ASSEMBLAGES OF DEATH: NECROCAPITALIST PRODUCTION AND FAILED REVOLUTION IN *FRANKENSTEIN IN BAGHDAD*

Ashmita Saha,
Mallika Ghosh Sarbadhikary
Indian Institute of Engineering Science and Technology, Shibpur

Abstract: *This paper explores the Whatsitsname in Ahmed Saadawi's Frankenstein in Baghdad as a material and symbolic product of the necrocapitalist economy that defines post-invasion Iraq. Drawing upon the idea of necrocapitalism and monster theory, the paper examines the Whatsitsname as a monstrous assemblage forged from the debris of war, a spectral figure that both embodies and critiques the imbrication of death, disposability, and commodification. Methodologically, this study undertakes a close textual analysis of the creature's narrative arc, examining how his transformation from moral avenger to indiscriminate executioner reflects the erosion of revolutionary agency under the weight of systemic violence and the inadequacies of insurgency within a necrocapitalist framework, where resistance is subsumed into the very machinery it opposes. By foregrounding the Whatsitsname's ultimate failure to transcend its debilitating circumstances, the paper argues that his monstrosity reveals not emancipatory potential but the recursive reproduction of violence that undergirds the post-2003 war economy. By exploring how the creature's unraveling underscores the futility of resistance when severed from collective struggle, thus marking him as a failed revolutionary, this reading aims to contribute to current debates on literary monstrosity and political resistance by situating the Whatsitsname within a broader critique of how neoliberal war structures render revolutionary subjects both impossible and undead.*

Keywords: *Iraq; justice; monster; necrocapitalism; revenge; Whatsitsname;*

Introduction

From Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* to Guillermo del Toro's cinematic creatures, specially bearing in mind his upcoming film *Frankenstein*, the monster and the monstrous have long served as ciphers for the contradictions and anxieties that underpin the socio-political and cultural fabric of the time, their ubiquity often hinting towards 'a sort of allegorical representation of the world system that is useful in coming to terms with the both unreality and many of the realities of the "real world"' (Tally 103). Emerging at moments of crisis, it becomes a site of projection, a liminal figure that encodes both radical potential and a susceptibility to systemic entrapment. In Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, the Whatsitsname embodies this dialectic with precision: born from the remnants of the unjustly slain, he materializes as an agent of retributive justice, ostensibly mobilized against systemic violence, yet ultimately ensnared within the very structures he had sought to dismantle. Thus, underscoring a fundamental paradox at the heart of

the revolutionary agency, wherein the impulse to resist and redress oppression is, over time, absorbed and repurposed by the mechanisms of power, the monster is rendered an extension of the system itself. Focusing on certain facets of the monster trope, this paper situates the Whatsitsname as a cultural text, one that articulates and negotiates Iraq's post-invasion landscape of terror, sectarianism, and disillusionment within its body and also through its actions. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's assertion that 'The Monster's Body Is a Cultural Body' (4) provides a helpful apparatus for understanding the Whatsitsname, which emerges at a juncture of ideological and historical rupture, not simply as an aberration but as an epistemological construct that registers the fractures of a nation in turmoil. Encapsulating the contradictions of the imperial machinery, the nationalist insurgencies, ethno-sectarian violence, and the illusory promise of justice, the Whatsitsname, with its grotesque form and unstable subjectivity, is almost a manifestation of the social anxieties. The dialectic between insurgency and systemic absorption, protection and destruction, as we shall illustrate later, foregrounds a broader historical and literary genealogy of the monster as a figure caught between radical rupture and cultural inscription, encompassing "fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy (ataractic or incendiary)" (Cohen 4).

While we shall be focusing upon the cultural implications of the Whatsitsname's presence, as stated above, one of the central concerns of this paper lies in bringing together Cohen's conception of monster and monstrosity and David McNally's critique of capitalist monstrosity to develop a materially grounded reading of the Whatsitsname. While Cohen's formulation of the monster as a cultural body offers a compelling framework for understanding the monster's symbolic polyvalence, it remains largely focused on its representational function. In contrast, McNally's work, *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism*, repositions monstrosity within a political economy, arguing that these creatures go beyond their role as symbolic disruptors to embody materialist expressions of capitalist crisis. By synthesizing these two approaches, we intend to read the Whatsitsname in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* as both a cultural artifact of collected grief and trauma and an unwitting enhancer of the machinery of necrocapitalism. While this paper primarily develops a reading of the text through the lens of necrocapitalism, which Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee describes as embedded "practices of organizational accumulation that involve violence, dispossession, and death" (1543), it is important to recognize its conceptual roots in Achille Mbembe's conceptualization of necropolitics, a system predicated upon the

> various ways in which, in our contemporary world, weapons are deployed in the interest of maximally destroying persons and creating death-worlds, that is, new and

> unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to living conditions that confer upon them the status of the living dead (92).

