Herman's observation that collective trauma recovery requires "communalization of the trauma story" (Herman 70) storytellers play the role of speaking the unspeakable pain, they are the chosen to confess guilt and assume responsibility.

4.1 Gothic Postcolonial Literature as a Tool of Resistance against Oppression

A. Subverting the Colonial narratives

Postcolonial Gothic literature dismantles colonial narratives by repurposing Gothic tropes (literary devices, people...) traditionally used to exoticize non-Western cultures. Where colonial texts weaponized Gothic conventions to frame indigenous beliefs as primitive or monstrous, authors invert these tropes to expose imperialism's material violence. Rituals like Caribbean Obeah—defamed as savage superstition—are reinterpreted as coded systems of resistance, transforming spiritual practices into

networks of revolutionary intelligence (Azzam 72) it is the production of indigenous people that works as authentic components of cultural identity, facing the process of erasure. This subversion operates within Homi K. Bhabha's "third space", where marginalized communities reclaim agency by manipulating colonial discourse itself (Bhabha 37) then create their own discourse, through philosophy and intellectual ideas to speak for themselves, making an opposing voice against the colonizer.

B. Reclaiming Space through Haunting

Geographical spaces become contested sites where supernatural presences archive suppressed histories. Mansions and plantations, representing colonial power, are preoccupied by ghosts of the oppressed. The fact that is leading to confrontations with violence under colonial "order." Somehow, reversing colonialism, where in this case the colonized is the one taking lands, giving a margin of negotiation to the marginalized communities. As such, institutions built on exploitation decay under moral rot, their ruins embodying Pierre Nora's "lieux de mémoire" (Azzam 89) they are portrayed in postcolonial literary works like devastated and destroyed buildings under the effect of chaos and unjustified violence. These hauntings transform homes into uncanny sites where repressed atrocities reappear, weaponizing Gothic conventions to demand historical visibility, because they are highly attracting.

C. Monstrosity as Political Allegory

In Postcolonial Gothic literature, violated bodies function as primitive accusations of systemic oppression, transforming individual suffering into collective testimony against historical erasure. People scarred by violence—whether through physical damage, supernatural fragmentation, or social marginalization—aligns with Stefanie Craps's concept of "collective corporeal memory", where traumatized flesh

becomes an embodied archive of communal trauma (Craps 817) leading fears and anxieties of communities to one direction and create a sort of shared bounds of belonging among them. These corporeal words force societies to confront obscured atrocities, interpreting hyper-visible what dominant power structures seek to bury.

In Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Ammu's body embodies this dynamic: her love affair with Velutha, a Dalit man, defies caste apartheid, transforming her into a walking palimpsest of social misbehavior. Her physical presence—marked by societal disrespect and literal isolation—materializes the violence of India's "Love Laws," turning her into a living monument to resistance (Roy 243) she is considered as the voice of traumatized people passing through the same painful experience. The novel's climactic scene, where her body is dragged from police custody, emphasizes how oppression marks itself on the flesh. Yet her defiance reclaims monstrosity not as shame but as accusatory power: her scarred existence forces the community to witness its own complicity. Through such embodiments, Postcolonial Gothic transcends victimhood, weaponizing the violated body as a site of insurgent memory that demands accountability from perpetrators and bystanders alike.

D. Folkloric Counter-Narratives as Insurgent Archives

In Postcolonial Gothic literature, oral traditions and folklore function as dynamic insurgent archives that preserve subaltern histories against state-imposed erasure, transforming cultural memory into a tool of resistance. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* epitomizes this strategy: the protagonist Saleem Sinai encodes fragmented histories of India's traumatic Partition within pickling jars, declaring, "*To understand one life, you must swallow the world*" (Rushdie 109). This act of narrative "remembering"—where scattered memories are reconstituted through folk practices—

literalizes the novel's idea that history is not monolithic but a "mutant version of the past" shaped by collective voices (11). Saleem's telepathic connection to other "midnight's children" (those born at India's independence) creates a belonging consciousness that challenges state-sanctioned history writing. As a "repository for competing voices" (11), Saleem embodies Homi Bhabha's third space, where Hindu myths like Brahma's "dream-web" (*Maya*) and Islamic narratives coexist to destabilize colonial binaries (11). The preserving metaphor extends beyond preservation; it allegorizes how folklore's malleability (flexibility)—like spices adapting to new ingredients—allows marginalized communities to escape suppression. When Saleem's body cracks under psychological anxiety, mirroring India's post-independence fissures, Rushdie visualizes Fredric Jameson's concept of "secularizing magical religion into psychological realism" (11), showing how myth metabolizes trauma into survivable form. Parvati-the-witch's supernatural powers further symbolize folklore's subversive potential, using "mystical resistance" to dismantle patriarchal-colonial hierarchies (11). Ultimately, Rushdie's magical realism asserts that folklore is not escapism but a counter-historiography where "truth" emerges through polyphonic memory—not state orders.

4.2 Edward Said's Conceptualization of Folklore as Decolonial Resistance

Edward Said's theorization of folklore as a dynamic instrument of anti-imperial resistance emerges from his foundational critique of Orientalist epistemology, positioning folk traditions as living counter-archives that destabilize Western knowledge hegemony. In *Orientalism* (1978), Said argues that colonial scholarship manufactured static, exoticized archetypes (e.g., the "irrational native," "timeless East") to justify domination (49). Folklore, as a systematic expression of cultural self-definition, directly subverts these concepts by preserving diverse narratives of community, labor, and spiritual practice that refuse reduction to colonial categorizations.

Palestinian *hikāyāt* (oral tales) recounting ancestral land ownership, for instance, dismantle Orientalist erasure of Indigenous historical agency, asserting what Said termed “the right to narrate”—the power to control one’s own representation (Said, xxiii), by anchoring the oppressed, the colonizer controls how to show his colonized, in a way that serves his colonial plans.

A. Folklore as Antagonistic Memory

Said further frames folklore as a hidden historiographic practice that preserves marginalized experiences against imperial erasure. In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), he rejects that colonialism wanted to erase indigenous histories to legitimize conquest (215) the colonizer replaces true indigenous histories with fake ones, and pretends that he is the owner of the land according to these falsified records. In other words, Folklore functions as *antagonistic memory*. Algerian *chaabi* protest songs encoding anti-French resistance, or Irish *seanchaí* (storytellers) preserving famine trauma, embody what Said calls “the voyage in”—centering marginalized voices within global discourse to challenge colonial amnesia (216) music is served as a powerful political narratives to reassure national identities and strengthen its bounds. During the First Intifada, Palestinian women’s *tatreez* (embroidery) motifs mapped erased villages onto dresses, transforming folk art into cartographic resistance. As Said observes, these acts convert cultural production into “weapons of the weak,” where “every stitch is a declaration of existence” (Said, *After the Last Sky* 38) this shows the contribution of women as members of resisting communities, stitching cultural identity and fighting the colonizing epistemologies.

B. Sustaining National Consciousness under Erasure

For Said, folklore's main function lies in its capacity to sustain collective identity amid *cultural genocide*. In contexts of physical and *epistemic displacement*—such as the Palestinian *Nakba*—folk traditions become what he terms “grammars of survival” (*The Question of Palestine* 29) refugees always repeat songs of returning back to their homes, keeping their old door keys as a hope of the return day. The preservation of Levantine *dabke* dance rhythms or Galilean harvest proverbs in diaspora communities constitutes not nostalgia but active resistance against fragmentation. Said underscores this in *After the Last Sky*, noting how a grandmother's recitation of olive-harvesting songs in a Beirut refugee camp rebuilds “a nation in the throat” (126) these songs work as a vessel of refugees memories about olive trees, a symbol of their strong roots and belonging to the land. This aligns with his insistence that folklore enables “cultural reclamation”—the reassembly of traumatized identities through narrative continuity (*Peace* 54) passed from one generation to the other, emphasizing the right of return to the homeland.

