

Exploring The Polyphonic Features of Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* in light of Mikhail Bakhtin

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ABSTRACT

The current article sets out to inspect the applicability of Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of polyphony to Ahmed Saadawi's "*Frankenstein in Baghdad*". It aims to clarify and divulge the narration method in Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, which showcases a narrative discursive style in line with Bakhtin's concept of a polyphonic novel. The essential question of this argument is 'What are the main characteristics of polyphonic narrative in this novel in light of Bakhtin?' Delving into this question helps illuminate how these characteristics imbue the overall meaning of the literary work. Through Bakhtin's lens, the article tries to unravel the intricate conversations within *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, exploring how various voices harmonize, clash, and ultimately contribute to the complicated layers of meaning. The study presents a unique viewpoint on the cultural variety and social divisions in contemporary Iraq. In conclusion, the article shows that the polyphonic structure is an inherent aspect of *Frankenstein in Baghdad* through the presence of a tandem narrative, adventurous hero, multiple narrators, diversity of ideologies, and the carnivalesque realm. It also finds that Saadawi employs multiple voices and perspectives in a constant interplay of dialogue and response.

Key words: Bakhtin, Carnavalesque, Frankenstein , polyphony, Whatisiname.

استكشاف الخصائص البولوفونية في رواية فرانكشتاين في بغداد لأحمد سعداوي وفقاً لميخائيل باختين

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مديرية تربية ذي قار / وزارة التربية

ملخص

يهدف هذا المقال إلى التحقق من مدى انطباق مفاهيم ميخائيل باختين حول تعدد الأصوات على رواية أحمد السعداوي "فرانكشتاين في بغداد". ويوضح أسلوب السرد في رواية "فرانكشتاين في بغداد" للسعداوي، والتي تعرض أسلوباً خطابياً روائياً يتوافق مع مفهوم باختين للرواية متعددة الأصوات. السؤال الأساسي في هذه المقالة هو "ما هي الخصائص الرئيسية للسرد متعدد الأصوات في هذه الرواية في ضوء مفاهيم باختين؟" إن الخوض في هذا السؤال يساعد في إلقاء الضوء على كيفية تشبع هذه الخصائص بالمعنى العام للعمل الأدبي. ومن خلال عدسة باختين، يحاول المقال كشف المحادثات المعقدة داخل "فرانكشتاين في بغداد"، واستكشاف كيفية انسجام الأصوات المختلفة وتصادمها، وفي نهاية المطاف المساهمة في فهم طبقات المعناني المعقدة. تقدم الدراسة وجهة نظر فريدة حول التنوع الثقافي والانقسامات الاجتماعية في العراق المعاصر. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن البنية المتعددة الأصوات هي جانب متأصل في رواية فرانكشتاين في بغداد من خلال وجود السرد الترادفي، والبطل المغامر، وتعدد الرواة، وتنوع الأيديولوجيات، والجو الكرنفالي. ووجدت أيضاً أن السعداوي يستخدم أصواتاً ووجهات نظر متعددة في تفاعل مستمر بين الحوار والاستجابة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: باختين، الكرنفال، فرانكشتاين، تعدد الأصوات، الشسمة.

Introduction

Since its release in 2013, Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* has received a global attention. It won the International Prize for Arabic Fiction in 2014, and it was translated into many languages until it won the Man Booker Prize in 2018.

The work addresses the traumatic experiences in contemporary Iraq after 2003 via distinctive and impactful aesthetics where its plot delves into terrorism, evil, horror, and corruption that leave a lifelong impression on the beholder. Concentrating on creating effects, motivating and appalling audiences, Saadawi's novel can be taken as participating in a

polyphonic narration in the sense that it employs multivocality, cultural richness, nonlinear narrative, and diversity of themes.

Due to its exceptional blend of Mary Shelly's myth with the brutal reality of post-invasion Iraq, Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* sparks a wide range of critical explorations. Different aspects of the novel are studied and different interpretations are presented using diverse lenses and theories. For example, Mahmudah (2016) discusses the use of magic realism in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* depending on Wendy's approach to analyze the quality of the magic realism in the novel. Abdalkafor (2018) explores the idea of the sovereign and violence in the novel in light of Agamben's theory. Rawad Alhashmi (2020) studies the grotesque bodily images of the monster, explores the issue of justice, and analyses the question of violence. Kareem et al (2021) discuss the complex biological nature and the contradictory qualities of Whatsitsname as a hybrid character in the novel while Davies Dominic(2021) explores the "concrete stories" and "infrastructural narratives" of the American military operations in Iraq as portrayed in Saadawi's novel. Alhashmi (2022) studies the representation of Iraqi identity in the novel depending on the metaphoric references. Al-Leithy explains the mental illnesses and fractures that the characters experience in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* throughout a psychoanalytical reading. However, the current article presents a new reading to the novel based on Bakhtin's theory of polyphony.

Mikhail Bakhtin proposes new theories and lenses for analyzing literary works with a primary focus on novels. A key cornerstone of his work is the concept of "polyphony". The polyphonic novels convey collective narratives that are constructed of numerous equally significant heroes, independent plots, and distinct views.

Bakhtin differentiates between two kinds of novels: the monologic and the polyphonic. The world in the former is "an objectified world, a world

corresponding to a single and unified authorial consciousness" (Bakhtin, 1984a,p. 9). In the monologic novels, only one perspective is presented despite the miscellaneous means of representation (Bakhtin, 1984a, p.7). For Bakhtin, monologism arises whenever a single truth spreads and does not allow any other sort of truth to emerge (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 68). The author's voice in the monologic novels overwhelms the characters' voices, as such the reader is directed to accept the solo truth that is of the author.

