

*Frankenstein* and *Frankenstein in Baghdad*:  
The Sovereign, Homo Sacer and Violence

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Even at this stage when technology has nearly made literature a secondary discipline, fiction is still a tool for imagining and re-imagining what this world is witnessing. The example that this paper discusses is Mary Shelley's novel: *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* along with *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013) by the Iraqi writer Ahmed Sadaawi. Written in 1818, Shelley's text was intended to be the best ghost story in a competition among four writers who did not, perhaps, imagine that at a certain point in the future, readers might find in this novel an interpretation of contemporary political problems. The trigger of Shelley's story was a philosophical discussion about the possibility of discovering the essence of life, but it was later endowed with many interpretations, whether scientific, political or social. As for Sadaawi, he is an author, journalist and documentary maker who, for his *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, won the International Prize for Arabic Fiction in 2014. *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is the first Arabic novel that has borrowed the Frankenstein element to address issues related to Iraq, presenting a Frankenstein-like monster to show the consequences of the American military intervention and the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, which resulted in a form of man-made monstrosity.

This paper tries to demonstrate that these two novels can be interpreted through the lens of a prominent political theory of the twentieth century; that is, Giorgio Agamben's reading of the Roman figure of *homo sacer*—the sacred man. Agamben's thought has so far been applied to the fields of politics, law and human rights. As for the implications it offers to literature, they have been neglected and bridging this gap is what this paper endeavors to do by highlighting and comparing *homo sacer* figures in *Frankenstein* and *Frankenstein in Baghdad* in an attempt to illuminate future postcolonial literary criticism and political readings of literature.

The paper starts by introducing Agamben's ideas on the sovereign and *homo sacer* as presented in his book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998). The second part attempts to analyze the sovereign-*homo sacer* relationship in Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the third examines how this relationship appears in even more complex ways in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. Finally, this paper concludes by stressing that this comparative study between the sovereign-*homo sacer* relationships presented in both novels reveals the need to search for the creators of monstrosity in current war zones in future research.

Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer*

At the beginning of this section, it is worth mentioning that Agamben's theory is very influential in the fields of politics, human rights and refugee studies generally. Using his thoughts in this paper, which deals with literary texts, might seem, to some readers, to simplify the intricate nature of some political principles; however, introducing an illuminating theory such as Agamben's to the field of literary studies is necessary and productive in an age that has witnessed many wars and refugee crises starting from Iraq and extending to Syria in the last few years. Further, I admit that this study will not cover the comprehensive discussion and complexity of *homo sacer* as presented by Agamben. In this respect, I agree with Peter Fitzpatrick who states the following:

The main work in which Agamben deals with such things, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998), is written in an episodic mode. It is made up of short, somewhat contained sections, the relation between which is not always evident. This attractive response, in the present setting at least, would produce such an enormity of permutations and combinations as to make impossible any compendious account of what Agamben says. (Fitzpatrick 51)

In a similar strategy to Fitzpatrick's, the argument of this paper is based on ideas about *homo sacer* which Agamben repeated or emphasized, even if this will be at the expense of a comprehensive discussion.

*Homo Sacer* is one of Agamben's major works addressing vital questions regarding the problematic relationship between power and the law. Agamben contends that "the sovereign, having the power to suspend the validity of the law, places himself outside the law" (Agamben 15). The sovereign can be an enemy of one person such as a father in Ancient Rome who claimed the right to kill a wife or daughter in case of adultery and a son in case of treason. Such murders happened outside the law and were not considered as homicides. Agamben extends the scope and shows that the sovereign can be an enemy of a whole nation as in the case of a state stepping outside the law to exclude a group of people describing them as outlaws.

Concerning *homo sacer*, Agamben argues that the "meaning of this enigmatic figure has been much discussed" (71) and there have been many contradictions in defining it. Yet, what Agamben himself underscores and what is useful within the scope of this paper is the most straightforward definition of *homo sacer*; that is, the man owned by the gods and judged on account of a crime, the judgment being that this man could be killed by anyone without considering this killing a homicide. *Homo sacer* is left only the right to *vita nuda* which is bare or naked life where, as Agamben advocates, a human being exists merely in a biological sense deprived of any rights whether political or social which other social members enjoy. As Fiskesjö argues, *homo sacer* in ancient Rome was "a person excommunicated from society, removed from the safeguards offered to its normal members so that his biological life subsequently could be taken by anyone with impunity (162). Agamben contends that *homo sacer* is captured in the sovereign sphere where "it is permitted to kill without committing homicide and without celebrating a sacrifice" (83). The correlative relationship

between the sovereign and *homo sacer* is as follows: for the sovereign, all men can be *homines sacri* – as the sovereign can always suspend the law – and for the *homo sacer* all men can be sovereigns because anyone can kill him without being accused of homicide (Agamben 84).