Finally, Said positions folklore as a counter-public sphere resisting neocolonial cultural imperialism. Against Western media dominations that perpetuate Orientalist tropes, folk forms like Egyptian *fellahi* (peasant) poetry or Moroccan *halqa* (street storytelling) create autonomous spaces for rebellious discourse. These traditions pass Said's call for “speaking truth to power” through indigenous epistemologies (*Representations* 83), ensuring subaltern voices critique authority outside state-controlled channels. In doing so, folklore fulfills Said's vision of resistance as both cultural and political: a daily practice where, as he asserted, “the power to narrate is the power to endure” (*Culture* xiii) it is the secret to exist.

5. Blending Myth and Reality the Role of the Fantastic in Fiction

The fantastic in literature, as defined by Tzvetan Todorov, occupies an interrelated space where the reader oscillates between natural and supernatural explanations, creating a "hesitation" that mirrors the destabilized realities of postwar societies (Todorov 33). To control this ambiguity and wipe off the boundaries between myth and reality, creating a narrative that reflects fractured identity. Many critiques offered a valid analysis showcasing the product of violence and a mythic embodiment of collective guilt. Its grotesque form literalizes Rosemary Jackson's assertion that the fantastic "traces the unsaid and unseen of culture" (Jackson 4), exposing the irrationality of war through a lens that realism alone cannot capture. Supernatural creatures transcend their folkloric roots to become hybrid entity, mixing the mythic with the corporeal, and critique the illusion of national unity in divided nations. This duality aligns with Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity, where cultural identity emerges from the interplay of contradictory forces (Bhabha 37) aspects in supernatural creatures are not found in normal people, they satisfy multiplicity and they stand as a metaphor for unity.

The nation's fragmented communities repaired with random attempts mirror the formulation of postcolonial identity, a bricolage of ethnic, religious, and historical fragments. Its existence challenges the binary of myth/reality, embodying what Fredric Jameson terms a "national allegory" for societies grappling with collective trauma (Jameson 69). The novel's fantastical elements amplify the irrationality of wartime violence. When oppressed people seek vengeance for the dead, it passes a distorted form of justice that reflects cyclical vengeance. Supernatural monsters are used to critique the moral decay of a society. This aligns with Eric Rabkin's theory that the fantastic disrupts normative logic to reveal societal contradictions (Rabkin 12). The mythic violence

becomes a parody of postwar failed regime, where vigilante justice replaces institutional order.

The fantastic also functions as a vessel for collective memory and a continuous struggle to reconstruct a coherent identity from the debris of war. It increases through rumors and media, echoing Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire* sites where memory crystallizes in the absence of living tradition (Nora 7). When cities with bombed buildings and haunted markets serve as archives of trauma, their stories are preserved through fantastical narratives. The novel's fantastical framework empowers marginalized voices to reclaim agency. The long tales about the superstitious monsters shared in societies revive the tradition of storytellers, transforming trauma into communal knowledge. This subversive storytelling mirrors Achille Mbembe's concept of "necropolitics," where the powerless negotiate sovereignty through narrative (Mbembe 40). By blending myth and reality, storytellers suggest that the fantastic is not escapism but a tool for survival, enabling conflict-traumatized people to be aware of a world stripped of meaning by war.

Conclusion

Folklore and superstition are not merely residues of the past or expressions of primitive belief; they are dynamic forces that shape collective identity, particularly in times of war and chaos. In contexts of violence and trauma, societies often turn to myth, legend, and supernatural narratives as a means of making sense of chaos, preserving cultural memory, and reasserting communal bonds. These stories become more than entertainment, they serve as psychological coping mechanisms, moral frameworks, and even tools of resistance. War fractures conventional identities, leaving individuals and communities searching for meaning amid destruction. Folklore, with its deep roots in shared tradition, offers a way to articulate the unspeakable, transforming collective

suffering into narratives that can be last, interpreted, and passed down. Superstition, meanwhile, emerges as both a response to powerlessness and a way to reclaim agency—rituals, omens, and taboos impose order on a world that has lost all predictability. As such, the fantastic—whether in the form of ghosts, monsters, or uncanny events—becomes a powerful literary device for representing the absurdity and horror of war. By blending myth with reality, fiction can expose the true nature of conflict in ways that straightforward realism cannot. Stories of the supernatural do not distort the truth of war; rather, they reveal its deeper truths, the collective fears, guilt, and unresolved trauma that remain long after the fighting ends.

To sum up, folklore and superstition in wartime are not signs of irrationality but evidence of resilience. They demonstrate how culture adapts to survive, how communities rebuild meaning from ruin, and how identity is continually reshaped through the stories we tell. In this way, the study of these narratives is not just an exploration of tradition but a vital lens for understanding the human experience of war, memory, and survival.

CHAPTER TWO

**Folklore, superstition; Constructing
Collective Identity in Frankenstein in
Baghdad**

1.Introduction

I represent the impossible mix that never was achieved in the past. I'm the first true Iraqi citizen, he thinks— Ahmed Saadawi, Frankenstein in Baghdad

Frankenstein in Baghdad by Ahmed Saadawi is a novel set in Iraq in 2005, shortly after the 2003 US invasion and its chaotic aftermath. The characters live under foreign occupation. The novel is a complex mix of the natural and the supernatural. It features extensive suicide car bombings, body searches, storytellers gathering for coffee, shooting nights, streets littered with corpses, families mourning the dead, government officials hiring astrologers, and many other contradictory, dark, violent, and even sentimental moments. The genre of Gothic literature has been extensively studied, but consensus defines the genre as a typically bleak setting full of scary, mysterious, and violent incidents.

The main plot begins when Hadi, a lower-class, alcoholic junk dealer, begins collecting leftover body parts from various explosions and suicide bombings around the city (Saadawi 23). "Hadi had gathered these parts from the scenes of explosions (...) He wanted to assemble a complete body so that the government would take it seriously and give it a proper burial." (27). Eventually, his creature resurrects and escapes Hadi's control, but the response to Whatsitsname is mentioned. Seeking revenge on the victims whose body parts made up his body, the monster begins a killing spree. Initially, he plans to target "real criminals," such as Al Qaeda leaders (118), explosives suppliers, and bomb recruiters. Eventually, the creature's body begins to decay, and it realizes that it must continue killing in order to stay alive and replace its rotting body parts. The line between 'criminal' and 'victim' becomes increasingly blurred, as the replacement body parts come from Iraqis whose pasts and actions he begins to question. He begins to feel guilty

about the body parts he has and questions his mission and the validity of justice and revenge. He even murders a seemingly innocent man to obtain his body parts but cannot fully justify the act in his mind (117). Despite this, he has received support from various groups. The creature has countless interpretations and seems to be used, as both an ally and an enemy, for various political purposes.

The novel follows the lives of several characters as the creature roams Baghdad. A grieving old mother called Elishva, who is into a twenty-year trauma, waiting for the return of a son taken to fight in Iran. The life of a journalist named Mahmoud al-Sawadi seeking fortune, love, and success, in addition to the life of a superstitious government official called Brigadier Madjid, the head of Tracking and Pursuit Department, and the director of Iraqi Homeland TV. The Brigadier employs a group of astrologers and fortunetellers to predict terroristic attacks before they happen, another mission of this department is to track supernatural activities like Jinns and ghosts, as well as The Whatsitsname's. This *Frankenstein* creature, and things like that, have metaphorical and symbolic meanings. Saadawi strategically uses the novel's absurd, horrific, and confusing plot to comment on Iraqi realities.

The Whatitsname is never actually referred to as “Frankenstein” by the narrator. In fact, the majority of the characters have different names for the monster and referred to it as “Frankenstein” few times in the novel. Nonetheless, as the novel’s title suggests, Mary Shelley's monster in *Frankenstein* continues to serve as a symbol for the essence of war. In a 2014 interview with Al-Mustafa Najjar for Arabic Literature and Translation, Saadawi remarks that “*Frankenstein* in this novel is a condensed symbol of Iraq’s current problems.” Or "melting pot of identities." Therefore, to comprehend how the *Frankenstein* concept is utilized and interpreted in this context, it is essential to grasp the essence of the *Frankenstein* trope itself. Mary Shelley released *Frankenstein* in 1818.

Nearly two centuries later, Ahmed Saadawi adapted his own version of Shelley's being to express and showcase the realities of Iraq. In his interview with Najjar, Saadawi says his novel does not share themes with Shelley's, like the quest for knowledge, the line between natural and artificial life, and the science-ethics interplay. His use of the *Frankenstein* monster serves to highlight the horror of war and everyday life in Iraq. While Saadawi adopts the Western motif and genre of *Frankenstein*, he appears to create a hybrid form by incorporating culturally specific issues and experiences.