On the other hand, the reader in the polyphonic novel is exposed to different voices and perspectives. Bakhtin's theory argues that some many voices and perspectives represent a variety of ideological contesting voices; the characters' perspectives are engaged in dynamic dialogues that showcase a variety of opinions. These opinions are freely and authentically presented alongside the author's voice without authorial judgment or restrictions because the opinion "is constructed not as the whole of a single consciousness, absorbing other consciousnesses as objects into itself, but as a whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses, none of which entirely becomes an object for the other" (Bakhtin, 1984a,p. 18). Thus, in the polyphonic novel, there is a dialogic relationship among the different viewpoints in the text. According to David Lodge, the polyphonic novel has to be understood as a literary work in which "a variety of conflicting ideological positions are given a voice and set in play both between and within individual speaking subjects, without being placed and judged by an authoritative authorial voice" (1990, p.86). Thus, the novel appears to be a field of clash between the different ideological voices.

The nature of dialogue in the polyphonic novel allows the characters to show their views and look for answers because "[d]ialogism continues towards an answer. The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly,

oriented toward a future answer-word" (Bakhtin, 1981, p.280). As the main characters in the polyphonic novel look for answers, dialogue flourishes as a ground for exploration, permitting characters to seek out answers, cope with difficulties, and participate in authentic interactions. Clark and Holquist argue that polyphony refers to the meaning that results from the frank exchange of divergent and sometimes conflicting voices without an aim for synthesis or harmony(1984, p.251). Moreover, the outcome of a dialogic meaning of truth and the unique authorial position that enables the manifestation of that feeling on the page in literature is polyphony(Morson et al., 1990, p. 234). As a result, the polyphonic sense of truth stands for a new way of understanding the world than that of the monologic.

Bakhtin places some literary pillars, like Dostoevsky, Faulkner, and Shakespeare, as pioneers of polyphonic writing. They produced convincing examples of how divergent viewpoints can coincide symphonically within a narrative framework. Regarding Dostoevsky, Bakhtin states: "A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels"(Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 5). Therefore, a novel is polyphonic if it presents a plurality of points of view. Bakhtin argues that the novel is "multiform in style and variform in speech and voice" (Bakhtin, 1981,p. 261).

The hero in a polyphonic novel shows her/his voice in a similar way to the author's. Bakhtin argues that "a hero appears whose voice is constructed exactly like the voice of the author himself in a novel of the usual type. A character's word about himself and his world is just as fully weighted as the author's word usually is"(Bakhtin, 1984a, p.7). The hero behaves like an author of an ordinary novel; s/he behaves independently or without being entrapped in a specific frame in a way

that s/he doesn't "serve as a mouthpiece for the author's voice" (Bakhtin, 1984a, p.7). The hero in these novels tries to flee the limits that he is burdened with by others; "man is not a final and defined quantity upon which firm calculations can be made; man is free, and can therefore violate any regulating norms which might be thrust upon him"(Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 59).

One of the features of the polyphonic novel is its carnival realm and its relation to the free menippea. The realm in carnivalistic stories is called a "serio-comical realm" where unusual situations are described in a world of dreams quite impossible in ordinary life. (Bakhtin,1984a, p.147). In Menippea, fantastic and fairy-tale elements are presented in the form of "dream satire and fantastic journey"(Bakhtin, 1984a, p.147). Employing fairy tales, sorcery, myths, and legends can allow the author to show life in a dream situation which is presented as a possibility of a completely different life providing depth and complexity to the entire plot.

The polyphonic novel has also exceptional occurrences of symbolic events that may be caused by the magic or supernatural elements that affect the journeys of the characters. To make the novel more difficult, to distinguish between the many narrative voices in a polyphonic novel and to create a sense of continuity between the experiences of the characters, magic realism can be used.

In polyphonic novels, characters with varying social backgrounds, beliefs, and worldviews are brought together. This plurality of voices in polyphonic novels allows for a carnivalistic ambivalence because of the contrasting of the characters' varying societal backgrounds, views, and beliefs. As a mode that challenges the fixed hierarchies and norms, the grotesque can be presented in these multiple voices. Irma Perttula argues that the grotesque can be generally presented as "a written form

of expression which described that which could not be controlled by reason, was unnatural, and arose in opposition to the classical imitation of ‘beautiful nature’” (Perttula, 2011,p.22).

For Bakhtin, the bodily distortions and bodily excesses represent the core feature of the grotesque where the conventional norms and expectations are disturbed. Furthermore, the grotesque, which includes absurd, bizarre, unsettling elements and horrifying components, can increase the layer of complexity to the characters and the themes.

Bakhtin argues that the grotesque is extremely associated with the carnival spirit. He also argues that the image of grotesque stands for something unfinished transformation of death and birth, of growth and becoming. At the same time, it is terrifying, humorous, and vacillated between the fantasy and the real (Bakhtin, 1984b,p. 420).

To sum up, it becomes clear that the polyphonic novel is a novel of multiple voices, languages, and dialects. It is also an open novel based on dialogical intertextuality, the multiplicity of discourses, the interaction of literary and artistic genres, and the cross-pollination of languages and dialects. This makes a novel gathers all voices to freely and democratically express its points of view, with the presence of the imaginary author who, in some ways, abandons his authority to another narrator or to multiple characters to express their inner worlds and attitudes towards a subject.