The most striking similarity between the sovereign and *homo sacer*, in Agamben's study, is that they are both outside the law. The first suspends the law by not considering killing the *homo sacer* as a crime and the second is not protected by the law. Another connection between the sovereign and *homo sacer* is that killing a *homo sacer* is not considered a homicide and the same applies to killing the sovereign. If *homo sacer* kills the sovereign, this is considered more than a homicide; it would be a special crime, a high treason. Agamben comments saying:

It does not matter, from our perspective, that the killing of *homo sacer* can be considered as less than homicide, and the killing of the sovereign as more than homicide; what is essential is that in neither case does the killing of a man constitute an offense of homicide. (102)

The implications of Agamben's argument are the following: the relationship between the sovereign and *homo sacer* is free from the authority of the law. In addition, this implies that there are two types of violence. The first is that which is used by the sovereign to protect its authority and this violence is considered lawful simply because it is the sovereign who determines and suspends the law. The second type of violence is that which is used by *homo sacer* against the sovereign and this violence is rendered lawless because *homo sacer* is the rejected outlaw excluded from the protection of the law in the first place.

In Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the sovereign acting as the protector of good society, *homo sacer*, allowed only to have a bare life, and violence are three main elements. Therefore, analyzing the novel in light of Agamben's concepts, as shown in the following section, can be productive.

### Frankenstein, The Monster, and Authorities

Shelley's *Frankenstein*, "one of the outstanding landmarks of modern fiction and political allegory" (del Valle Alcalá 3), presents a very good example of the relationship between the sovereign and *homo sacer*, a relationship which leads to lawless violence, and a relationship which is exemplary to be used in a contemporary novel like *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. Shelley's text endures a political interpretation since Shelley's parents had their own opinions about the monstrosity and cruelty collateral to revolutions. For example, in "The Politics of Monstrosity," Baldick argues that the "story of the creation of a monster emerges from [Shelley's] parents' debate with Burke over the great monstrosity of the modern age, the French Revolution" (27). Shelley's parents, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, highlight the fact that violence in the French Revolution was caused by the aristocracy. This opinion is evident both in Godwin's *Enquiry*

*Concerning Political Justice* and Wollstonecraft's *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution*. Similarly, in *Frankenstein* Dr Victor Frankenstein, who views himself and society as victims of his creature's violence, appears to be the "more subtle form of violence" (Leger-St-Jean 14).

In the text, Dr Frankenstein, obsessed with his scientific studies, tries to discover the secret of life. He says: "Whence, I often asked myself, did the principle of life proceed? It was a bold question which has ever been considered as a mystery" (F 41). In order to solve this mystery, Frankenstein "collected bones from charnel-houses and distributed with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame" (F 44). His efforts end in his discovery of the secret of life and he assembles different corpses into a "creature" presented in the text as a huge and ugly male creature described by Frankenstein in the following manner:

How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips. (F 46)

Frankenstein's description of his creature has resulted in most of us, readers, referring to this creature as a 'monster' in most criticisms and commentaries related to the novel. After his success in making this monster, Frankenstein is disappointed with his creation and his heart is filled with "breathless horror and disgust" (F 47). Frankenstein directs his anger towards the monster that he punishes with abandonment. He simply leaves the monster to his fate, in other words, to his bare or naked life, an action which copies gods punishing *homo sacer* by abandonment as emphasized in Agamben's theory. Frankenstein describes how he left the monster in the following passage:

I issued into the streets, pacing them with quick steps, as if I sought to avoid the wretch whom I feared every turning of the street would present to my view. I did not dare return to the apartment which I inhabited, but felt impelled to hurry on, although drenched by the rain which poured from a black and comfortless sky. (F 48)