In *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, the Whatsitsname emerges precisely from such a necropolitical landscape under late capitalism enmeshed in a market imperative to produce a regime where militarized economies generate profit through death. While existing scholarship, namely Ola Abdalkafor's "*Frankenstein* and *Frankenstein in Baghdad*: The Sovereign, Homo Sacer and Violence," has effectively read the creature as taking on the role of both a sovereign and a homo sacer, albeit at alternating moments, drawing upon Agamben's concept of the same, such readings tend to emphasize political abandonment over structural incorporation into circuits of capital. Furthermore, by extending Banerjee's theorization of necrocapitalism, which focuses upon the "creation of death worlds in colonial contexts through the collusion between states and corporations" (Baneerjee 1548), this study seeks to explore how local insurgent violence, often framed as resistance, may itself become absorbed into the necrocapitalist machinery. Following this line of thought, we intend to explicate, through a close reading of the Whatsitsname's trajectory, how necrocapitalism fabricates revolutionary figures who are structurally doomed to fail and, thus, reframe monstrosity not only as a site of symbolic transgression but also as a function that enacts a performative resistance, ultimately reinforcing the very war economy it appears to confront.

In this respect, it becomes pertinent for us to examine how the Whatsitsname is imbricated within an apparatus of necrocapitalist accumulation, becoming a figure of insurgency that is always already scripted to collapse. And in order to explore these issues with respect to the text in question, we need to look beyond an uncritical celebration of the monster figure as a symbol of the transgressive Other. This indubitable valorization and eulogization is precisely what McNally cautions us about and accuses the postmodern sensibility of normalizing:

> Rather than seeing the arena of monstrosity as a site of contestation, instead of recognising that monster-images are multi-accentual, the postmodern celebration of the monstrous flattens out a field in which different social accents and values contest one another. (10)

In our case, interestingly enough, simply by virtue of his very name, the Frankenstein's creature itself, effectively dubbed "the Whatsitsname," consistently eludes this unidimensionality, further accentuated by the personas imputed to him, "the One Who Has No Name" (Saadawi 107), "He Who Has No Identity" (Saadawi 107), and "He Who Has No Body" (Saadawi 107).

Socio-Economic Contexts

A reading of the Whatsitsname as a cultural text would primarily require us to contextualize it against the backdrop of a war-and-civil-war torn Iraq post the 2003 invasion. And, in our efforts at contextualizing Saadawi's text(s), we would need to start by glancing back at the socio-cultural milieu of Mary Shelley's magnum opus *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus*, meticulously investigated by McNally, who begins by examining the historical nexus between the rise of anatomical science in 18th-century England and the defilement of the laboring body. While the burgeoning class of surgeons and anatomists sought to expand medical knowledge through the dissection of cadavers, ironically enough, the process of procuring these bodies predominantly targeted the marginalized, the executed criminals, and the socially dispossessed, thus not only signaling the objectification of the laboring poor but also enacting a symbolic violence, wherein the working-class body was stripped off any sanctity and reduced to a mere commodity circulating within an expanding market of medical education (McNally 19). Contending that "[f]or the British working class, anatomists, surgeons and resurrectionists were all part of a general conspiracy to degrade and oppress the poor in both life and death through kidnapping, murder, grave-robbing and dissection" (McNally 10), he explicates how the riots and protests, where crowds would forcibly reclaim the corpses of hanged petty thieves from the executioner's gallows, reflect class solidarity and a concrete awareness of the continuity of class-based dispossession in both life and death. Emphasizing upon how monstrosity is constructed through the violent ruptures of capitalist production and the epistemic authority claimed by bourgeois science, he argues that Shelley's *Frankenstein* "is in important measure a story about the monstrous practices of grave-robbing, body-theft, and dissection – in short, about corporeal dismemberment" (McNally 12). Following this model, we can also embark upon a reading of Saadawi's text as a veritable lesson on how monstrosity emerges from the material contradictions of the socio-economic structures in place.