Frankenstein in Baghdad as a polyphonic novel

Narration

Frankenstein in Baghdad starts with a report, which stands as an prologue of the novel, written by a chairman of a special committee that is set up to investigate the activities of the Tracking and Pursuit Department(Saadawi, 2018, pps 1–3). The report, which has a great connection with the future events of the story, is represented in a

flashback technique because it comes after the end of the novel's events which then start over from the beginning. The author employs the prologue judiciously to provide engaging background information and set the tone of panic and mystery of the story. It includes occasions and information that happened before the main narrative begins.

Tandem narrative can be spotted in the way of collecting the material of the novel by the character of the author. As it starts, the novel presents the character of the author who writes a story of 17 chapters in 250 pages. The epigraph also refers to the documents sent by emails from the "second assistant" to "the author" (Saadawi2018, pps 2–3). After the prologue, the author presents seventeen–chapter story which ends literally on page 250, and then he adds the other two chapters which describe the way the author has collected his material and the last events of the story after the mission of the committee.

The author collects his material from different sources. First, the recordings of Mahmoud's digital recorder which Mahmoud sails to "the author" because he needs money after his employer Ali Baher al–Saidi fleeing the country. Mahmoud knows that the story inside the recordings is valuable and could be a great novel (Saadawi,2018, p. 251) that is why he wants to sell the recording for 400\$, 100 for the device, and 300 for the recorded material which is about ten hours (Saadawi, 2018, pps 251–253). The recorded material contains Mahmoud's notices and the confessions of the Whatisiname.

Secondly, some emails are sent from an unknown person called "the second assistant" who works in the Tracking and Pursuit Department (Saadawi, 2018, p. 262). The second assistant sends the documents to the author to make these documents public. The documents are related to the story in the recordings and some information about the tracking and pursuit office. Thirdly, some emails that Mahmoud sends to the author after he leaving Baghdad (Saadawi, 2018, p.269). Fourthly,

shattered material which contains Mahmoud forwarded emails to the author when he stays in Maysan from Saidi and Hazem Aboud to be the material of the last two chapters. Finally, some information are collected from local people who were living in the Bataween district. Abu Salim is a source of a lot of information on the monster's story and other events. When "the writer" goes to Al-kind Hospital, he meets Abu Salim who informs him some details relevant to the story of the monster (Saadawi, 2018, p. 256). Abu Salim carries considerable information because he was watching everything from his balcony (Saadawi, 2018, p. 240). The author uses all these sources to write his novel which he refers to as "a great novel" (Saadawi, 2018, p. 251) called *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. Therefore, the novel has the feature of a diversity of narrators, the plurality of the source of materials, the democracy of collecting voices from different sources alongside the author's voice.

In terms of their relationship to the events of the story, the narrators in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* can be called homogenetic narrators because, in addition to their role as characters in the story, they narrate some events (Genette, 1983, p. 245). The author himself is a homogenetic narrator because he presents himself as an author and a character who has the role of witnessing, registering, and observing events in the story. The same thing can be said about Hadi who is presented as a storyteller in addition to his main role as a character.

The Whataisname narrates his story to the reader through the digital recorder and he becomes a first-person narrator in chapter ten of the novel. He narrates his mission and confesses his activities on the digital recorder. Thus, the multiple narrators tend to be homogenetic in their roles in the event of the story in addition to their roles as narrators.

All voices are blended and does not submit to the authority of a single voice. Different forms of reality appear throughout their narrations. The thought of the hero, according to Bakhtin, "lives a tense life on the

borders of someone else's thought, someone else's consciousness" (1984a,p. 30). Thus, the reader can see a synthesis of different ideologies among the different characters in the novel.

The characters of the novel are presented from a wide range of social levels, religious beliefs, nations, and ethnicities, in addition to prior political and cultural backgrounds. This diversity reflects the multicultural and multi-ethnic nature of Iraq which, in turn, reflects various viewpoints and perceptions and incorporates historical, political, and cultural factors into its consciousness.

The narration in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is carried out through the technique of the multi-character narration where the author presents different characters to contribute their unique perspectives and experiences to the overall narrative. Through the voices and eyes of those characters, the readers get a full understanding of the story's themes and events. Each character has a center stage at different points in the story and the spotlight shifts from one character to another. Their narration is interconnected to produce a comprehensive textile of the overarching plot. Throughout this technique, readers can be exposed to the characters' thoughts, voices, feelings, and histories. Overall, multi-character narration is often used to delve into complex storylines with multiple layers of meaning and diverse characters and this method matches the nature of the polyphonic novel.

A clear example of employing this technique in Saadawi's novel is the event of the explosion of the Sadeer Novotel Hotel where different characters narrate the occasion according to their witnesses of the scene.

The author, as an omniscient narrator, narrates the explosion caused by a Sudanese suicide bomber who drives a dynamite-laden garbage truck (Saawadi, , 2018, p. 33). He describes the whole scene of the explosion including the way Hasib, the hotel guard, fires at the driver,

forcing him to ignite the explosives earlier. Through the eyes of Hasib, the author also describes the location of the explosion and how a man with a white canvas sack, Hadi the junk, is "hurtling through the air and landing quite a distance from the explosion"(Saawadi, 2018, pps. 34–35).