What can encourage a reader to bring Agamben to bear on a discussion of this novel is the fact that Frankenstein tries to imitate the sovereignty of gods by creating and punishing his monster. Many feminist critics, like Gayatri Spivak and Jane Donawerth, describe Frankenstein as a mother figure to his monster. In her analysis of *Frankenstein*, Spivak ("Three Women's Texts" 255) stresses the fact that Frankenstein's description of his duties towards his monster "reveals his own competition with woman as maker." As for Donawerth, she argues that "Shelley enables male conversion: Victor Frankenstein eventually felt his duties towards the monster – not in the form of financial responsibility ... but in the form of responsibility for

the ‘happiness’ of the creature” like a mother (xxv). Although such feminist readings seem plausible, in the text, Frankenstein himself defines his relationship to his creature as that of a father and creator as appears in the following passage:

A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs. (F 55)

He claims dominance over his would-be creatures through his belief that they must be grateful that he has given them life and this implies that they should obey him. Having this ambition is the first and clearest evidence that Frankenstein aspires to be a sovereign who acts as a creator and as a protector of good society. Frankenstein’s power as a creator and father is recognized by the monster who addresses him saying: “I am thy creature, and I will be even mild and docile to my natural lord and king, if thou wilt also perform thy part, that which thou owest me” (F 82). Other clear references to Frankenstein’s sovereignty will come later when, on many occasions throughout the novel, he reserves the right to decide on the right of his monster’s life and death.

Thus, the textual evidence makes it more convincing to detect a sovereign/ *homo sacer* relationship here just as Agamben presented the interaction between father and son as an example of this relationship. As for the monster, it can be argued that the novel shows the monster as not only hated and abandoned by the sovereign but also by all society including children. A case in point is the reaction of William, Frankenstein’s little brother, to the monster. When the monster first sees William, he supposes that William is still too young to reject ugliness and be horrified by it; therefore, the monster wishes to take William as his companion. However, the latter screams and describes the monster with very ugly words. The monster responds by grasping William’s mouth to silence him and, eventually, the boy dies. This incident denotes that for a rejected being like the monster, all people are expected enemies and as Agamben argues, all men are potential sovereigns to the monster. The monster realizes this and he says to Frankenstein: “If the multitude of mankind knew of my existence, they would do as you do, and arm themselves for my destruction. Shall I not hate them who abhor me” (F 82)?

So far in the novel, the monster’s punishment has been being abandoned to his fate without being protected by human laws. The way the monster describes waking up for the first time after leaving Frankenstein’s apartment shows nothing but a human encountering *vita nuda*:

It was dark when I awoke; I felt cold also, and half-frightened, as it were, instinctively, finding myself so desolate. Before I had quitted your apartment, on a sensation of cold, I had covered myself with some clothes; but these were insufficient to secure me from the dews of night. I was a poor, helpless, miserable wretch; I knew, and could distinguish, nothing; but feeling pain invade me on all sides, I sat down and wept. (F 84)

He describes how he learnt everything in his bare life and how he survived in the wood, constantly on the move in order to find food:

Food, however, became scarce; and I often spent the whole day searching in vain for a few acorns to assuage the pangs of hunger. When I found this, I resolved to quit the place that I had hitherto inhabited, to seek for one where the few wants I experienced would be more easily satisfied. (F 86)

As for society, his monstrous appearance made him an Other rejected and isolated. When he first tried to mix with people, the monster got the following reaction: “children shrieked, and one of the women fainted. The whole village was roused; some fled, some attacked me, until, grievously bruised by stones and many other kinds of missile weapons, I escaped to the open country” (F 87). When he reaches the hovel attached to the De Lacys’ cottage, he dwells there and enjoys their company without them seeing him.

Regarding the monster’s exclusion based on his monstrosity/Otherness, Spivak, in “Three Women’s Texts,” refers to two types of Otherness in the novel. The first type is the Other who can be domesticated and this is represented by Safie whose mother is a Christian Arab and whose father is a Muslim Turk. This figure, Spivak argues, refers to Ariel in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, an Other who can be turned into a copy of the self. Therefore, Safie is welcomed among the De Lacys who also teach her their language and history. The second type of Other in *Frankenstein*, Spivak continues, is Frankenstein’s monster, that is, the Absolute Other (or variably the wholly Other) who cannot be domesticated and this can be associated with Caliban in *The Tempest*. Therefore, the monster can only be educated by listening to them as they teach Safie. He masters the language and gets educated from the books they discussed, such as *Paradise Lost*, Plutarch’s *Lives* and Volney’s *Empires of Ruins*. Thus, the monster gets this education to be human only “clandestinely ... through the monster’s eavesdropping” (Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* 137). This “Caliban’s education,” as Spivak describes it (317), leads the monster to think socially and politically, learning about “all the various relationships which bind one human being to another in mutual bonds” (F 99) and ask about his own identity: “where were my friends and relations? ... What was I? The question again recurred, to be answered only with groans” (F 99).