After examining the various adaptations that have emerged from Shelley's novel, Friedman and Kavey seek to explore the reasons behind the enduring polarity of this monster and its associated tropes. As they suggest, the questions posed by the novel are indeed universal (2). Saadawi's work explores similar inquiries, particularly within the framework of the Iraq War and its consequences. For instance, some of these universal questions refer to the contrast of hero versus monster, the interpretation and decline of life, and the very essence and significance of death. In the end, Friedman and Kavey's observation about the original piece resonates well within Saadawi's narrative: "Shelley provides a dynamic and ultimately influential tale of two lost and lonely beings who, instead of comforting and perhaps even loving each other, cause their mutual destruction" (207). In Saadawi's view, this is the situation that has been explained in Iraq. Within the war-torn, suffering, and occupied city portrayed in the novel, the citizens fail to unite in solidarity. Instead, they actively participate in one another's destruction. They have, metaphorically, brought into existence a figure similar to Shelley's monster, the "Whatitsname," characterized by an insistent pursuit of justice, violence, isolation, loneliness, and desperation. This cycle of self-inflicted harm inevitably leads to widespread devastation. Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* occupies an essential position in contemporary Arabic literature, for it innovatively combines Gothic

horror with magical realism in its reflections on the fragmented identity of post-2003 Iraq. The creature, composed of the severed parts of war victims, reflects national disintegration and collective trauma. In this allegory, Saadawi critiques sectarian violence, political corruption, and the failure of justice. Novelists have turned away from classical Arabic realist forms to more speculative ones to reflect the chaos of modern Iraq.

2. The novel's connection to Iraqi postwar reality and its engagement with folklore

Frankenstein in Baghdad is a novel that reflects on the historical and contemporary issues plaguing Baghdad, drawing attention to the violent images, deep disappointments, and bitter defeats that have defined the city's recent history. The narrative is set against the backdrop of the Iraq War and the fallout from the 2003 U.S. invasion, a time of extreme sectarian violence, explosions, and political anarchy. The novel addresses the deep-rooted fear that has permeated the lives of Iraqis since the era of the Baath Party's rule. During the dictatorship, violence used as a primary means of control, with the regime imposing severe penalties for disobedience and employing an extensive network of spies and informants. This system created a pervasive atmosphere of fear, making Iraqis hesitant to express political opinions even to close friends and family. After the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, this climate of fear did not dissipate. The subsequent occupation by the Coalition Provisional Authority worsened the situation, leading to further violence, sectarian conflict, and instability. The novel explores the outbreak of violence following the occupation and attempts to investigate the factors contributing to the rise of terrorism and lawlessness in the post-invasion years.

Through its narrative, the novel examines the tragic history of Baghdad, particularly the events that transpired during and after the 2003 U.S. invasion, such as the rise in violence and the created security crisis. One of the key devices used in the novel is the symbolic representation of Baghdad's troubled history through a character known as the Whatsitsname. This creature is a grotesque amalgamation of bomb victims' body parts, embodying the dismembered and fragmented nature of Iraqi society. The Whatsitsname stands as a metaphor for a nation that has been fragmented by violence, sectarian conflict, and political chaos, where no single entity or authority has the power to unite the people. This figure represents the damaged state of the country, both in a literal sense as a physical body and in a figurative sense as a nation struggling to regain cohesion and identity. The novel is steeped in elements of magical realism, blending folklore, jinn, curses, and omens with the harsh realities of modern warfare. Iraqis, in their desperate attempts to understand their suffering and powerlessness, turn to traditional beliefs and superstitions, which are merged throughout the narrative. The creation of the Whatsitsname is rooted in these supernatural elements, suggesting that the body, constructed from the parts of victims and brought to life by a lost soul, seeks justice. This odd element adds depth to the novel, highlighting the coexistence of the mystical and the real in the lives of Iraqis lasting immense trauma. In addition to these fantastical elements, the novel presents historical incidents in a way that challenges traditional narratives.

3. Collective Identity in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*

Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* transcends its roots in Gothic horror to deliver an intense and unforgettable allegory of post-2003 Iraq (Booker and Daraiseh). Set against the backdrop of a Baghdad ravaged by the U.S. invasion, sectarian violence, and the collapse of social order, the novel employs the grotesque figure of the

What's its name a monster stitched together from the body parts of bombing victims, to explore the profound fragmentation of Iraqi collective identity and the intense politicization of memory. Through this metaphor, Saadawi critiques the failures of attempts to build the Iraqi nation, exposes the manipulation of historical narratives, and reveals how folklore and superstition become vital, although ambiguous, tools for survival and meaning-making amidst chaos. Below is an analysis of these themes using collective memory theory and examples from the search results.

3.1 Superstitious beliefs to cope with collective trauma

Saadawi explores how superstition develops as a way for Iraqis to cope with the hardships caused by war. In *Frankenstein In Baghdad* novel, a society is divided by suffering and sadness, so individuals seek comfort through stories and ideas that aren't true. This phenomenon can be better explained using trauma theory. Caruth argues that trauma is not just about remembering the past but often comes back to us in unrecognizable ways. Because of this, the use of superstitious thinking should be seen as a way for survivors to cope with things they cannot easily understand (Herman 62). It means that trauma can interrupt the bond between people, leading them to come up with strange narratives in an attempt to restore their emotional ties.

By presenting Elishva, Saadawi demonstrates how superstition is a way people deal with the troubles facing their society.

“With her veined and wrinkled hand, Elishva would put the Nokia phone to her ear. Upon hearing her daughters’ voices, the darkness would lift and she would feel at peace. If she had gone straight back to Tayaran Square, she would have found that everything was calm, just as she had left it in the morning. The sidewalks would be clean, and the cars that had caught fire would have been towed away”. (Saadawi 22).

This excerpt delivers profound insights into the psychological defenses Elishva engages in as well as the overall denial element in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. Her “veined and wrinkled hand” words symbolically represent her advanced years along with her physical vulnerability while demonstrating how time and suffering have left their mark on her body. Picking up the Nokia phone turns into an essential emotional stabilizing practice. The straightforward, simple action completely opposes the surrounding world's confusion, while, unexpectedly, the natural, repeated action gives Elishva some brief stability. Her daughters’ voices clear “the darkness” which represents psychological fog caused by trauma, and depression, and loss.

Cathy Caruth's view of trauma as a sudden wound that defies complete understanding because one experiences it "too soon, too unexpectedly, " which thus leads to balance and stubborn biases of real life. Elishva’s mental separation from her area around her—a denial of trauma—acknowledges that a return to Tayaran Square would reveal a peaceful, untouched place. Her described Baghdad realm where “the sidewalks would be clean” and “the cars that had caught fire would have been towed away” constitutes a wishful projection about maintaining stability in full opposition to the actual chaotic violence that dominates the city. The mental city version that emerges from her imagination embodies Judith Herman's Trauma and Recovery concept of "reconstruction of meaning" communicated by survivors after experiencing trauma. During breaks of fundamental meaning bases, which include family, safety, and community people, tend to shape imaginary comforting stories.

Elishva’s dream picture goes beyond mere sentimental remembrance; it acts as an essential psychological defense mechanism. This demonstrates her inability to reconcile postwar Baghdad's harsh reality with her mind's need for coherence. Through the act of creating a controlled 'calm' image of the city, she gains limited dominion over

the surroundings because her power is only psychological in nature. This sort of psychological denial performs similar functions to evil superstition in Saadawi's book: it sustains emotional order when logical thinking gives way to the destructive power of trauma.

The phrase 'have been towed away' indicates an advanced stage of time combined with a rescue or municipal authority system, which does not show up at all in the novel's narrative about Baghdad. The clean and tidy world that Elishva constructs through imagination comments ironically on how political and social systems within Iraq fail their citizens. Elishva's mind creates a mythical type of normalcy to replace the real city, which she refuses to face. Difference and trauma from the disappearance of Elishva's son align perfectly with Caruth's concept of trauma as repeated 'return' to the loss target and the failure of Loss narration here: Elishva returns to Tayaran Square through symbolic practices to reconstruct traumatic events into something tolerable. The passage represents a key element of the novel, which demonstrates ordinary people reconstructing mental landscapes to defend themselves against devastating grief together with mortal terror.