When he is telling his strange story about the creature in the coffee shop, Hadi narrates the events of the explosion and describes the events of the hotel guard, the suicide truck, and the people who help him after the explosion (Saawadi, 2018, p.28). Mahmoud is also a witness to the explosion. He informs that "I was standing with some friends on the other side of the street when I saw a garbage truck heading toward the hotel gate"(Saawadi, 2018, p.29) then he helps Hadi gets up (Saawadi, 2018, p.30). The same event is repeated through the eyes of Mahmoud's followers when they are trying to cross a street opposite the Novatel Hotel. They see an "orange garbage truck loaded with dozens of kilograms of dynamite turned off the main street and slammed into the metal gate of the hotel"(Saawadi, 2018, p.49). In the location of the explosion, they see a man blasted away because of the explosion. When they want to help the man gets up, Mahmoud recognizes it as Hadi the lair(Saawadi,2018,p. 49). Thus, the novel contains a diversity of voices about one event.

The scene of the vanishing of the corpse is also narrated by different narrators. Hadi tells his beholders that he wakes up late after a long time to find that the body is gone. When the people ask him about the destiny of the corpse, he answers "I don't know"(Saawadi,2018,p. 32). According to the omniscient author, Hasib's body disappears in the explosion, so his soul heads along to search for its body. When it doesn't find the body, it dwells in the naked corpse laid in Hadi's house to be its body after it finds that this corpse has no soul while it was a soul without corpse (Saawadi,2018,pps. 37–38), then he climbs the

walls to Elishva's house while Hadi is sleeping. The interweaving of the events in this method of narration labels the novel to be polyphonic, and it helps show the readers the diversity of the character's perspectives to create a larger theme and discourse.

In this regard, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* echoes some famous works such as Victor Hugo's "Les Miserables" and Samuel Richardson's "Clarissa." The heroes in Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* presented their voices freely alongside the author's. Hadi, for example, becomes a storyteller in the novel. He is the first source to narrate the story of the Whatisiname. The story of Hadi is blended with the narration of the author who sometimes abandons his authority to Hadi to tell the story which is the base for the creation of the character of the Whatisiname (Saawadi,2018,pps. 18–20). Hadi and the author are taking turns to narrate the story of creating the Whatisiname. While Hadi points to the headlines of the story, the author goes deeper to tell the details depending on his omniscient authority and other sources. As Hadi tells his listeners to delay their logical objections and disbeliefs about the events of the story, the author tends to convince them to listen and read the story before they present any objections. As such, the novel has diversity of narrations.

Mahmoud Al-sawadi provides a good example in the plurality of narrators. He narrates many of the events on his recording device which later is sold to "the author". Mahmoud's character echoes the personality of the writer of the novels. First, Mahmoud al-Sawadi has a similar name to Ahmed Saadawi, secondly Mahmoud, like Saadawi, is a journalist who witnesses all the miseries of the civil war in the same period and he was threatened by the extremists(Alnajar). Therefore, the reader can sometimes constitute the narrative of Mahmoud with the narrative of Saadawi.

Such a tandem narrative presents numerous equally weighted storylines within the larger community of Saddawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. The story of different protagonists is presented including Elishva, Hadi, and Mahmoud.

World of Carnival

The novel shows the carnivalistic space where people take the roles of others. It employs grotesque, deformation, ugliness, combining opposites and contradictions, oscillating between seriousness and humor, parody, symbolism, caste-switching, ritual-switching, breaking the social rules, and shifting from the comic to the tragic.

The novel contains many events where opposites are combined. In one hand, the Whatshisname is a savior and the only justice on this earth, but he kills innocent people; Elishva is Christian, but she practises Muslim rituals; brigadier Majid heads a security office that supposed to impose peace and provide secure to people, but he is leading an assassination squad supported by the American embassy(Saawadi,2018,p.170).

The novel also contains humorous scenes in addition to its robust seriousness. The narration of the jokes at Aziz's café provides an entertaining interlude to the reader (Saawadi,2018,p. 17).

Hadi switches roles with God when he creates the monster. In addition, he switches roles with the author when he becomes a storyteller. He is the creator of a character in the same way that Saadawi is the creator of the novel's characters. Hadi constructs the Whatshisname from the parts of the dead people. This is essential in the canon of polyphony because a character from marginalized people had the right to contribute to the production of reality with his invention. Moreover, Hadi switches the roles with God in a sense that while God is normally the creator of people, Hadi becomes the creator of "the Savior" who, in turn, represents

a God on earth. In this way, Hadi provokes the debate that does God create us or do we create God?

Like all humans whom God has created, the Whatisisname carries the good and the evil sides like other human beings; he changes his role from the savior to the murderer (Saawadi,2018,p. 154). Although he is a construction of many parts of victims, he plays the part of a killer and his mission turned from employing justice to unquestionable killing. While people wait the savior to amend their issues and heal their agonies, the Whatisisname shifts this role and becomes a new obstacle. His villain deeds reflect one of the silent and repetitive themes in the novel that "each of us has a measure of criminality"(Saawadi,2018,p. 149).

The carnivalistic atmosphere of the novel can be seen in the way of switching the roles between Mahmoud and his boss, Ali Baher al-Saidi. Although Mahmoud criticizes Al-Saidi for being highly aristocratic, Mahmoud plays the part of Saidi and adopts all his behavior including molesting Nawal Alwazir. (Saawadi,2018,pps. 220-1). Once Mahmoud escapes his city, Maysan, and stays in Baghdad to solve his problem with the Mantis(168), Al-Saidi then escapes the country to solve his problem with the government. Al-Saidi himself has addressed Mahmoud "I see myself in you. We've very much alike" (Saawadi,2018,p. 267).

Thus, the realm of the story is a carnivalistic one which labels it to be a polyphonic novel because the "carnival is oriented to the collective, it does not speak in individual voices. Rather, it cultivates masks and disguises to separate voice from the individual and attach it to the collective"(Emerson, 1990, p. 227)).