However, as soon as he reveals himself to the De Lacys, they reject him with fear and he realizes his exclusion from humanity. It is then that he condemns his creator saying:

Accursed creator! Why did you form a monster so hideous that even you turned from me in disgust? God, in pity, made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image; but my form is a filthy type of yours, more horrid even from the very resemblance. (F 106-7)

This quotation comparing God to man as maker is important for the purposes of this paper as it suggests the theme of resemblance between the creator and the created in the novel. The creature believes that his own horrid monstrosity is derived from that of Frankenstein, his

maker. This idea is stressed by Barbara Johnson who states the following:

What is at stake in Frankenstein's workshop of filthy creation is precisely the possibility of shaping a life in one's own image: Frankenstein's monster can thus be seen as a figure of autobiography as such. Victor Frankenstein then, has twice obeyed the impulse to construct an image of himself: on the first occasion he creates a monster, and on the second he tries to explain to Walton the causes and consequences of the first. (Johnson 3-4)

Leger-St-Jean also argues that “the victims (the aristocracy, Frankenstein) [are] guilty of more subtle form of violence which caused the later outburst” (14). Yet, she highlights, Frankenstein insists on excluding the monster from mankind based on his criminal act against William. For example, she refers to Frankenstein’s reaction to the murder: “Nothing in human shape could have destroyed the fair child. He [the monster] was the murderer! I could not doubt it” (*F* 62). Despite the fact that Frankenstein is more monstrous than his creature, he acts as the protector of good society who wants to save humanity from the monstrosity he himself has introduced. This paper suggests that the sovereign creates monstrosity to then exclude it from humanity and act as the savior and this consolidates the sovereign’s power and esteem. The monsters produced by sovereignty are nothing but its own images. Both can use violence; one for revenge (lawless) and one to show heroism (lawful) though both are similar in remaining outside the circuit of the law, as obtains in the relationship between Frankenstein and his creature.

Frankenstein acts as the sovereign on many occasions determining what is just or unjust and deciding on the life and death of the monster. After the murder of William, Frankenstein decides that this monster has no right to live and vows that he will save humanity from him. During the encounter between the monster and Frankenstein, the former asks for a female mate with whom he promises to live away from all mankind. The monster’s speech attempting to convince Frankenstein of making a female mate for him affects Frankenstein who says: “I concluded that the justice due both to him and my fellow creatures demanded of me that I should comply with his request” (*F* 121). Frankenstein does start to make a female mate for the monster, but then he reflects on the consequences of such an action, such as giving birth to a race of monsters that can threaten the human race. Consequently, he concludes that it is not just for the human race to make the female monster and destroys the half-finished creature he has already started to make. Frankenstein says: “The remains of the half-finished creature, whom I had destroyed, lay scattered on the floor, and I almost felt as if I had mangled the living flesh of a human being” (*F* 140). Thus, Frankenstein as sovereign deprives the monster of his right of having a mate and procreating. As argued by Claridge, the monster is “forbidden all that society holds dear” (23).

After destroying the half-finished female, the monster is determined to punish his maker more. Therefore, he kills Frankenstein’s fiancée, Elizabeth, and his friend, Clerval. The violence at the hands of the monster is what this paper refers to as ‘lawless’

violence, from the sovereign's viewpoint, which happens outside the circuit of law. It is the monster's lawless revenge for excluding him from the laws governing humanity. The lawlessness of the monster's violence drives Frankenstein, the sovereign, to use the law against his creature by making an accusation against the monster to the magistrate saying: "This is the being whom I accuse, and for whose seizure and punishment I call upon you to exert your whole power. It is your duty as a magistrate" (F 164).