Through the lens of trauma theory, Elishva's behavior reveals human attempts for dissolution of pain through invocation of ritual practice and imagination and superstitious belief. Her imaginary form of Baghdad becomes an individual myth yet simultaneously echoes collective attempts at denial in refugees of war and continuous brutality surroundings society, is vulnerable to pain from trauma. "Elishva no longer shared with anyone her belief that Daniel was still alive. She just waited to hear the voice of Matilda or Hilda because they would put up with her, however strange this idea of hers. The two daughters knew their mother clung to the memory of her late son in order to go on living. There was no harm in humoring her." (Saadawi 14) Elishva never told anyone that she thought Daniel was still alive. She stayed still for Matilda or Hilda to

pronounce their voices because both of her daughters would endure her despite her scratched theory. The couple of daughters recognized that their mother preserved herself alive by remembering her deceased son. She disliked "no harm in humoring her"(14); demonstrates Elishva's excessive psychological trust in an imaginary conviction, which serves as a survival strategy for deep distress (23) that is why she lives in a virtual world away from her bitter reality.

Although Elishva's belief about her son Daniel being alive appears meaningless, she exhibits signs of disturbed grief and post-trauma experiences. Her unshakable sentiment is not a clinical form of mental illness but a triggered reaction to trauma's fundamental design, which Cathy Caruth explores by saying, "the full realization of traumatic experience (...) amounts to more than self-perception and violent-event representation because it results in infinite repetitions of the event for which the survivor's comprehension remains limited" (Caruth 4). Elishva's psyche holds on to the seeming existence of Daniel because her emotional needs make her unable to face a second loss from him. Judith Herman elucidates this process more thoroughly in the field of trauma studies through her essential publication *Trauma and Recovery*. Trauma survivors encounter states of "frozen mourning" that prevent normal grieving operations because their trauma remains unprocessed yet sealed for preservation (Herman 62) Elishva is always cold, even when she hears near bomb explosions.

Elishva's emotional survival hinges on her ability to protect the sealed loss from being reopened. When she said she "no longer shared with anyone her belief" she revealed her experience of trauma has become intensely private and guarded. Because her delusion has become sacred, it serves as a protective barrier that blocks society's attempts to provide the closure feeling. Matilda and Hilda play subtle roles in shaping this trauma process. Through their willingness to entertain her fantasies, they sustain her

kind of emotional stability, which exists on very thin ice. Through their supportive actions, they exhibit what aligns with Dominick LaCapra calls “acting out” where trauma remains workless and is lived again through repeated patterns, or behavioral changes (LaCapra 70). The character Elishva practices her rituals in a daily routine, that brings her stability and social integration.

Elishva never processes her loss; through extended silent waits and repeated mental recreations of her son, she relives this pain continuously. By drawing on her own personal myth of Elishva, we also glimpse how it stands for social importance in the world of *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. Saadawi locates the genesis of her personal suffering inside a system marked by profound political turmoil together with social violence and losses. An absolute irrational takes up the function for communities to continue existence. The very foundations of logic and justice with the arrival of post-invasion Baghdad together with normal timekeeping standards itself collapse. Through her firm belief that her child still lives, Elishva embodies both pathological mental characteristics and a sign revealing the psychological wounds of her nation's community. Superstition and irrational beliefs dominate the areas institutional dysfunctions, and lack resolutions leaves behind. Elishva represents how trauma creates persistent ghosts of suffering that also bend real existence to uphold meaningful experiences. She does not pick foolishly to believe yet her belief system remains essential to build emotional defenses for unbearable hardship.

“There were people who had returned from long journeys with new names and new identities (...) There were people who had survived many deaths in the time of the dictatorship only to find themselves face-to-face with a pointless death in the age of 'democracy'—when, for example, a motorbike ran into them in the middle of the road. Believers lost their faith (...) Nonbelievers had become believers (...) So that

Daniel Tadros Moshe, the lanky guitarist, had come back to his old mother's house was not so hard to believe". (Saadawi 180)

The breakdown of meaning in postwar Iraq turns the absurd into everyday experience. Collective trauma becomes apparent through the shifting nature of identity alongside unpredictable mortality experiences and collapsing belief structures. Individual memory experiences disruptions together with cultural understanding systems because of trauma, which Caruth identified. The text blurs myth-reality boundaries to demonstrate how traumatized societies accept superstition as a legitimate explanatory framework. Elishva's belief in Daniel's return feels logically sensible within his society, where shared epistemological confusion prevails. Belief in the supernatural presence of *Frankenstein in Baghdad* represents individual and societal reactions to the chaos unleashed by war and violence. Elishva's devotion to her son's survival, together with her ritualized actions, stands as an example showing how trauma disrupts our experience of time, and memory, and reality itself. Following theoretical frameworks from Caruth and Herman, we can interpret superstition as a fabricated alternative narrative survival fiction for unbearable realities. Within Saadawi's story world, where objective understanding fails to explain pain, superstition emerges as a rational psychological tool that supports both personal healing and cultural preservation.

3.2 Collective Memory Theory and the Fragmentation of Identity

Collective memory, as theorized by Maurice Halbwachs, emphasizes that memory is not static (fixed) but reconstructed through present-day social frameworks because "the believer preserves in his memory certain chief facts that religious instruction has taught him (...) he has often rethought them and that others have rethought them with him" (Halbwachs 99). In *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, this is clear in the Whatsitsname, whose composite body symbolizes Iraq's fragmented collective memory. Each body part

represents a victim of violence from different religious or ethnic groups (Shiites, Sunnis, Kurds, etc.), mirroring the "human mosaic" of Middle Eastern communal identities. Which is reflected in the monster's statement, "I'm made up of body parts of people from diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, tribes, races, and social classes, I represent the impossible mix that never was achieved in the past. I'm the first true Iraqi citizen, he thinks" (Saadawi 133). Its inability to maintain cohesive body form counterparts, represents Iraqis struggle to forge a unified national identity, amid sectarian divisions. Frankenstein declared "I had serious suspicions (...) they had used body parts from a criminal (...) they had used parts from a terrorist. Maybe that was why I wasn't in a good mood and felt confused and flustered" (Saadawi 121). for instance, the novel's setting in Bataween — a neighborhood inhabited by Christians and Muslims in Baghdad — bring to mind a pre-sectarian era of coexistence. Once a center of Arabic intellectual and cultural life with Churches, mosques, and schools, Bataween's decline reflects the broader erasure of Iraq's multicultural heritage, a theme echoed in real-world accounts of many writers memorializing Baghdad. The neighborhood's transformation into a battleground for competing memories aligns with Halbwachs' assertion that memory is "reconstructed on the basis of the present" (Halbwachs 8) Bataween is just boiling like the whole country like a chemical reaction, because of the different elements found in one vessel, once the reaction ends, everything is stabilized.

3.3 Politics of Victimhood and Weaponized Memory

The novel critiques how political elites manipulate collective memory to legitimize power. The Whatsitsname's vengeful revolution fueled by the trauma of its "fellows" matches real-world Iraqi groups invoking historical grievances, such as Shiite groups comparing their martyrs to Imam Husseyn's ritual murder at Karbala. It gave an approximate number for these ghostly figures: about one thousand (...) of people had

been killed on the Imams Bridge. A rumor that there was a suicide bomber among the pilgrims had caused panic, and some of the pilgrims were trampled to death while others threw themselves into the river and drowned" (Saadawi 87). This weaponization of memory worsens societal fractures, as seen in Iraq's post-2003 political landscape. Saadawi's portrayal of citizens like Elishva, a Christian woman clinging to the memory of her son Daniel, who had been taken to fight and been killed in the war, illustrates how individual grief is related to collective trauma.

"Over the last three years the local people had heard many stories that were no more believable. Dead people had emerged from the dungeons of the security services, and nonexistent people appeared out of nowhere outside the doors of their relatives' humble houses. There were people who had returned from long journeys with new names and new identities, women who had spent their childhoods in prison cells" (180).