Based on Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the carnival, the last scene of the novel reflects the inversion of social standards and living a joyful and liberating atmosphere. In this part of the novel, the news of the arrest of the Whatisisname triggers a carnival-like celebration in Baghdad. First,

the celebration happens in the streets of Bataween, and on the roofs of buildings, suggesting a communal and collective expression of joy that surpasses individual boundaries. Secondly, the joy is depicted as "hysterical," signifying an extreme and almost chaotic exuberance; Veronica's celebration through throwing gum and candy on the children, Umm Salim's dance in the street like a child, the husband's shy reflection all shape the festive atmosphere (Saadawi, 2018,p. 271). Despite Aziz's skeptical view of the reality of capturing the real criminal for he is convinced that his friend Hadi cannot be the real criminal who is responsible for all the crimes in the country, he partakes in the festivities by going to dance with people. The inversion of norms, the collective celebration, and a temporary escape from the realities of the country's sufferings show the carnivalesque elements of the novel.

The Diversity of Ideologies

In the mono novels, the author produces his ideology and lets the hero follow it. The author supports his ideas through language, discourse, and description. The ideology of the author is presented through the hero, and the author uses different ways to convince the reader to accept this idea. On the other hand, different characters produce their ideologies openly in the polyphonic novel.

Frankenstein in Baghdad is full of controversial ideologies and constant discourses among its characters, for instance, Faraj is in constant opposition to some characters in the story like the old woman, Eleshva, and the hotel's owner, Abu Anmar; the Whatisisname is in an indirect constant dialogue with the government, the old astrologer and the Americans; Hadi, in his normal speech, or during his jokes, is always mocking the government; Eleshva is in a controversial dialogue with her community who wants to convince her of leaving the country. She is also in a constant dispute with her patron, Saint George. During these controversial discourses, the characters show their ideologies and

perspectives freely and they are looking for answers for their inquiries. Therefore, the reader can observe different ideologies, but not any of them are privileged or dominant. We can hardly observe the author's ideology in the novel. These different ideologies reflect the relationship of the hero with his world where he or she lives.

The racial and ethnic voices categorize individuals into castes and religions. Elishva is a Christian woman, but she is beloved and accepted by her Muslim neighbors. Although she is Christian, she does Muslim ceremonies. Aum Salim is Muslim and she believes in Elishva as a sacred woman.

The novel focuses also on the cultural hybridity inside the Jewish ruin (Hadi's house), which symbolizes the multicultural and multi-religious community zone. It incorporates diverse values in itself. The most important event about this multiculturalism is the parts of the icons in the hole inside the wall of Hadi's house. The picture of Mary is covered by a poster of a verse from the Quran. The explosion that happens in Bataween reveals the statue of Mary and the large candelabra with a Hebrew inscription beneath the statue (Saadawi, 2018, p.197). The combination of three religious symbols in a small hole inside a wall of an old house depicts the diverse layers and voices of religions and cultures in the country. These different details about multiculturalism and the multi-religion community can give great depth to the themes of the novel. Hadi's room contains many antiques. The room symbolizes the antiquity of Iraq. While they are searching Hadi's room, the officers "found a set of plates in a cardboard box—with pictures of King Ghazi and King Faisal II, and of Abd al-Karim Qasim, Baghdad Central Station, and other historical sites and nature scenes" (Saadawi, 2018, p. 184). The distinguished architectural edifices and portraiture of kings and the head of the republic state, Abd al-Karim Qasim, serve as symbolic manifestations of the sequential narrative encapsulating the

historical eras of governance in Iraq. Accordingly, these symbols and images concurrently embody the miscellaneous ideological tenets underpinning the British occupation, the era of monarchy, and the subsequent establishment of a republican government following the demise of King Faisal II.

Another diversity can be seen in the relationship between Hadi and his friend Nahim Alabdki. Although their points of view are dissimilar, they work and live together for years, "unlike Hadi, Nahem did not smoke or drink, was fastidious about religious matters. And did not touch a woman till his wedding day," on the other hand, "Hadi had no regard for religion, but he did not want to seem antagonistic" (Saadawi, 2018, p. 23). This plurality of voices reflects the peaceful coexistence within the community once upon a time.

The importance of dialogue in Saddawi's novel springs from the fact that the various perspectives of the characters can reflect the various tones of the contradictory creeds in Iraq which in turn reflect the roots of the violence problems and quarrels in the story. In Saddawi's novel, each outlook becomes a living thing and is close to the embodiment of the human voice.

Thus, in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, we can see the plurality of contrasting ideas and views strive in a constant battle to echo the world of violence and horror in the country at that time.

In *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, the novelist eschews extensive character delineation, choosing instead to focus on the elucidation of their philosophical tenets and existential ideologies. Characters express their views and opinions freely and The author refrains from unequivocally endorsing or rejecting any of the aforementioned ideologies; he never judges, stands against nor does supports any. So the novel is based on possibility and relativity; no character in the story is perfect; everyone has his merits and faults. The author of the novel makes room for all

main characters to speak out their viewpoints whether a character belongs to the marginalized caste like Hadi, or to the high authority like the spokesman of the American occupation.

Eleshva, her daughters, and Father Josiah present the Christian ideology. While Eleshva stands for the tolerated side of this ideology, Father Josiah presents the radical side of this ideology. As Eleshva makes a condition with God that she will present the gift if her son comes back, and this is an Islamic ritual or belief, Father Josiah shows the strict Christian belief that "We don't set conditions for the Lord, as Muslims do"(Saadawi, 2018,p.58). The discourse on this point has great significance in the story because the violence in the country is mainly caused by the religious differences among the fragments of the community. In addition, it shows the role of religious leaders who want to conduct their followers without leaving a space for thinking of coping with other beliefs.