This is the only time when Frankenstein endeavors to include the monster in human laws, the time of punishment. However, Frankenstein's effort to subjugate the monster to the law fails. The magistrate explains to him the impossibility of this saying: "I fear, from what you have yourself described to be his properties that this will prove impracticable; and thus, while every proper measure is pursued, you should make up your mind to disappointment" (F 165). Accordingly, Frankenstein vows to the magistrate that he himself will destroy the monster to which the magistrate has no reaction except disbelief. He ascribes Frankenstein's thoughts to delirium; no one will arrest and investigate the sovereign concerning the creation of a monster that has killed three people and no one will pursue this monster or prevent Frankenstein from killing him which means that, like the sovereign and *homo sacer*, they will both remain outside the law.

Hence, through the relationship between Frankenstein and his creature, the novel reveals the relationship between sovereign and *homo sacer* and between lawful and lawless violence. This line of thinking leads to the conclusion that the lawless in this novel has been created by the civilized man who claims to be the protector of the wellbeing of society and who wants to impose law on the outlaw. However, Frankenstein's transgression – making the monster – goes unnoticed by the magistrate. Shelley might have depended on the incredibility of the story for the magistrate to make him overlook Frankenstein's transgression. Frankenstein blames himself only morally; he does not ask the magistrate to arrest him as the real criminal behind the monster. Then, he promises to destroy the monster in order to protect humanity and he sees that he is motivated by "devotion and heroism"; thus, whatever he does is justified and lawful (F 165).

For Agamben, states include outlaws in the law just to exclude them by declaring them as 'monsters' or 'scum' who can be killed with impunity. Agamben also argues that the state and the outlaw similar in that they are both outside the law; the outlaw is excluded and allows the state to be outside the law to enforce states of emergency to fight or kill outlaws. One can argue here that the only difference is that "the state is considered the sole source of the right to violence" as argued by Weber (78). This means that states might rely on certain pretexts to use violence and spread horror among their citizens in case they oppose the power of the state.

Such behavior on the part of states leads those who might be oppressed by the violence of the state to commit revenge acts which

make them monsters and outlaws in the eyes of the law and which, in turn, excludes them though it protects the violence of the state. Harald Wydra argues that states “can use their monopoly of violence not only for preserving the life of their citizens but also for terror and annihilation” (183). The example which will be discussed in this paper is Ahmed Sadaawi’s *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013).

## Frankenstein in Baghdad

Reading *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is an enjoyable as well as an illuminating experience, especially when comparing it with the canonical text written by Shelley. As highlighted by the *Guardian*, it “borrows heavily from the science fiction canon, and pays back the debt with interest” (*Guardian*, par. 9). However, because the novel was published in 2013 in Arabic and only very recently translated into English (2018), there are very few critical analyses of the novel. Therefore, one of the limitations of this paper is its being based primarily on the text of the novel. Apart from the text, I made use of two articles on and a few reviews of the novel.

Because it deals with a contemporary political case, Sadaawi’s novel can be seen as an example of the political relationship between the sovereign and *homo sacer*, but in a rather chaotic way. Sadaawi borrows only one element from Shelley: the making of monstrosity. The creature, named here Shesma (the Whatsitsname), is used in a markedly different way from Shelley’s monster. One of the themes of the text is the tension between lawful and lawless violence in the context of Iraq after the American invasion of 2003. In addition to the title, the name ‘Frankenstein’ is mentioned twice in the novel and it is associated with Shesma rather than its maker. The author justifies using the myth of Frankenstein in the following words: “The Frankenstein-esque atmosphere of horror was strongly prevalent in Iraq during the period covered by the novel” (Najjar, par. 7).

There are many differences between Shelley’s text and Sadaawi’s. For instance, Hadi the old junk dealer who sews the scattered parts of many corpses making up Shesma is not a sovereign in this text. Hadi is described in the text in the following manner: “he was a scruffy, unfriendly man in his fifties who always smelled of alcohol” (FB 10). He is known in his neighborhood for telling many stories infused with a great deal of realistic detail and people would often make comments such as: “it looks like he watches lots of movies” (FB 18). Hadi is horrified and saddened by the spread of torn corpses everywhere in Baghdad due to the chaos caused both by the American invasion and by the mad terror caused by the hatred and division among the Iraqis themselves. The incident that is the most horrible and shocking to him is the death of Nahim, his closest friend, in an explosion where it “had been hard to separate Nahim’s flesh from that of the horse” (FB 23) symbolizing “the loss of his [Nahim’s] humanity” (Elayyan 160). This painful incident transforms Hadi into a grumpy, obscene and mentally confused person who responds by collecting parts of different corpses

and stitching them into one body to bury it respectfully as he says to his neighbors:

‘I wanted to hand him over to the forensics department, because it was a complete corpse that had been left in the streets like rubbish. It’s a human being, guys, a person,’ he told them.