Similarly, the destruction of Baghdad's cultural institutions (e.g., museums, libraries) and the brain drain of the educated middle class as the case with Elishva's daughters, who told her, "You'll be more comfortable here, (...) Here in Melbourne there's an Assyrian church called Saint George"(77) that mirrors the novel's portrayal of a society stripped of its unifying historical bonds.

4. Ethnic and Religious Boundaries in a Fractured Society

The novel's characters, including a Sunni hotel guard, a Shiite militia member, and a Kurdish journalist, reflect the ethnic and religious fractured lines described in anthropological studies of Middle Eastern identities. These divisions are worsened by the collapse of state institutions, a reality echoed in reports of Iraq's ruined education system and assassinations of professionals. for instance, the Tishreen(October) protest

movement (2019–2020), which aimed to transcend sectarian identities, finds a literary counterpart in Saadawi's critique of elites who reduce citizens to "body parts" in a political game (Alkinani, "Tishreen Protest Movement"). The failure of both the novel's characters and real-world activists to overcome these divisions emphasizes the difficulty of rebuilding collective identity amid entrenched sectarianism.

4.1 Moral Ambiguity and the Collapse of Binaries

The Whatsitsname's mission evolves from a quest for righteous vengeance ("a body for a body") into an infinite cycle of moral ambiguity. As it hunts those responsible for the deaths of its component parts, it confronts the impossibility of distinguishing pure innocence from absolute guilt in a society scarred by decades of dictatorship, war, and occupation. The Magician, one of its assistants (Saadawi 120), articulates this: "Each of us has a measure of criminality(...) Someone who's been killed through no fault of his own might be innocent today, but he might have been a criminal ten years ago" (120). The creature itself reaches a shocking conclusion: "There are no innocents who are completely innocent or criminals who are completely criminal." (165). This realization paralyzes its original mission and mirrors Iraq's own crisis: the collapse of clear moral and political frameworks in the face of widespread violence and corruption, making the formation of a positive, shared identity based on clear values nearly impossible (Bahoora 18). Its eventual turn to killing innocents for spare parts starkly symbolizes how the quest for justice or survival in such an environment inevitably perpetuates the cycle of violence and further fractures the social fabric (13) this symbolizes the fail of Iraqis in building a united nation, because they are new to democracy, the result is unstoppable sectarian violence.

4.2 Literature as a Site of Memory Preservation, Kachachi's *The American Granddaughter*, and Antoon's *the corpse washer*

The US invasion of Iraq is engraved in Iraqis' memory profoundly. Too much blood and ink are shed, as a result of violence and turmoil, to write Iraqis' pain and suffering. Complexity in Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is compared with Inaam Kachachi's *The American Granddaughter*, both authors employing distinct narrative strategies to dissect the occupation's strong impact on Iraqi collective identity and individual morality. Saadawi's novel, structured around the grotesque figure of The Whatsitsname, a fragmented corpse stitched from bombing victims, serves as an allegory for the nation's division under sectarian violence inflamed by foreign intervention. The monster's fragmented body, composed of Shiite, Sunni, Christian, and Kurdish parts, literalizes Pierre Nora's theory of *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory), where each part embodies unresolved communal traumas and the impossibility of cohesive national identity amid externally orchestrated chaos (Nora 10). This corporeal metaphor critiques the US occupation's role in dismantling state institutions, which transformed Baghdad into a landscape where bodies became natural currency. As Haytham Bahooora argues (Bahooora 188), Saadawi's use of "postcolonial gothic" aesthetics confronts the unspeakable violence exceeding realistic representation, framing the invasion as a neocolonial project that weaponized sectarian divisions rather than innate Iraqi animosities (Bahooora 189). The Whatsitsname's vengeful rampage, driven by the unavenged grievances of its composite souls, mirrors the cyclical violence unleashed by occupation policies, where accountability for civilian deaths remains perpetually deferred, leaving ghosts to haunt the city's ruins (Nora 10) it is an irrational plan based on avengence, that aligns with the ending of Shakespear's Hamlet where all die.

Both novels converge in depicting Baghdad's urban spaces as palimpsests of erasure and resistance, where invasion physically rewrites communal histories. Saadawi sets the *Whatsitsname's* creation in Bataween, a historical neighborhood, where buildings, and institutions, and intellectual salons once symbolized Iraq's multicultural "human mosaic" but now lie in ruins, mirroring the expulsion of many Iraqis and the occupation's acceleration of cultural amnesia. Similarly, Saadawi's *Elishva* preserves her missing son's photograph, resisting the homogenization of sectarian narratives. These domestic spaces function as what Bahooora terms "alternate historical archives," where literature preserves what museums and libraries lost to looting 15,000 artifacts vanished from Baghdad's National Museum post-2003. The authors, thus, frame storytelling as counter-memory: Saadawi through the *Whatsitsname's* tapes confessing, "I will bring justice on earth," and *Kachachi* through *Zeina's* manuscript battling the "gullible writer" attempting to co-opt her story into patriotic propaganda (arabhyphen) that highlights the power of narratives.

Stylistically, Saadawi deploys magical realism and gothic horror to articulate trauma beyond science. Saadawi's animated corpse, decaying unless avenged, embodies the instability of memory without justice. This technique aligns with what Bahooora identifies as Iraqi fiction's turn to the supernatural to narrate "spectacles of violence" that oppose conventional description, transforming the US invasion's collateral damage into powerful mythology. That is to say, instead of trying to describe the war's horrors realistically, they transform the real-world suffering and destruction into powerful, mythical stories that capture the trauma in a deeper, more emotional way (Bahooora 188). More importantly, the authors decenter the American soldier as the main Western Iraq War narratives to center civilian perspectives. Saadawi's monster avoids reductive labels (Shiite extremist, Wahhabi, foreign agent), exposing how occupation forces manipulate

memory to serve power. To sum up, the novel offers uncertain conclusions about reconciliation. Saadawi's monster disintegrates, mirroring Iraq's failed national identity, yet its persistence as legend affirms narrative resilience against erasure.

Saadawi's work aligns with works like *The Corpse Washer* by Sinan Antoon who uses literature to preserve Baghdad's multicultural past ("Erasing Collective Memory"). The novel's fragmented narrative structure—jumping between perspectives and timelines—mirrors the "emotional truth" of exile and dislocation described in memoirs of displaced Iraqis ("Erasing Collective Memory"). This literary preservation contrasts with the systematic erasure of Iraq's cultural memory through the destruction of schools and institutions ("Erasing Collective Memory"). *The Corpse Washer* by Sinan Antoon is a good example of collective memory in Iraqi literature and explores these themes deeply; it examines the psychological scars of sectarian violence on Baghdad's citizens. Like *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, Antoon's work interrogates how collective trauma reshapes individual and national identities, offering a great match to Saadawi's allegorical critique. By synthesizing these elements, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* emerges as a profound interpretation of the interplay between memory, identity, and violence in a society struggling to reconcile its past with an uncertain future.

4.3 Fragments of a Nation: Reconstructing Iraqi Identity in the Wake of War

Iraq experienced profound upheaval after 2003. The Baath regime fell. A U.S.-led coalition intervened. Later, ISIS invaded northern areas in 2014. These events created deep societal crises. Sectarian violence spread. Conflict and occupation intensified. Trauma became widespread. Terrorism increased. These crises devastated Iraq. They caused massive destruction. Countless lives were lost. Displacement affected millions. An identity crisis emerged. Against this backdrop, Ahmed Saadawi addresses critical concerns. He focuses on violence tearing Iraq apart. He examines the loss of Iraqi

identity. He explores societal fragmentation. Ian Campbell analyzes Saadawi's perspective. He contends that Saadawi's text "poses migration and exile as the rational choice for anyone who can afford to leave. In an Iraq where the response to a wrecked and occupied country is to try to enforce a univocal national identity, exile is a matter of survival for religious and ethnic minorities" (Campbell 2). Campbell notes that many Iraqis fled. They sought safety elsewhere. This was a necessary choice.