A closer look at the socio-economic structures against which *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is posited demands critical attention towards the proliferation of suicide bombings that sprouted amid the socio-political destabilization, beyond the direct military engagements between the U.S. and Iraq following the invasion. These attacks, often framed within the discourse of martyrdom, not only intensified the spectacle of violence but also went on to complicate narratives of victimhood and agency. An examination of the demographic data about the casualties of these bombings as pursued by Mohammed M. Hafez in his book *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom* and also by Katherine R. Seifert and Clark McCauley

in their article "Suicide Bombers in Iraq, 2003–2010: Disaggregating Targets Can Reveal Insurgent Motives and Priorities" reveals patterns that challenge monolithic representations of both insurgency and imperialist occupation. By situating Saadawi's text and the Whatsitsname amidst this turmoil, we can further unravel the ways in which a necropolitical logic operated within the broader matrix of occupation, resistance, and especially sectarianism. Suicide bombings in Iraq, as analyzed by Mohammed M. Hafez, represent a calculated instrument of insurgent strategy rather than mere expressions of religious fanaticism, thus demonstrating a deliberate orchestration to disrupt state-building and perpetuate instability. By targeting critical political junctures such as elections and governmental transitions, they served to delegitimize Iraq's post-2003 political order, exemplified by the AQI's (Al-Qaeeda in Iraq) operational framework wherein the attacks were designed to escalate sectarian divisions, framing the Shia population as adversaries rather than political counterparts. This strategic deployment of violence underscores how this act functioned as a necropolitical tool designed "not only to drive the multinational forces out of Iraq but also to create widespread insecurity among the public, engender sectarian polarization, and produce economic collapse" (Hafez 92). Seifert and McCauley's article mentioned above further contributes to this investigation through a very curious observation; it highlights how the strategic deployment of suicide bombings in Iraq between 2003 and 2010 reveals a deliberate shift from attacking U.S. military personnel and coalition forces to targeting Iraqi civilians, with 83 percent of the attacks directed at them, thus laying bare the politics of an insurgency enacted through terror, systemic collapse, and sectarian polarization, explicitly designed to aggravate the state of disarray. By prioritizing attacks on Shi'a neighborhoods, security forces, and state institutions, the AQI weaponized sectarian violence to delegitimize the emerging Iraqi government and reinforce its own position as the sole guardian of Sunni Muslims in a Shi'a-dominated state. Moreover, the targeting of the Awakening Movement, led by leaders from Sunni al-Anbar tribes to counter the growing influence of AQI and also cooperate with the government, reinforces the exploitation of even intra-sectarian conflict. Thus, rather than functioning as instruments of nationalist resistance, the insurgents' ultimate objective appears to have been prolonging instability and entrenching sectarian animosities designed to fracture Iraqi society.

Perverted Justice and the Necrocapitalist Cycles of Violence

Having thus established the socio-political turmoil against which Saadawi's text is situated, we can now turn our attention to the titular character of the text, the Franeknsteinian monster–the Whatsitsname, oftentimes referred to as

"the Great Azrael, the Angel of Death" (Saadawi 148) and examine how his actions at times align with those of the abovementioned suicide bombers plaguing Iraq while also diverting from them, and how they render him to be a failed revolutionary of sorts who becomes enmeshed in the very system he had set out to challenge. This creature, assimilated from the body parts of victims of sectarian violence, embodies the chaotic repercussions of suicide terrorism in Iraq, particularly through his disproportionate targeting of civilians, a reality mirrored in his evolution (or maybe, degradation) from avenger to indiscriminate perpetrator. Referred to as "a massive corpse" (Saadawi 24) "with viscous liquids, light in colour, oozing from parts of it" (Saadawi 24), devoid of "a uniform colour" (Saadawi 24), this creature is a monstrous patchwork of fragments collected from the dismembered body parts of bomb blast victims. And these remnants symbolically embody shards of the past that Hadi, the junk dealer, attempts to stitch together, driven by an ideal, "so it wouldn't be treated as rubbish, so it would be respected like other dead people and given a proper burial" (Saadawi 25). However, the creature's motivation, made up as it is "of the body parts of people who had been killed, plus the soul of another victim, and … given the name of yet another victim" (Saadawi 125) turns out to be significantly different from that of his creator's; this is quite literally "a composite of victims seeking to avenge their deaths so they could rest in peace … created to obtain revenge on their behalf" (Saadawi 125).

While the Whatsitsname declares, "I'm the answer to the call of the poor. I'm a saviour, the one they were waiting for and hoped for in some sense" (Saadawi 136), his self-fashioning as a vigilante figure determined to mete out justice soon goes haywire. His assertion, "I'm the only justice there is in this country" (Saadawi 130), is also accompanied by the deliberation:

> These unseen sinews, rusty from rare use, have finally stirred. The sinews of a law that isn't always on the alert. The prayers of the victims and their families came together for once and gave those sinews a powerful impetus. The innards of the darkness moved and gave birth to me. I am the answer to their call for an end to injustice and for revenge on the guilty.
>
> '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. (Saadawi 136-137)