‘But it wasn’t a complete corpse. You made it complete,’ someone objected.

‘I made it complete so it wouldn’t be treated as rubbish, so it would be respected like other dead people and given a proper burial,’ Hadi explained. (*FB* 25)

Unlike Victor in Shelley’s text, Hadi believes in the humanity of Shesma as he stresses saying: “It’s a human being, guys, a person.” In addition, one of the essential departures from Shelley’s text is that Hadi is not a scientist; he does not want to create a human being and be the sovereign, the father of a new race. Hadi makes Shesma wishing for its burial, not his life. However, contrary to Hadi’s intentions, the lost human spirit of Hasib, a hotel guard killed in a recent suicide bombing, finds its way into this corpse and inhabits it (*FB* 33). Hasib’s soul was looking for a body and found Shesma; then, “he lodged inside the corpse, filling it from head to toe, because, probably, he realized then, it didn’t have a soul, while he was a soul without a body” (*FB* 38).

The resulting creature differs from Shelley’s in that he plays two roles simultaneously: sovereign and *homo sacer*. From one perspective, Shesma plays the role of the sovereign with his decision to achieve justice by avenging the victims of terror. After the restless soul finds its way to the corpse made by Hadi, Shesma leaves Hadi’s place and the first house he visits is that of Elishva, an old Christian woman who lives in the hope that her long-lost son might one day return. Abu Zaidoun, a barber in the neighborhood “was the Baathist who had taken her son by the collar and dragged him to the unknown” (*FB* 11). Elishva is convinced that her son is still alive: therefore, when she sees Shesma the first time, she believes that he is her son and gives him her son’s name, Daniel. Naming him as such is significant since the biblical meaning of Daniel is God’s Judgment which ascribes a sovereign aspect to Shesma as stressed by Taweel (par. 4). Like Frankenstein’s monster, “Saadawi’s creature feels he is misunderstood. He’s not a bad man, he wishes to explain. He’s not killing at random. Instead, he’s after revenge. He is killing the men whose bombs created his parts” (Garner, par. 11). Therefore, he records his story and sends the recordings to Mahmoud al-Sawadi, a journalist. In these recordings, Shesma reveals his belief in his sovereignty when he says:

Is that junk dealer really my father? Surely he’s just the conduit of for the will of our Father in heaven” (*FB* 136) [...] With the help of God and of Heaven, I will take revenge on all the criminals. I will finally bring about justice on earth and there will no longer be a need to wait in agony for justice to come in heaven or after death. (*FB* 137)

Throughout the novel, it is Shesma who decides the right of life and death of people according to their crimes and he kills “Sunnis and

Shiites: a leader in Al-Qaida in the Sunni Abu Ghraib area and a militia leader in the Shiite Sadr City” (Juhi Jani 327).

Unlike Frankenstein’s creature that is rejected by and isolated from human society as a *homo sacer*, Shesma succeeds in attracting many followers who believe in his sovereignty. In this respect, Omar Dewachi says:

With the inevitable failure of “earthly” forms of justice, the *Shesma* cultivates a cult of followers in the city, from the most wretched who see him as the embodiment of a perverted God-sent justice. His followers offer him comfort, love and their own bodies as a sacrifice towards his undertaking. (Dewachi, par. 10)

His followers either view him as the “first true Iraqi citizen” because he is made up of corpses combining the different religions, sects and ethnicities of Iraq, or “the saviour” (*FB* 140). In chapter 10, Shesma establishes a kingdom of his own and sets his own law as follows: his flesh must be that of innocent victims who require revenge on their killers. For Shesma to go on living, killing must go on because every time he takes revenge on someone, a part of his body will decay and need a replacement. However, later he loses his confidence that his followers are always using the flesh of innocent victims to repair his body. The flesh used for his persistence becomes a mixture of victims and criminals; he realizes this when one of his followers says: “Tomorrow he’ll tell you you’re three quarters criminal, and later you’ll wake up to find you’ve become totally criminal. You’ll be the super criminal, because you’re made up of criminals, a bunch of criminals” (*FB* 151).