The plurality of viewpoints surrounding the identity of the mysterious figure, Whatisiname, attests to a multilayered narrative within the novel. The delineation of divergent perspectives underlines the complexity inherent in the characterization of Whatisiname. Remarkably, the young madman portrays the creature as the incarnation of the "first true Iraqi citizen" (Saadawi, 2018,p.140). In contrast, the elderly madman characterizes Whatisiname as an ominous harbinger, an "instrument of mass destruction" foreshowing the imminent advent of a prophesied savior across global religions (Saadawi, 2018,p.140). Equally, Eleshva imbues a maternal perspective upon Whatisiname, watching him as her son, Danial. Sectarian divisions further contribute to the dissonance of perceptions, as Shiite Muslims denounce Whatisiname as a "Wahhabi," while Sunni Muslims look at him as a Shiite extremist. The Iraqi authorities ascribe to the Whatisiname the role of a foreign state agent, a sentiment contradicted by the American Department spokesman, who

describes him as a dangerous individual endeavoring to spoil the American project in Iraq.

Brigadier Majid acquaint with an different layer of interpretation, postulating that Whatisiname represents the American project itself, arguing that the Americans intentionally provoke conflict within Iraq (Saadawi, 2018,p. 259). This variegated variety of opinions encapsulates a polyphonic discourse, where themes oscillating between the nightmarish and the humorous permeate the gothic milieu of the narrative.

Readers can comprehend the development of the ideology of those characters. Eleshva, for example, starts praying for her patron (Saadawi, 2018,p. 7), but at the end of the novel, she turns to leave part of her devotion to her patron when she cuts out the picture of the knight to take off the part which refers to war(Saadawi, 2018,p. 233). At the start, the Whatisiname presents his ideology of revenge freely when he proclaims that he is the only justice on this earth(Saadawi, 2018,p. 130). He represents the ideology of the savior(Saadawi, 2018,pps. 136–137). Then he changes his ideology to be a criminal when he starts killing innocent people to repair his body(Saadawi, 2018,p.154). In a dialogue with the old magician, who is one of his assistants, the Whatisiname assures that “Nothing in me lasts long, other than my desire to keep going. I kill to keep going”(Saadawi 259). As the Whatisiname was wearing civilian clothes at the start of his mission, he ended up wearing some clothes that were similar to the militia's (Saadawi 151). The novelist maintains a position of non–interference and refrains from proffering personal viewpoints on the concept of the savior. Similarly, the author abstains from aligning with or opposing Eleshva's beliefs and rituals.

The controversial ideas are also been observed in the mind of the society within the novel. Fascinatingly, while Whatisiname is the first

enemy of the Iraqi government, he is the only justice, the savior, and the perfect citizen for the community who was looking for justice to put an end to the violence. So, there are contrasting points of view in terms of the existence of the Whatisiname. The author allows all views to appear without imposing any on the reader. Furthermore, the body of the monster stands for the realm that contains all voices of the different Iraqi sectors. The creation of the grotesque image of the monster's body is prominently related to the collective image of Iraqi society as a whole. Bakhtin states, "[m]anifestations of this life refer not to the isolated biological individual, not to the private, egotistic 'economic man,' but to the collective ancestral body of all the People" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.19). Thus, the image of the grotesque body represents all the Iraqi citizens, and the monster in turn belongs to all of their ideologies. This seems true in the statement of the monster that "[I am] 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" (Saadawi, 2018,p. 140). The deformation of the monster helps produce the theme of the evil in the story that evil "resides deep within us, even when we want to put an end to it in the outside world because we are all criminals to some extent ... " and all people "have all been helping to create the evil creature that is now killing us off"(Saadawi, 2018,p. 219). "

The body of the monster became an arena of discourse and a field of conflicted voices. As the Whatisiname replaces his parts constantly from other parts of people, he encompasses different voices, movements, perspectives, needs, and ideologies. The monster's movement is conducted according to the ideologies of the new parts of the body stitched to his body because his mission is to avenge people with whom he carries their parts (Saadawi, 2018,p.129). Consequently, there will be a variety of voices within the same character over time. Most of the

characters in the story suffer duality in their personalities because of the restlessness and agitation. Mahmoud, for example, always wants to be someone else, to be Ali Bahir. In turn, Ali Bahir also wants to be Mahmoud because an astrologer foresees Mahmoud to be a prime minister in the future. Brigadier Majed wants to be Faried Al-Shawwaf as he sees him on a TV show because Majed eagers to be a celebrity(Saadawi, 2018,p. 118). Mahmoud's father hid his real race and religion and lives among his community as an Arab Muslim until his death(Saadawi, 2018,pps. 97-98). Therefore, different voices are seen within most of the characters in the novel.

Therefore, the nature of the Whatisname can be understood clearly through Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque "The grotesque body, " Bakhtin said," is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body" (Bakhtin, 1984b, p. 317). Thus, the monster in the novel is a grotesque body that changes itself to make contact between the inside and the outside worlds via the new body which "never presents an individual body; [but it] present[s] another, newly conceived body" (Bakhtin,1984b,p. 318). The ongoing deformation of the monster's body that fuels the dialogue and polyphony in the novel is part of the author's plan to show the reality of the futile debate in society that begets endless violence.