While the metaphor of "unseen sinews, rusty from rare use" (136) signals a dormant, corrupted system, rendered even more impotent by political disarray, which has denied any form of justice to the populace, the Whatsitsname's awakening is certainly not a return to order but a perverse reanimation, a mobilization of violence steeped in the residual effects of war. The reference

to a "powerful impetus" (Saadawi 136) emerging from the "innards of the darkness" (Saadawi 137) alludes to the grotesque, abject nature of the Whatsitsname's creation, a monstrous by-product of collective suffering and unresolved grief. His assertion of popular consensus and divine sanction, as highlighted above, collapses the line between sacralized justice and vindictive vengeance, thus illustrating a moral terrain where "the lines between resistance and suicide, sacrifice and redemption, martyrdom and freedom" (Mbembe 92) have been blurred. The very notion of the "innards of darkness" (Saadawi 137) gestating this monstrous figure evokes a materialization of trauma, one very visceral and gory, and which, when left unmediated, forms a festering wound in the societal fabric. This self-proclaimed savior thus ends up as a paradoxical figure–an embodiment of the very violence it claims to redress. As is evident, this seems to mirror the motivations and actions of the several insurgent factions operating within the erstwhile landscape of the nation.

Explicating the state of complete collapse that loomed before the country and to which it was veritably pushed, Patrick Cockburn writes in *The Occupation: War and Resistance in Iraq*:

> Iraq on the eve of the invasion was not only a country divided by religion and ethnicity. These divisions had been deepened and complicated by a quarter of a century of war and deprivation. Iraq was a broken society … In the great slums of Baghdad and across Iraq there were the urban poor, crushed by the misery of their lives, willing to turn their hands to any job legal or illegal, prepared to loot or protect a building against looters, to join a charismatic religious leader or become the foot soldiers in a militia force. Unemployment may have been as high as 70 per cent. These young men had no skill other than knowing how to use a gun, which they had been trained to do in the army or the government-sponsored militia. It was these people, often living in total poverty, who poured into the streets across Iraq in an orgy of theft and destruction as the old government collapsed in 2003. (15-16)

He further elucidates how the Coalition Provisional Authority's (CPA) policies, most notably de-Ba'athification and the disbanding of the Iraqi military, engendered a structural vacuum that facilitated the rise of several insurgent groups, with a neoliberal restructuring of the country's economy, wherein foreign corporate interests were prioritized over local governance, exacerbating unemployment and discontent. Thus, the occupation's failure to establish effective governance not only delegitimized U.S. authority but also created conditions ripe for the insurgency to function as an alternative power structure, leveraging violence as both an ideological and economic instrument. It should be noted that the insurgency was not merely a reactionary force but one operating with a distinct necrocapitalist logic meant to commodify death and destruction as forms of political and economic capital, with suicide bombings and sectarian massacres functioning not only as tools of terror but

also as mechanisms for resource control, thus transforming violence into a marketable asset. Commenting upon how these factions benefitted from the said "death worlds, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of the living dead" (Mbembe 40) and equating the jihadi Salafi's involvement in "lawlessness and ethnosectarian schisms" (Cockburn 223) with that of 1989 post-Soviet Afghanistan, Hafez notes, "A victory in Iraq not only would ensure their survival, it would provide them with a new base in the heart of the Arab world and coveted strategic presence near the oil-rich Gulf region and religiously significant Saudi Arabia" (223). Beyond the actions of insurgent groups, the very architecture of the U.S. occupation exemplified necrocapitalist principles, with the destruction of Iraq's state apparatus paving the way for the influx of private military contractors whose profitability was directly proportional to sustained instability, thus resulting in "a privatization of sovereignty, … another enabling condition of necrocapitalism" (Banerjee 1553). In this light, the post-2003 Iraqi insurgency needs to be looked at not as an isolated instance of religious or ideological extremism but as a manifestation of a broader capitalist logic that thrives on crisis, disorder, and structural ruin, a similar kind of privatization, a form of "imperial debris" (Stoler 192) which proved fertile ground for the proliferation of insurgent economies, where both local warlords and global capitalists extracted value from the mechanisms of death. Thus, the occupation and its insurgent afterlife represent two sides of the same necrocapitalist paradigm—one driven by state-sanctioned imperial violence and the other by decentralized networks of militancy. While the figures emerging from this nexus are perceived as particularly monstrous, the system itself is never deemed as such. McNally contends:

> nowhere in the discourse of monstrosity today do we find the naming of capitalism as a monstrous system, one that systematically threatens the integrity of human personhood. Instead, monsters like vampires and zombies move throughout the circuits of cultural exchange largely detached from the system that gives them their life-threatening energies. (3)