Gradually, ideas that all people are half criminal inside and that they are killing one another randomly, which makes it hard to distinguish the victim from the criminal, start to creep into Shesma’s mind. He eventually sticks to life and sometimes he himself suspends his law, which he has established to achieve justice. For example, when he loses one eye, he kills a sixty-year-old man walking in fear of the sounds of bullets in order to take his eyes justifying this action in the following manner:

The old man was a sacrificial lamb that the Lord had placed in my path. He was the Innocent Man Who Will Die Tonight [...] The bullets from the fighters were bound to hit him, and he would have died right here [...] So all I had done was hasten his death. All the other innocent people who came down this desolate street will die too. (*FB* 155)

In this novel, sovereignty is more complicated than expected as there are different parties claiming to be sovereign. For instance, another face for the sovereign is the American power and all the authorities under its umbrella like The Tracking and Pursuit Department, “partially affiliated to the civil administration of the international coalition forces in Iraq” (*FB* 1). Apart from his conviction that he is a holy sovereign achieving justice on earth, it can be also argued that Shesma’s sovereignty is symbolic of that of the American power, given that he appears after the American invasion and just before the

Iraqi civil war according to the dates used in the novel. In this regard, Bushra Juhi Jani states the following:

The novel tries to show ‘what’s its name’ is different and alien, or the Abject, which is, according to Kristeva, ‘a non-assimilable alien, a monster, a tumor, a cancer’. In *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, the indirect reference to the invasion of Iraq is shown as the cause of the appearance of this alien. Being Christian, ‘what’s its name’ symbolises Western military and cultural invasion. (330)

The Tracking and Pursuit Department is headed by Brigadier Sorour Majid, who depends on astrologers and fortune-tellers to chase Shesma, known to them as Criminal X. Because Colonel Sorour insists on pursuing Shesma/Criminal X, he offers another departure from Shelley’s text in which the Genevan Magistrate asks Frankenstein to lose hope in subjecting his monster to the law. Sadaawi wants to show that the military and political authorities controlling Iraq at that time were the responsible parties for making Shesma; therefore, he replaces the magistrate’s disbelief in *Frankenstein* with the Colonel’s belief in the existence of Shesma and his determination to chase him. Eventually, one of his fortune-tellers tells him: “I think we played a role in creating this creature, in one way or another” (FB 209). Hereafter, Colonel Sorour starts to think differently about Shesma’s creation. He asks himself about the American project in Iraq and his answer is the following: “the monster itself is their project. It was the Americans who were behind this monster” (FB 259). The conclusion itself can be one of the plausible interpretations of the text.

After Sorour’s conclusion, readers can understand the main sovereign-*homo sacer* relationship – or the Frankenstein-monster one – in the contemporary novel in the following manner: the American military is the sovereign and Shesma is *homo sacer* left to his destiny on the streets of Baghdad. They cause his creation but then condemn him as if they had no relationship with him. They announce that they are chasing him and then that they have arrested him, but the one arrested is Hadi not Shesma. Thus, what happens is that they abandon him in Baghdad unwilling to sacrifice him as is the case of Frankenstein when his monster first wakes up, and as *homo sacer*, who, in Agamben’s reading, is also left to his destiny. Sadaawi possibly wants to intimate that Shesma is the monster created by neo-colonial power to allow killings and terror to resume, so that the American ‘heroes’ appear as saviors. In this respect, one can agree with Omar Dewachi who concludes that this novel with its monster “is indeed a commentary on contemporary colonial violence and its attempt to obscure and deny local and personal histories and wounds of ordinary Iraqis” (par. 11).