In the polyphonic novel, "The hero becomes relatively free and independent"(Bakhtin,1981,p.51), in the sense that the hero performs, thinks, and perceives reality outside the limits of what she or he is, that is he excesses the boundaries of his character. The hero has the final word while the author "constructs no objectified image of the hero at all"(Bakhtin,1981,p. 53). In dealing with the Dostoevskian novel as a typical kind of polyphonic novel, Bakhtin points out that "the entire artistic construction of a Dostoevskian novel is directed toward discovering and

clarifying the hero's discourse, and performs provoking and directing functions in relation to that discourse"(Bakhtin,1981,p. 54). Applying these ideas to *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, it can be seen that the voice of the author is drowned out by all other voices. The heroes in the novel are treated ideologically in an authoritative way. Their voices are not slaves, but rather they are free characters who stand alongside their creator. Elishva, for example, is perceived as an inventor of fully weighted ideological concepts, and her words and views about herself and her world are just as entirely weighted as the writer's ones. She behaves freely within the realm of the novel. Likewise, the Whatisiname presents his voice in his recordings in isolation from the voice of the author of the novel. Moreover, the author himself depends on Whatisiname's recordings as the main sources to form his story. In a similar way to Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel, the voices of the heroes in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* were "constructed exactly like the voice of the author"(Bakhtin,1981,p. 7) the Whatisiname stands himself independently from the author and starts his own story within the main story in chapter ten of the novel as an omniscient narrator. He shows his ideology, presents his view freely, and offers causes for his crimes(Saadawi, 2018, p.136–157).

Although the novel is mostly presented in an omniscient point of view, all people in the polyphonic novel give their opinions; or as Bakhtin put it "[n]ot a single element of the work is structured from the point of view of a nonparticipating "third person"(Bakhtin,1981,p. 18).

In the polyphonic novel, the "truth" that the hero must and truly finally comes with, through describing the happenings to himself, is essentially the only truth of the hero's consciousness. It cannot be neutral toward his self-consciousness. That is to say "in the mouth of another person, a word or a definition identical in content would take on another meaning and tone, and would no longer be the truth"(Bakhtin,1981,p.

55). Thus, Saadawi intends to reveal the truth about the monster through the mouth of the monster himself. The monster recounts events that only he attends and witnesses. In the novel, the discourse and the self-consciousness become dominant factors through which the hero is constructed. The dialogue of Whatisiname and his self-consciousness pervade the thematic construction of the novel and it causes the plurality in the novel where the discourse of the characters is different from the author's.

The Whatisiname's discourse is no longer restricted to the fixed context of the writer's discourse about him. His discourse presents a separate voice in the novel. Thus, the second independent voice (together with the author's voice) that appeared in Saadawi's words labels the novel to be a polyphonic one. For this reason, there is a problem of linking voices and locating the novelist's point of view.

The hero always lives in a great struggle to "destroy that framework of other people's words about him that might finalize and deaden him" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 59). This is what was observed in Whatisiname's character when he was trying to declare his real personality to people throughout the recordings. He wants to defy the fraud of the bad rumors against his personality (Saadawi, 2018, p. 130) because people give him a bad reputation while he believes in himself as the only justice on this earth.

The polyphonic structure of *Frankenstein in Baghdad*

The structure of Saadawi's novel is constructed on the principle of numerous converging tales that are connected by the musical-like norm of polyphony and strengthen one another via contrast.

Although the novel contains 19 chapters and each chapter has different content, the novel is internally unified. These chapters cannot be published separately, and they echo one another internally.

The prologue of *Frankenstein in Baghdad* contains two items: the final report and the recommendation. Both items, which are contained within three pages, are important to understand the whole story.

Throughout the analysis of the novel, the article uncovers that several different thematic plots are superficially interconnected by the storyline, but they are dependent by themselves. One can observe the story of Eleshva, the bereaved woman; the story of creating the monster; the story of Mahmoud and Ali Baher al-Saidi; the story of Majed; the story of Hasib; the story of Hadi; and so on. They are all linked together in one storyline. Thus, the world of Saadawi is a world of polyphony. Everything in this world of the novel seems to be multifaceted and multi-structured. With every voice, there is a contradictory one. Inside each character, one could hear two competing voices. Inside every phenomenon, one could find multiple ambiguities. The monster, for example, declares himself as the voice of justice and the savior, but he murders innocent people. The government offices are supposed to protect people; however, they torture the citizens, for example the characters of the author, Hadi, and Mahmoud are tortured or put in jail unfairly. Aziz was not convinced that his friend Hadi was a criminal; however, he went to dance with other people to celebrate the arrest of Hadi (Saadawi, 2018, pps.270–1).

Nevertheless, there are no contradictions among the events. The author's particular ability to merge all voices immediately and simultaneously has enabled him to generate a polyphonic novel supported by the interaction, violence, and misery found in Iraqi society at the time.

The novel shows the history of each soul along with a depiction of the psychological sufferings of other individuals. The writer originates the notion that all simultaneously existent, experiencing individuals have equal rights to express their ideas. The world of Saadawi becomes a

catalytic pot where different psychologies interact objectively. This conflict permeate all the events of the story, allowing the writer to depict the conflict of the social, political, and ideological voices of the age.

Frankenstein in Baghdad as an adventure novel

The genre of the polyphonic novel tends to be an adventure, and the hero tends to be similar to the European, adventurer one. It tends to have an adventure plot following the features of its adventure hero, who has not fixed socially distinctive or individual characterological features out of which a stable appearance of his character, type, or nature may be constructed (Bakhtin,1981,p. 102). To put it briefly, Bakhtin states, "The adventure hero is, to the same degree as Dostoevsky's hero, not finalized and not predetermined by his image" (Bakhtin,1981,p.102). To be an adventure novel, the artistic design, according to Leonid Grossman, should contain three basic functions: first, presenting the numerous philosophical ideas and theories and human relationships in a single story. Secondly, there is a sense of sympathy for the insulted and the injured, like the low-caste people. Lastly, the author presents the extraordinary in the very thick of the commonplace, links the sublime with the grotesque, and joins everyday reality to the limits of the fantastic (Bakhtin,1981,p. 103).