In *Writing the Dismembered Nation*, Bahooora comments on Saadawi's novel and other Iraqi works that deal with the narratives of war in post-2003, stating that "Iraqi identity raises a series of questions about the role narrative fiction plays in constructing a history and experience of structural violence for which there has been no political, legal, or historical accountability" (Bahooora). Saadawi clearly addresses the paradox of Iraqi identity by emphasizing its significant characteristics, such as religious plurality, cultural variety, and multiethnic communities. He comments about his novel: "I wanted to shed light on several issues with this book ... One was the paradox of identity diversity in Iraq and how people understand themselves. All my characters are from different backgrounds" (Hankir 10) the author is an Iraqi citizen trying to analyze the situation in his country.

Saadawi's story features characters from varied backgrounds who live in one district of Baghdad, reflecting the diversity of Iraqi society. Furthermore, Saadawi intentionally assembles the body of the Whatsitsname from various backgrounds and ethnicities. In order to represent all groups, tribes, and sects of Iraqi society, it is his way to demonstrate the complexities of Iraqi identity, particularly in the context of war and occupation. In this context, the essence of Whatsitsname's body is critical in the formation of the present Iraqi identity as an archetype of Iraqi citizens, which the Iraqi government has failed to establish. As described in the novel, "I'm the model citizen that

the Iraqi state has failed to produce, at least since the days of King Faisal I” (Saadawi 146). At its core, the Whatsitsname celebrates the identity of the Iraqi population, with each portion of his body representing some feature of modern Iraq. The body, in particular, emphasizes the relationship of a part to the whole, symbolizing an individual's representation of the collective. The Whatsitsname is a self-conscious figure that represents the Iraqi people. As a result, he creates a shell of basic identity to represent all Iraqis as one real citizen. Such an iconic citizen has a deep trust in Iraq, demonstrating symbolic diversity and plurality. Through the assembling of his body, he creates a composite identity extending from singular to plural, a society from within. The Whatsitsname's collective role is a part-for-whole relationship, which serves as a national metaphor for the viability of Iraq's cohesive body and “the potential of its very national continuity” (Bahooora 189) it is a member of society and represents cocktailed Iraqi communities.

The Whatsitsname unifies Iraqi identity and creates a positive view of Iraq's national identity. Saadawi's monster is named *Shisma* in Arabic, an Iraqi dialect that literally means, "What is his name." Saadawi uses this identification to articulate the fragmented situation of Iraqi identity in a meaningful linguistic accent, referring to all Iraqis by a single name. Jonathan Wright translates the name into Whatsitsname; perhaps he chose this translation purposefully because it captures the fractured nature of the Whatsitsname, which Hadi has united into a single collective body. Additionally, it stands for *dialect* in this case. The original meaning of the name refers to forgetting someone's name. As a result, the linguistic association of Whatsitsname indicates a forgotten name rather than an anonymous one. It is important to note that Hadi is serious about naming his creature rather than leaving him as an unnamed body. To back up this claim, when people question Hadi about his narrative in the coffee shop, he responds,

“Tell us the story of the corpse” (Saadawi 84). Hadi responds firmly: “The story of the Whatsitsname, you mean” (Saadawi 84). Hadi “insisted on correcting them, using the name he had given to his creation.” It was not actually a corpse, because the word ‘corpse’ implied a specific person or thing, which did not apply to the Whatsitsname (Saadawi 84). The Whatsitsname can thus be interpreted as a symbol of the forgotten people who died because of sectarian conflict and colonial consequences. Saadawi tries to remember and respect all Iraqi victims by using the name Whatsitsname.

In another sense, Saadawi deliberately chooses a dialect name, *Shisma*, to identify it with the entire Iraqi people, regardless of their religious differences and cultural backgrounds. Saadawi carefully lists all of Iraq's sects: Arab, Kurdish, Turkmen, and so forth, without favoring any specific group, and the Whatsitsname equally represents all of them. In this way, Whatsitsname becomes a synonym for Iraqiness. According to Kirmanc, many Iraqi intellectuals and academics value their identity, often known as "Iraqiness" (Kirmanc 9). As a result, the name Whatsitsname becomes a national emblem to identify all Iraqis, mapping the existence of their nation and metaphorically calling them race by race, linguistically naming them name (sect) by name (sect), and collectively remembering them piece by piece—all unified in one name, body, and soul. Furthermore, the social link between self and other at the national level is dynamically reflected by the Whatsitsname's broken body parts, which represent various nationalities of Iraqi people. In this vein, Bahooora contends that, despite the fragmented nature of the Whatsitsname representing a shattered country, it is a cohesive body that embodies Iraq's identity. He describes the corpse as “a metaphor for the broken and damaged nation.” The novel's characters regard the *Shisma* as symbolizing many versions of Iraqi identity, with its body made up of Iraqis from diverse sects and nationalities (Bahooora 196). *Frankenstein in Baghdad* depicts Iraqi identity as divided but with a cohesive soul. In his

words: “Because I am made up of body parts from people from various origins — ethnicities, tribes, races, and social classes — I represent the impossible blend that has never been done before. I am the first true Iraqi citizen” (Saadawi 146) according to the author the King Faicel era is much better than Saddams' dictatorship for hybrid Iraq.

The Whatsitsname becomes the national icon of all Iraqis, with enough gravitas to unite all sects of his society from south to north and east to west. He is a nested figure inside the Iraqi community that the Iraqi government's political authority has completely failed to create or recognize. Thus, the remark "the first true Iraqi citizen" reveals a deeper meaning at its core, as it is a direct attack on the Iraqi government's political spectrum while evoking nostalgia for a golden past. Saadawi gestures to his country's historical continuity while also confronting horrifying current events. He emphasizes the importance of human characteristics, social fiber, cultural unity, and historical continuity in the Bataween neighborhood. Perhaps it is no coincidence that "Al-Bataween" is a genuine area in Baghdad; therefore, Saadawi chooses to expressly describe it in his narrative. Furthermore, the realistic, diverse characters in the neighborhood, with regard to their names, titles, and social interactions with each other, constitute a national agency of community and symbolic diversity in modern Iraq. Interestingly, a neighborhood inhabited by many people of diverse backgrounds, thereby representing modern Iraq. The residents include Hadi, the central character; Mahmoud, the journalist; Abu Anwar, the owner of Orouba Hotel; Aziz the Egyptian and the owner of the coffee shop; Faraj the realtor; and Elishva, or Umm Daniel, among others. These characters mirror the diversity of Iraqi society.

The spirit of community is vital, so far, as it involves unity and reflects the cultural diversity of contemporary Baghdad. Besides its location in the heart of Baghdad, the Bataween neighborhood holds a historical significance, religious ethnicity, and cultural

diversity of all Iraqi sects, including the Jews, Christians, and Muslims coexisting in one district. In doing so, Saadawi reveals the dynamics of his community by representing them in one diverse district, Bataween. Furthermore, the Bataween district's spectrum resembles a mosaic of shattered infrastructure caused by frequent explosions. In one example, a car explosion demolishes one of the capital city's historic sites, such as a share of the Abbasid Baghdad wall, which is regarded as "the most important discovery in Islamic archaeology in Baghdad for many decades" (Saadawi 265) that shows how rich the cultural history of Iraq.

Saadawi references Iraqi archaeology's past while emphasizing the danger of many explosions destroying the city's identity and transforming it into a colonial museum of ruins. In truth, the American army used several archeological sites as military camps, such as the ancient city of Babylon. Simon Jenkins correctly observes that "Babylon is being rendered archaeologically empty" (Jenkins, para. 6). In a meeting held on September 29 at UNESCO's Paris Headquarters, Philippe Lalliot, the French ambassador to UNESCO, stated, "Because the destruction of heritage that carries with it the identity of a people and the history of a country cannot be considered collateral or secondary damage that we can live with. It is comparable to the ruin of human lives." ("A Call to Save Iraq's Cultural Heritage," para. 3). In the same conference, Qais Hussein Rashied, Director of the Baghdad Museum, confirms that ISIS intensifies the situation in Iraq because one of the radical extremist groups "has undertaken digs to sell (items) in Europe and Asia via middlemen in neighboring countries," Rashied continues, "These sales are financing terrorism" ("A Call to Save Iraq's Cultural Heritage," para. 7).