Added to this canon of vampires and zombies is an equally persistent figure that repeatedly materializes across epochs, re-emerging in various historical contexts and diverse landscapes–the Frankenstein's monster. The disembodiment inherent in the Whatsitsname's very being, both physically and psychologically, owing to his composition from bits and pieces of corpses of people rendered insubstantial by the state and the insurgents, people who could be killed on a whim, is a product of the necrocapitalist machinery stemming from "practices of accumulation in (post)colonial contexts by specific economic actors … that involve dispossession, death, torture, suicide,

slavery, destruction of livelihoods, and the general management of violence" (Banerjee 1548). The mechanisms of his body are summarized by the Magician, one of his followers, as:

> Whenever you kill someone, that account is closed … In other words, the person who was seeking revenge has had his wish fulfilled, and the body part that came from him starts to melt. It looks like there's a time factor. If you exact revenge for all the victims ahead of the deadline, then your body will hold together for a while and start to dissolve only later, but if you take too long, when you come to your last assignment you'll have only the body part of the last person to be avenged. (Saadawi 142-143)

These very lines provide a compelling picture of the creature as a grotesque embodiment of a machine that operates through the relentless accumulation of resentments and a system constituted through transactions and deadlines. This is apparent in the language applied here, steeped as it is in economic and bureaucratic jargon, with words like "account" (Saadawi 142), "deadline" (Saadawi 143), and "assignment" (Saadawi 143) evoking the image of a cold, calculative world governed by transactions even in death, where violence is commodified and revenge becomes a debt to be settled. The "time factor" (Saadawi 143) intrinsic to the notion of a "deadline" (Saadawi 143) further accentuates the temporal pressure innate to capitalist productivity, which relies on a race against time to extract value before complete obsolescence. The Whatsitsname's survival and his dependence on fulfilling said assignments promptly, failing which would result in bodily dissolution, once again mirrors the precarity of labor, where missed targets can result in disposability. An extreme example of this complete commodification of death is provided by Cockburn, "In Baghdad's all-Jadida market a group of killers put up a poster advertising their services with a price tag of $300 to $400 a murder" (154). Just as capitalism relies on the continuous extraction of surplus value from labor, the Whatsitsname is literally composed of surplus bodies, those arbitrarily killed and discarded. A macabre materialization of the surplus spilling over from the existent war economy which degrades human life to mere bodies and finally to disposable commodities, this creature, almost emulating what Marx calls "monstrous accumulation" (125), becomes distinctly aware of his inability to remain whole and that "he needed to replace the parts that were falling off, so he needed new flesh from new victims" (Saadawi 129). The reiteration of the word "parts" (Saadawi 129, 142), concerning the Whatsitsname, in the form of "disconnected body parts" (Saadawi 29), "disparate body parts" (Saadawi 51), "spare parts" (Saadawi 143, 145, 194), "rotten parts" (Saadawi 145), "new parts" (Saadawi 145), "old body parts" (Saadawi 146), "criminal parts" (Saadawi 154), "worn-out parts" (Saadawi 195), and "innocent parts" (Saadawi 207), emphasize how individuals are reduced to mere cogs in the machinery of war. This entity, both

a by-product and a mechanism of this machinery, simultaneously shaped by and also perpetuating cycles of violence, lives on through the accumulation of surplus bodies, a relentless drive to extract value even from death and destruction, which is further accentuated by his admission, "my right eye had turned into something like dough or paste" (Saadawi 153) and "[m]y left eye started to mist up again, and I felt it would run down my face like leavened dough" (Saadawi 154), where the food metaphors do not symbolize sustenance but rather depict an abyssal, immeasurable hunger driven by the war economy.

Fragmentation and the Failed Revolutionary

The Whatsitsname's physical and psychological fragmentation, at times expressed through his despairing cries, "I don't have a permanent face" (Saadawi 249), "[m]y face changes all the time … Nothing in me lasts long, other than my desire to keep going" (Saadawi 259), and also through his body's unyielding refusal to attain wholeness, is deeply rooted in the necrocapitalist economy he occupies. This severation, aptly described by McNally as "capitalism abstracts (detaches, cuts off) labour and its products from the concrete and specific individuals who perform unique productive acts, treating all work as effectively identical and interchangeable" (14), can be witnessed in the Whatsitsname's actions as well. He remarks, "[t]he saint's fingers pushed open doors, showing me the way" (Saadawi 145), "I killed the Venezuelan mercenary in charge of the security company responsible for recruiting suicide bombers" (Saadawi 146) who had resulted in the person's death whose soul later inhabited this patchwork body, "I killed the al-Qaeda leader … who was responsible for the massive truck bomb in Tayaran Square that killed … the person whose nose Hadi picked up off the pavement and used to fix my face" (Saadawi 146). Following Marx's caution that the capitalist machinery "mutilates the worker, turning him into a fragment of himself" (482), this creature, dictated by the demands of his parts, which, in turn, are forever in a state of flux, is turned into an abstraction where the fragmented parts take precedence in place of the composite whole, and subsists simply on a heady dose of revenge and nothing else. Blinded by a wild rage and a firm belief in his "noble mission" (Saadawi 126), he tries to forge his path as a revolutionary, "the first true Iraqi citizen" (Saadawi 140) "made up of body parts of people from diverse backgrounds – ethnicities, tribes, races and social classes" (Saadawi 140), but is doomed to remain as a failed revolutionary. This failure seems to be rooted in an absence of class consciousness, an absence that is structurally mirrored in his very body, composed of bodies across sectarian, ideological, and socio-economic divides. While his material form symbolically holds potential for a collective solidarity, a revolutionary