Echoing these features, one can find the descriptions of the adventure novel suit the plot and heroes of Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, which contains most of the features mentioned above. *Frankenstein in Baghdad* delves into loads of philosophical ideas and themes, such as the predetermined evil, the savior, justice, violence, etc. The posture of Saint George the Martyr, Elishva's patron, holding his lance to kill the dragon without a brave action to achieve the duty reflects the philosophy of the divine intervention to stop evil. Saint George's decision not to slay the dragon proposes a complex understanding that godly intervention does not always eradicate evil

outright. The theological notion that God, represented by Saint George, lets the existence of good and evil without direct intervention. This lines up with the belief that human free will and actions are crucial in the ongoing struggle against wickedness. The imagery in the artwork underlines the complicated nature of victory over evil, highlighting the everlasting struggle and the vital role of human responsibility in confronting moral challenges. Elishva archetypes people who sometimes blame God when god never interfere to stop evil. The writer exposes this idea on the mouth of Elishva who "wondered why he hadn't killed the dragon years ago. Why was he stuck in that posture, ready to strike"(Saadawi, 2018,p. 196).

In addition to the wide web of human relationships, the novel also encompasses a sense of sympathy for the offended and injured, like Elishva, Hadi, Nahim and Hasib. Furthermore, Saadawi presents an excessively extraordinary world to the extent that one can label the novel as an example of the Iraqi magical realism genre. Nothing more fantasy than stitching body parts collected from the streets of Baghdad to form a corpse by a junk dealer. Then a new creature, the Whatisiname, is made up of these stitched parts: the soul of the hotel guard who loses his body in a terror explosion, and sacred words from an old woman who brings him out of anonymity (Saadawi, 2018,p. 51). After that, the Whatisiname sets out a series of avenging deeds that lead to the increased violence in the country. Thus, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* has the features of a polyphonic novel through its adventurous nature.

Conclusion

Ahmed Saadwi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* defines the cruel and harsh violence in Iraq after the American invasion in 2003 when Iraqis endured extreme brutality. This article tries to explore the polyphonic features of

the novel in terms of Bakhtin's theory of polyphony relating to its structure, multiple voices, ideologies, and genre.

Based on Bakhtin's theory of polyphony and Carnavalesque, the article finds out that *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is rooted in the realm of the polyphony where every character in the novel, irrespective of eccentricity, has a voice. It becomes a site for dialogic discourse. In Saadawi's novel, readers cannot offer finalized definitions of the heroes, and there isn't a monologic authorial theme or idea. It is also found that there is a dialogic openness in his artistic world. The article assures that there is a fundamental plurality of unmerged consciousnesses that penetrates the whole novel. Thus, this plurality shaped the novel to be polyphonic.

Every opinion in the novel is accepted and found its sustain in the novel. Like Dostoevsky, Saadawi is a host who invites many people to his work. In their gossip, the guests produce their views independently. However, the author could hold all opinions in an equal state of respect. The novel contains multiple cognitive subjects, and there is a dialogic rapport between the author and his heroes. The author and his heroes participate in a great dialogue where they may partake in equal rights.

Saadawi depends on an assortment of stylistic strategies that shape the polyphonic feature of his novel: these include a proliferation of narrators, a nonlinear narrative structure, the use of the impersonal voice to express gossip and public views such as the record of the voice recorder and the voice of the American helicopters. Thus, what is not represented by the authorial sort of reality can be granted a voice throughout the plurality of voices expressing other realities.

The article also highlights that there is not only an important feature of the multi-voicedness in the novel, but there is an essential role for each point of view sprung out of each voice. In addition, most of the characters in the story have more than one internal voice or opinion

which leads them to suffer great conflict. The multiple voices inside a single character echo the psychological suffering of these characters caused by the war's aftermath. The unique voices in this novel tackle such numerous problems of life while the author was a witness who was looking for all these arguments to observe the situations.

The article concludes that Saadawi, in this novel, is untendentious; in the sense that his characters are independent from himself. These characters have great inner logic themselves which leads to showing multiple perspectives and ideologies. The voices in Saadawi's novel, to some extent, are ideologists.

Due to its rich employment of grotesque, deformation, and the combination of opposites, *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, embodies the spirit of Bakhtin's theory of carnival including role-switching where characters like Hadi play the roles of both God and storyteller. This gives way to the marginalized voices to contribute to the creation of reality. By creating the Whatshisname, Hadi challenges the conventional belief that God is the only creator and poses thought-provoking issues about the relationship between humans and the divine. Most of the characters embody both good and evil. The Whatshisnames' shift from a savior to a slaughterer challenges the expectations of the readers and the characters alike. His personality demonstrates the novel's investigation of human duality. *Frankenstein in Baghdad* repeatedly highlights the notion that each individual carries a part of criminality, echoing a silent but pervasive theme. The interaction between Mahmoud and Ali Baher al-Saidi explains clearly the carnivalistic atmosphere where roles are switched and behaviors are adopted. This atmosphere reinforces the polyphonic nature of the novel. In essence, the novel masterfully employs the spirit of Bakhtin's carnival, creating a polyphonic story.

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