The loss of archaeological treasures impacts the Iraqi identity in that the loss of Iraqi identity represents the destruction of archaeological sites and legacy. As a result, archaeological sites, relics, and museums are more than just Iraq's national property; they

are also cultural heritage that is an important element of Iraqi identity. Fundamentally, archaeology is critical in shaping Iraqi identity. In this vein, Magnus Thorkell Bernhardsson emphasizes the need to develop Iraqi identity through archaeological endeavors. Specifically, Iraq's archaeological heritage is linked to the political and cultural history of archaeology, as well as the formation of Iraqi identity itself. For Bernhardsson, archaeological sites are linked to the bone of Iraqi society since they serve as a metaphor for the ongoing issues of conflict, and the archaeological heritage may hold objective potential in forming Iraqi society. According to Bernhardsson, “Archaeological objects became intrinsically tied to the execution of the war and maybe emblematic of the problems ahead in the restoration of Iraq.” He claims, “Archaeology, therefore, had a crucial role in helping foster nationalism in the age of decolonization of Iraq and supplied physical items for identifying the country in the era of a strong, centralized nation-state” (Bernhardsson 18). Bernhardsson's line of thought is consistent with Saadawi's narrative, in which he connects an archeological arc through references to historical records (legacies of Baghdad's past achievements) and cultural variety among many races and tribes in the Bataween neighborhood. By doing so, the author develops an authentic relationship with the location through historical continuity, archaeological heritage, and cultural diversity, thereby creating a national sense of belonging for all Iraqi citizens to their home.

5. The Folkloric Monster as Collective Identity in Frankenstein In Baghdad, Hybridity, Resistance, and Third Space

Ahmed Saadawi wrote *Frankenstein in Baghdad* to reimagine Mary Shelley's famous monster. Saadawi calls this new creature the *Whatsitsname*. One of the main characters in the novel, it is a confusing body, a fragmented and a whole body at the same time, both of opposing binaries fractured/united belong to the same being. It is a fragmented,

hybrid being. This monster physically represents Iraq itself. Iraq's collective identity was fractured. These cracks are made under U.S. occupation. The monster's body is grotesque. It is made from many different parts. This physical form has deep symbolic meaning. The Whatsitsname becomes a powerful site of resistance. It challenges simple narratives. Homi Bhabha's "Third Space Theory" helps explain this. The theory describes where new meanings are made. The monster inhabits such a space. Through it, Saadawi critiques imperialist violence. He also critiques harmful sectarian divisions within Iraq. In short, the Whatsitsname uses its hybrid existence to actively resist forces that seek to divide and destroy.

The Whatsitsname is more than just a monster. It acts as a "site of rebellious memory." A folkloric tool is meant to resist simple and single stories about Iraq. It fights homogenizing narratives. The monster reclaims agency through its hybrid nature. It is made from many different parts. Homi Bhabha describes places like this, he calls them "Third Spaces." Cultural meaning is not just mirrored there. It is actively produced there (Bhabha 30). The Whatsitsname embodies this Third Space. It represents Iraq's struggle for a solid collective identity. This makes it a challenging and powerful symbol.

5.1 The Whatsitsname a Collective Body of Fragmented Identities

The Whatsitsname is stitched together from the body parts of bombing victims, representing Iraq's ethnoreligious mosaic (Shiites, Sunnis, Christians, Kurds, etc.) and the collective trauma of occupation. Its fragmented form mirrors the disintegration of Baghdad's social fabric, where sectarian violence and foreign intervention have erased cohesive national identity (Bahooora 18). Saadawi's monster is not merely a physical abnormality but a living palimpsest of collective memory. As Hadi, the junk dealer, assembles the corpse, he unconsciously creates a hybrid entity that challenges singular categorization; it is "The lost human spirit of Hasib, a hotel guard killed in a recent

suicide bombing, finds its way into Nahim's reconstructed corpse and inhabits it. It is a rebirth for Hasib, rendered in a vocabulary of excess" (Saadawi 36). This "excess" transcends individual grief, transforming the monster into a vessel for communal suffering. Each body part carries the memories and grievances of its original owner, making the Whatsitsname a symbol of Iraq's collective fears of annihilation, erasure, and unresolved (Alhashmi, Rawad) the monster is the incarnation of Iraqi's collective trauma.

5.2. Folklore as resistance, third space, and hybrid agency

Bhabha's Third Space Theory, a site of cultural hybridity where marginalized identities negotiate power, provides a framework for understanding the monster's role. The Whatsitsname exists in an interlinked zone between a number of essential binaries such as life/death, self/other, and victim/murder. This duality allows it to destabilize dominant narratives imposed by the U.S. occupation and sectarian violence. In addition, that is precisely what makes Saadawi challenge the essentialism of the idea of opposing binaries, creating a long list of assembled, contradicting meanings interrelated areas that represent a sort of Iraqi counter-resistance against the U.S. occupation. For instance, Saadawi's character "Brigadier Majid had been a colonel in the intelligence service of the old Iraqi army, and for his new position, he had obtained an exemption from the de-Baathification regulations", or Elishva, the old Armenian considered a protective woman for the neighborhood and considered as evil crazy by the same neighbors.

5.2.1 Narrative Resistance and Subversion

Folklore and rumor become powerful forms of resistance against dominant, often oppressive or misleading, narratives. Hadi, initially dismissed as "Hadi the liar," uses storytelling, including the tale of the Whatsitsname's creation, not just to cope with his deep trauma but also to assert a counter-truth about the value of the anonymous dead and the government's failure (Saadawi 141). His stories, told in Aziz the Egyptian's coffee

shop, create a communal space for sharing trauma and skepticism towards official accounts. The Whatsitsname itself rapidly evolves into an urban legend ("Criminal X," "The One Who Has No Name"), its meaning contested limited identities, thus, the "Fear of the Whatsitsname continued to spread. In Sadr city, they spoke of him as a Wahhabi, in Adamiya as a Shiite extremist. The Iraqi government described him as an agent of foreign powers, while the spokesman for the U.S. state Department said he was an ingenious man whose aim was to undermine the American project in Iraq". This proliferation of rumors, as Michel de Certeau might argue, represents a "tactic" used by the powerless to reinterpret and subvert the "strategies" of power (occupying forces, government, militias, media). By controlling the narrative around the monster, ordinary Baghdadis reclaim a measure of agency in defining their terrifying reality (de Certeau 37). The government's insisting but useless attempts to capture or explain the creature reveal its inability to control this narrative resistance coming from the streets "people grew more convinced with every passing day that he would never die. They were well aware of the stories of bullets passing through him. They knew he didn't bleed and didn't let anyone catch a glimpse of his face" (Saadawi 206) it represent rumors and myths that could not be ended.

Saadawi, in a complex way, demonstrates how memory in post-2003 Iraq is not a neutral but an aggressively contested battleground, manipulated by various actors to serve present agendas, further complicating collective identity formation. The novel indirectly contrasts the unified, state-imposed national memory of the Ba'athist era, which idealized a united Sunni-Arab heritage and a glory to strengthen Saddam's regime, with the fragmented, *polyphonic* memories embodied by the Whatsitsname (16). Each body part carries the unfulfilled vengeance and personal history of its original owner, Hadi's grief for Nahem, Elishva's longing for Daniel, Hasib's stolen future. This storm

of personal traumas challenges any singular, authoritative version of Iraqi history promoted by new sectarian powers or the occupying forces. The *Whatsitsname* becomes a walking archive of suppressed or marginalized histories, demanding recognition for the individual suffering erased in grand political narratives (Alhashimi 17) a memory that resists the power state.

The inability to properly bury and mourn the dead, symbolized by Hadi's initial act and the morgues filled with unknown peoples' body parts. This act prevents closure and allows the past to violently intrude upon the present. Haytham Bahooora argues the novel exemplifies the "postcolonial gothic," where the reanimated corpse represents "the frightening return of the dead, unjustly killed and improperly mourned" (Bahooora 205). The *Whatsitsname* *is* this return, literally animated by Hasib's restless soul and driven by the collective, uncontrolled trauma of its components. Its vengeful killing signifies how open historical wounds, from Saddam's oppression to the crisis of sanctions and invasion, continue to fuel cycles of violence, preventing the emergence of a stable, forward-looking collective identity. The past, like the rotting flesh, refuses to stay buried and poisons the present (192) seeking for hope to build a better united nation.