From another perspective, Americans are not the only ones responsible for this monster, but also other Iraqi groups which all participated in creating and abandoning this monster. This, in fact, is the analysis offered by Hroub who quite convincingly argues:

Sadaawi’s Frankenstein monster is a deadly creature of legend that has many fathers: the Iraqis and their religious denominations, terrorist organisations of all kinds, the Americans and the West, the Arabs and Iran. Each claims it is the others who are to blame for the brutality, the bloodshed and the killing, each

washes his hands clean of all sin. Shesma, however, lives among them, sleeps in their houses and looks very much like them until they finally chase him out of town. All of them hate the ugly monster, but none are willing to admit that they too had a hand in creating and protecting it. (par. 13-14)

The incidents of the novel lead to the following line of thinking: When the sovereign, authorities or the state want to demonstrate power under the pretext of fighting dictatorship, they will not be able to avoid making a *homo sacer* whom they will exclude from human laws and justice. *Homo sacer*, the outlaw or monster is unprotected by human laws and, simultaneously, cannot be subjected to these laws. The creators either lose control over their monsters or just abandon them on purpose. This is clear not only in Shelley's text but also in Sadaawi's. In the latter text, the person who is arrested by the supreme security commanders in Baghdad towards the end of the novel is not Shesma but Hadi who, after another explosion, has become disfigured to an extent that has made him resemble Shesma:

In shock, he wiped his hand along the surface of the mirror to make sure it was really a mirror and then he leaned in to examine his disfigurement. He wanted to cry, but all he could do was stare. As he looked closer, he detected something deeper: this wasn't the face of Hadi the junk dealer; it was the face of someone he had convinced himself was merely a figment of his fertile imagination. It was the face of the Whatsitsname. (FB 258-9)

Again, this is a departure from *Frankenstein*. Whereas in Shelley's text the monster is an incomplete copy of the self (Johnson 3-4), in Sadaawi's text, Hadi is an incomplete copy of Shesma who is still free in the end while the killing goes on. The law does not succeed in subordinating Shesma but in subordinating his maker. Hadi's friends and neighbors can hardly believe that Hadi is Criminal X. As for Mahmoud al-Sawadi the journalist who wrote Shesma's story in newspapers, he knows that Shesma is still free:

Mahmoud al-Sawadi thought this was just another massive mistake. It was inconceivable that this elderly man was a dangerous criminal. He had sat with him for hours: he was just a drunkard with an unstable personal life and a powerful imagination, but his story about the Whatsitsname still posed many questions for Mahmoud. Hadi was permanently scatter-brained. He didn't have any of the eloquence or composure apparent in the digital recordings of the Whatstname's strange long monologues. It was impossible that Hadi was the Whatsitsname. (FB 348)

On the last page of the novel, a mysterious man is still seen watching the streets of Baghdad. This could be Shesma.

In *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, violence is ubiquitous; everybody is killing everybody. Even Shesma's claim to achieve justice by avenging the victims cannot be maintained. The novel is full of violence; every party thinks they are fighting for a valid reason and see their violence as lawful while others see it as lawless. All view Shesma's violence as lawless though he himself considers he is achieving justice until his body becomes a mixture of criminals' as well as victims' flesh, contaminating his mission. In this novel, issues of innocence and criminality are entangled in complex ways and the lines between

sovereignty and its *homo sacer* are blurred. Who is the lawful and who is the lawless? Whose version of justice is the valid one; the American military's, Shesma's, Iraqis' – Shiite, Sunni, Kurd? None of these?

In her introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, Shelley stated that she wanted to write a ghost story “which would speak to the mysterious fears of our nature, and awaken thrilling horror—one to make the reader dread to look round, to curdle the blood and quicken the beatings of the heart” (F 5). Through the comparison and contrast between Shelley's and Sadaawi's texts, this paper has demonstrated that the worst of humanity's fears might reside in humans' ability to initiate horror and make monsters as well as create violent battlegrounds. After reading both novels, it can be concluded that in a canonical text like *Frankenstein*, there could be a clear excluded *homo sacer* at whose expense the sovereign as well as society hold their image, power, balance and solidarity. In contrast, in the postcolonial world, things become more complicated especially in war zones. Many kinds of sovereign emerge in such turmoil, each claiming to be the protector of law and humanity while using a plethora of violent means to achieve justice and freedom, each from their own perspective. Moreover, as a citation of Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Sadaawi's text shows that in the contemporary world where many kinds of *homo sacer* exist, such as the rebel and the refugee, the laws of humanity still fail to include all human beings. The two novels show that exclusion was and still is at the heart of politics and the tension between the sovereign and *homo sacer* is what underlies many of the stable and advanced regimes of the world. When speaking of monsters that are multiplying in this world, especially in war zones, what should be tracked is not only the monster, but also its maker.

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