subject forged from debris, this potential remains unrealized. It is also in part owing to his lack of an originary political impulse, which is muddied halfway through the project since, although he proclaimed to mete out justice, he "knew his mission was essentially to kill, to kill new people every day" (Saadawi 193). Unlike Victor Frankenstein's elite scientific experiment designed upon a class-based violation of the working-class dead, the Whatsitsname, assembled by Hadi, the junk dealer, in an act of resistance against the necrocapitalist war economy, initially appears as a potential agent of revolutionary justice positioned within the ranks of the oppressed. McNally's description of 18th-century England as an ever-burgeoning

> corpse-economy in which human bodies, increasingly commodified in life, assumed in death the status of commodities pure and simple. So extreme was the reification involved that a corpse intended for the market was dubbed a 'Thing' (52)

rings true to some extent for 21st-century Baghdad, more so in the Baghdad picturized within the pages of Saadawi's text, as the Whatsitsname utters, "I kill in order to keep going" (Saadawi 259). While Hadi's efforts, as he rambles, "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" (Saadawi 25), are rooted in a kind of dialectical reversal marked by "the liberation of things, as well as persons, from circuits of abstraction" (McNally 267), the creation itself slinks over to the other side as an agent of indiscriminate violence. He becomes an extension of the system, with his very existence justifying further militarization and cycles of retaliatory violence. His body, perpetually oozing and disintegrating, forecloses his ability to achieve any form of solidarity. Unlike the proletarian body, defined by its embeddedness in collective labor and shared material conditions, the Whatsitsname's body, albeit an assortment of traumas and memories collected as scraps, is radically unstable and incapable of sustaining a coherent identity. His persistently leaking "blood and sticky plasma fluids" (Saadawi 145), "viscous liquids, light in colour, oozing from parts of it" (Saadawi 24), the "strong smell of rot" (Saadawi 142) accompanying his melting eyes and rotting limbs signify a corporeal fragmentation that mirrors his ontological crisis. This state of constant flux, one which lacks a stable referent and a permanent face, underscores the instability of a revolutionary figure forged solely from fragmented "parts" while devoid of an ideology and proper understanding of the situation, which then deprives him of the shared consciousness that emerges through an individual's ability to recognize their position within a broader historical framework. Herein, Cohen's idea that the "[m]onster [a]lways [e]scapes" (4) to return, reframe, and rearticulate cultural fears might appear to hold in the Whatsitsname's unstable form, but the

critical difference becomes that here the monster does not merely escape, it is constantly co-opted and subsumed by apparatuses of control. His very terms of formulation, thus, render him a grotesque product, who shows how monstrosity in the necrocapitalist order neither returns nor is animated by a desire for resistance but by vengeance and ideological incoherence, predetermined to collapse.

Rather, his actions can be seen in the light of what Žižek writes about the 2005 Paris riots, "There was only an insistence on recognition, based on a vague, unarticulated ressentiment" (*Violence* 75), a desire for acknowledgment of the pain and indignation suffered by the civilians. Žižek's observations about that particular incident:

> The sad fact that opposition to the system cannot articulate itself in the guise of a realistic alternative, or at least a meaningful utopian project, but only take the shape of a meaningless outburst, is a grave illustration of our predicament. … The protesters' violence was almost exclusively directed against their own. The cars burned and the schools torched were not those of richer neighbourhoods. They were part of the hard-won acquisitions of the very strata from which the protesters originated (*Violence* 76)