5.4. Fractured Psyches and the Impossibility of cohesive identity

The novel's characters themselves embody the psychic fractures of a nation in trauma. As psychoanalytic readings suggest, they represent "broken psyches" overwhelmed by traumas they cannot resolve, reflecting a collective unconscious scarred by invasion and violence. Mahmoud al-Sawadi, the journalist, flees his hometown after publishing an article on "three types of justice" (legal, divine, and street) unintentionally provokes a murder, only to become disappointed in Baghdad. His path, from idealism to pessimism ("there is no justice in Iraq, only anarchy") mirrors the nation's failed transition to democracy (Saadawi 209). His boss, the charismatic but corrupt al-Saïdi

(who embezzles millions and flees), represents the moral bankruptcy of potential leadership figures. Brigadier Majid's reliance on astrologers to track the Whatsitsname underscores the state's irrationality and weakness. Even the Whatsitsname experiences a fractured consciousness, pulled by the conflicting desires and traumas of its composite parts, unable to achieve a stable sense of self, a direct matching to the Iraqi people's struggling to reconcile conflicting identities and loyalties (Bahoor 18) they are contradicting conflicts to set peace.

The novel's ambiguous ending reinforces the impossibility of clear resolution. Elishva leaves for Australia, tricked by a grandson resembling her son, a bittersweet escape from, but not a solution to, her trauma. Mahmoud returns to Amara, disappointed. Hadi, horrifically disfigured by a bomb intended for the Whatsitsname, is falsely arrested as the monster by authorities desperate for a scapegoat to project an illusion of control (Saadawi 213). The final image, however, reveals the true Whatsitsname watching *Hadi's* arrest while petting *Elishva's* cat, *Nabu*. It remains free, an enduring symbol of Iraq's unresolved traumas, fragmented identity, and the cyclical violence that continues unabated. There is no rebirth, only a haunting persistence of the monstrous reality born from invasion and division.

Conclusion

Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* works as a space of narrative resistance, of cultural memory, projecting an Iraqi identity through the language of folklore and superstition in the wake of war. In the character of the Whatsitsname, Saadawi has an allegory of national disintegration and the fight for unity within sectarianism, occupation, and trauma. The monster's composite body, stitched together from victims of more than one ethnicity or faith, is a living source of shared trauma, and an image of the contested nature of belonging, and superstition is shown to be not only an irrational

religious belief but also a strategy of survival for people like Elishva, whose spiritual connection to the dead underlines the psychological effects of unresolved grief. In an institutional failure of a society that does not provide that justice or stability, folklore and superstition become vehicles for resistance, survival, and the re-imagining of collective identity. This chapter has discovered that Saadawi's novel not only critiques post-invasion Iraq but also proposes alternative, culturally inherent means of reconstructing identity through myth, memory, and symbolic hybridity.

General Conclusion

This dissertation has examined how Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* uses folklore and superstition to represent the incoherence and ambiguities of collective identity in post-2003 Iraq. Amidst the ruins of sectarian conflict, foreign invasion, and multicultural backgrounds, the novel relates to myth, collective trauma, and memory in an effort to recover Iraq from the symbolic chaos into which it has been thrown. In the grotesque and hybrid Whatsitsname, a being formed from the *dismembered* body parts of Iraqi victims, Saadawi presents a powerful allegory for a fractured national consciousness in search of its unity, justice, and history.

The folklore and superstition in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* are not just cultural side marks but essential storytelling devices that help to cope with trauma, store historical memory, and resist dominant forces in society. These elements are actually rational, effective facts, and contribute to making sense of a world in which there is no longer established truth. The novel positions narratives and belief systems, whether they tend to the superstitious, the mythological, or the folkloric, as modes of survival and cultural engagement. The trauma experienced by characters like Elishva, Hadi, or Mahmoud, according to the novel's events, is done so not in logic, but rather in daily rituals, in illusions, and in storytelling, and that reflects a reality of many postwar societies. By adopting such an interdisciplinary approach drawing on perspectives from postcolonial, collective memory, and trauma theory, this study has brought to light the various performances, reconstructions, and reunions of identity in literature. By using magical realism and Gothic aesthetics, Saadawi invents a narrative space that dissolves the lines between the real and the unreal, the living and the dead, the past and the present (and future) in lines that link to the psychological confusion of groups and individuals trying to make sense and meaning during war. The Whatsitsname, then is not just a literary

device but also a symbolic vessel for what the Iraqi is struggling with; injustice, loss, and guilt, struggling to remember.

Furthermore, the tension between the artificially applied political narratives on the one hand and the spontaneous, chaotic processes of identity making from below on the other are actively brought out in this dissertation. In Iraq, the dream of a unifying national identity remains largely unrealized, troubled by both state-authorized narratives and sectarian viewpoints. However, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* suggests an alternative, revealing how identities are stitched together through unofficial products, including popular legends, oral traditions, spiritual beliefs, and the superpower of unofficial histories. Saadawi, in this sense, authorizes those often left out of formal accounts, giving voice to the silenced, the dead, and the marginalized.

The essential innovation of this study reveals itself from its engagement with folklore and superstition, treating them not just as habitual themes, but also as epistemological tools, frameworks for understanding, recalling, and making sense of the world. This strategy questions the typical Western preference for purely rational thought, offering instead a framework based on the inherited fabric of localized cultural traditions. By inserting the novel within a rich tapestry of Middle Eastern spiritual imagination and storytelling, the study also aims to contribute to a decolonization of literary analysis, validating non-Western perspectives as legitimate paths to meaning. Although this dissertation focuses on a single text, it has wider relevance beyond just Iraqi literature. The way of thinking used here could be helpful for looking at other places affected by conflict, like Syria, Lebanon, or Palestine, where memory, identity, and trauma meet with folklore and beliefs.

In short, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is an effective cultural artifact; its identity reflects the issues that plague a street-free country, uncertain as it is by loss, fragmentation, and historical violence. Saadawi's novel is a reminder that in moments of ruin, this is what literature does, It is more than a representation of suffering; it is a ground of symbolic regeneration. Through folklore and superstition, Iraqis in the novel confirm their cultural presence, resist forgetting, and imagine alternative futures. As this dissertation has shown, these elements are not nostalgic residues of a pre-modern past but living strategies of resilience, collective healing, and narrative survival.

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ملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة توظيف أحمد سعداوي في روايته فرانكنشتاين في بغداد (2013)، والحائزة على الجائزة العالمية للرواية العربية، الفولكلور العراقي والمعتقدات الخرافية كمعيارين لاستكشاف وبناء الهوية الجامعة، وهذا في ظروف الفوضى التي أعقبت الحرب الأمريكية على العراق (2003-2011). سعداوي من خلال إعادة تصور نموذج رواية الرعب الذي أسسته ماري شيلي ضمن سياق شرق أوسطي معاصر، ينتقد في روايته المذكورة أنفا تفكك المجتمع العراقي تحت الاحتلال. ويتجسد هذا التفكك في شخصية "الشسمة"، الوحش المركب من أشلاء ضحايا العنف، والذي يُبعث إلى الحياة نتيجة للصدمة الجماعية. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى الكشف عن كيفية توظيف سعداوي للعناصر الخارقة للطبيعة بغية فضح تناقضات تشكل الهوية الجامعة في زمن الحرب. وتحقيقاً لهذه الأهداف، تعتمد الدراسة على نظريات الذاكرة الجامعة، والصدمة الجماعية، وأدب الرعب فيما بعد الاستعمار. ومن خلال القصص الفولكلورية والمعتقدات الخرافية، يسعى العراقيون إلى التفاوض حول هوية مشتركة في ظل غياب خلفية وطنية موحدة. يصبح الوحش في الرواية مجازاً للجسد السياسي العراقي المفكك الذي يسعى للانتقام من النظام القديم، كما يمثل تجلياً فولكلورياً للمقاومة والصمود. وتخلص هذه الأطروحة إلى أن رواية فرانكنشتاين في بغداد تزخر بالأحداث التي تربط واقع ما بعد الحرب في العراق بالخرافة والحكايات الشعبية في سبيل بناء هوية عراقية جامعة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الفولكلور، الخرافة، فرانكنشتاين في بغداد، الهوية الجامعة، أثناء الحرب، الصدمة

الجماعية.