resonate with the reality of Iraq and the Whatsitsname's actions. Akin to the violent ritual of the sectarian suicide bombers perpetuating terror, the Whatsitsname starts off by enacting retributive justice, which soon spirals into indiscriminate killing, solely driven by ensuring his own existence rather than serving a coherent purpose. His body, bearing revolutionary potential, becomes a site of both life and imminent death, embodying the paradox of suicide terrorism, and this is what intensifies the horror. Intrinsic to his viewpoint is a fixation upon individual instances of humiliation and debasement, while he overlooks the very circumstances that had thrust the entire nation into mayhem and the parties responsible for the same. While he projects himself as a figure of revolutionary terror, a form of "totalitarian 'idealist' Evil, accomplished with the best intentions" (Žižek *Iraq* 75), the sectarian insurgents to which we have compared him previously embody a manifestation of fundamentalist Evil "bent on the ruthless infliction of massive damage, destined to cause fear and panic" (Žižek *Iraq* 75). As such, the shift in his mission from "I am the answer to their call for an end to injustice and for revenge on the guilty … I will take revenge on all the criminals. I will finally bring about justice on earth" (Saadawi 137) to "I'm now taking revenge on people who insult me, not just on those who did violence to those whose body parts I'm made of" (Saadawi 178) is quite telling in itself as he becomes a complex symbol straddling both forms of violence as his claim to justice collapses.

Despite being an unwitting agent of necrocapitalism, the Whatsitsname is ultimately a tragic figure resurrected from the midst of a war economy beyond his control. Oscillating between complicity and resistance while grappling with an existential crisis that underscores his pathos, he ruminates on the very nature of his being, questioning whether he is a victim seeking justice or just another criminal perpetuating violence. Struck by the realization:

> There are no innocents who are completely innocent or criminals who are completely criminal … every criminal he had killed was also a victim. The victim proportion in some of them might even be higher than the criminal proportion, so he might inadvertently be made up of the most innocent parts of the criminals' bodies (Saadawi 207),

that '[t]he flesh of the innocents, of which he was initially composed, had been replaced by new flesh, that of his own victims and criminals" (Saadawi 193), he "no longer had a clear idea who should be killed or why" (Saadawi 193). Pondering over the extensive list of people he intended to kill which was "replenished with new names" (Saadawi 207) as fast as it shrank, he labors under the impression that "avenging these lives [was] an endless task" (Saadawi 207) and even craves freedom simply by refraining from playing his part, "He thought if he took too long avenging the victims in whose name he was acting, the body parts he had taken from them would decompose in situ. It would be the end of him" (Saadawi 193). This propensity to view the self-proclaimed "noble mission" (Saadawi 126) as an "endless task" (Saadawi 207) that can only ever replenish the kill list further underscores how he has far been implicated within a necrocapitalist system with no conclusion in sight. The very juxtaposition of the word "replenished" (Saadawi 207), connotating renewal, restoration, and abundance, with a kill list is an irony of tragic proportions. However, his decision to persist amidst such dissonance as he believes that "he should exploit this distinctive talent in the service of the innocent – in the service of truth and justice" (Saadawi 193) by ensuring his own survival and salvaging "the spare parts he needed from the bodies of those who deserved to be killed" (Saadawi 194), even as he is left beleaguered and floundering for his next course of action betrays a fake sense of urgency predicated upon the belief that "[t]here is no time to reflect: we have to act now" (Žižek's *Violence* 6), his actions in a compulsive momentum that substitutes action for insight. Even as he proclaims, "It wasn't the ideal option, but it was the best one possible for now" (Saadawi 194) and "I kill in order to keep going" (Saadawi 259), the recursive act of killing masks a refusal, or perhaps a structural incapacity, to interrogate the conditions that produced him; a symptomatic reaction untethered from any sustained effort to situate his purpose. Thus, deviating from Cohen's celebration of the monster's ability

to destabilize boundaries, acting as "the [h]arbinger of [c]ategory [c]risis" (6), he emerges from a collapse of all meaning and moral order, revelling in an ambiguity which is not liberatory but symptomatic of deep existential disintegration.

This, then, makes one suspect the prophetic urgency with which he embarks on his mission, his conviction in his divine mandate, "I was the black hole and the Great Azrael, the Angel of Death, who would swallow up the whole world under the protection of divine grace" (Saadawi 148). Moreover, the presence of the word melt as "Whenever you kill someone … the body part that came from him starts to melt" (Saadawi 142), "my flesh was melting" (Saadawi 144), and "I started hoping that the killing in the streets would stop, cutting off my supply of victims and allowing me to melt away" (Saadawi 147) hints towards something far more sinister, reminding one of the famous proclamation, "[a]ll that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned" (Marx and Engels 16). Resurrected by a spectral force, the soul of Hasib Mohamed Jaafar, described as:

> With his hand, which was made of primordial matter, he touched the pale, naked body and saw his spirit sink into it. His whole arm sank in, then his head and the rest of his body. Overwhelmed by a heaviness and torpor, 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 (Saadawi 37-38),

and animated by Elishva's, a frail old lady who had lost her only son Daniel in the Iran-Iraq war, command "Get up, Daniel … Get up, Danny. Come along, my boy" (Saadawi 51), the Whatsitsname discovers that "the old woman had animated this extraordinary composite – made up of disparate body parts and the soul of the hotel guard who had lost his life. The old woman brought him out of anonymity with the name she gave him: Daniel" (Saadawi 51). His very creation thus exemplifies religious syncretism wherein the soul bestows vitality upon matter and is called to action by a divine force, an articulation that gestures towards both Islamic and Christian resurrectionist mythologies. Positioned as a variation of the figure of the Mahdi, a symbol of redemptive justice and cosmic restoration in Islamic eschatology who emerges specifically in times of socio-political turbulence and moral disarray, as stated by the author himself in an interview (*PEN Transmissions*), the Whatsitsname tries to functions as both an avenger and a messiah whose advent signals the restoration of equity and obliteration of systemic oppression, Following the Twelver Shi'ism's belief in the return of Imam al-Mahdi before the Day of Judgement, Moojan Momen notes in *An Introduction to Shi'I Islam* –

> The Hidden Imam, the Imam Mahdi, is in occultation awaiting the time that God has decreed for his return. This return is envisaged as occurring shortly before the final

> Day of Judgement. The Hidden Imam will then return as the Mahdi with a company of his chosen ones and there will also return his enemies led by the one-eyed Dajjal and the Sufyani. The Imam Mahdi will lead the forces of righteousness against the forces of evil in one final apocalyptic battle in which the enemies of the Imam will be defeated. (166)

Among the several signs presaging the advent of the said Mahdi as delineated by Momen, these two seem particularly relevant in the current context:

> 4. The Arabs will throw off the reins and take possession of their land, throwing out the authority of the foreigners.
> 7. Death and fear will afflict the people of Baghdad and Iraq. A fire will appear in the sky and a redness will cover them. (168-169)

In the anarchic aftermath of the 2003 invasion, the figure of the Mahdi resurfaced as a rallying symbol amidst the vacuum of governance and endemic violence with the rise of militias. The conceptualization of this messianic figure in the form of the Whatsitsname, while exploring the interplay between mythopoetic imaginaries and historical exigencies, underscores the desecration of even deep-seated religious beliefs in the face of a necrocapitalist venture where "all that is holy is [indeed] profaned" (Marx and Engels 16). The Whatsitsname, born out of a negotiation between sacred traditions and current crises, ultimately adds to the carnage he had resisted, thus echoing the Gordons' pronouncement, "Monsters of disaster are harbingers of things we do not want to face, of catastrophes" (10). An interesting parallel can be found in the second chapter of Han Kang's *Human Acts: A Novel*, where we encounter a victim of the Gwangju Massacre whose soul remains tethered to his mutilated body, suspended between material decay and incorporeal persistence. This spectral presence, caught in the necropolitical apparatus that governs life and death under state-sponsored repression, wonders, "If we'd been given a little more time, might we have arrived, eventually, at a moment of understanding?" (Kang 48). Commodified as mere collateral damage where all the historical, theological, and ontological certainties are sullied, he is "at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind" (Marx and Engels 16), equally pertinent for the Whatsitsname, the difference being our protagonist or antagonist (whichever way we choose to perceive him) shies away from the final realization.

Conclusion

Thus, the Whatsitsname embodies the contradictions of a figure born from and ultimately consumed by a necrocapitalist machinery. The grotesque spectacle of his body, riddled with bullet holes and stitched together in a chaotic

assemblage, embodies the self-consuming nature of Iraq's post-invasion landscape, leaving him bereft of a collective revolutionary agenda despite an initial sense of moral urgency. His steep descent into apathy, revealing the erosion of his initial ethical imperative, is accentuated by his lack of a clear idea about his targets, signaling the collapse of any and all revolutionary purpose and also illustrating the structuring of insurgency within a framework that thrives on perpetual instability, fear, precarity, and death. This resistance emerges in a landscape shaped by a military-industrial complex, sectarian conflicts, and an overarching war economy that curates performative acts of revolt while neutralizing their transformative potential, as one of Brigadier Majid's, the head of a government agency tasked with capturing the Whatsitsname, fortune tellers confides in him, "I think we played a role in creating this creature, in one way or another" (Saadawi 209). Rather than overturning the necrocapitalist order, this monster becomes just another one of its instruments, haunted by the impossibility of ethical action in a landscape where monstrosity is both symptom and system, and exposes how necrocapitalism co-opts even the figure of the revolutionary into its recursive production of profitable death.

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