
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Translating Religious Trauma in Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein* in Baghdad: Strategies and Meaning Shift

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| ABSTRACT

This article examines the translation of religious trauma in Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein* in Baghdad, with particular attention to how Jonathan Wright's English version mediates sacred language, sectarian identity, and traumatic affect for Anglophone readers. The study argues that religious trauma in the novel is embedded not only in theme but in discourse: prayer, saint veneration, church ritual, burial, curses, and divine punishment are repeatedly entwined with grief, fear, shame, and loss. Using a qualitative comparative-analytical approach, the article reads selected Arabic passages alongside their English translations to identify the strategies through which religiously charged expressions are preserved, attenuated, or reframed. The analysis is grounded in translation studies, trauma theory, and postcolonial criticism, with particular attention to domestication, foreignization, and the translator's ethical role in mediating culturally and spiritually saturated language. The article contends that Wright's translation does more than transfer meaning across languages: it actively shapes the visibility, intensity, and interpretive frame of religious trauma in the target text. By tracing these translational shifts, the study contributes to scholarship on Arabic-English literary translation, religious trauma, and the representation of sectarian suffering in contemporary fiction.

| KEYWORDS

Religious trauma, translation, Ahmed Saadawi, *Frankenstein* in Baghdad, Jonathan Wright, comparative-analytical study, Arabic-English translation

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1. Introduction

Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* has been widely read as a novel of war, fragmentation, and collective loss, but its religious dimension is equally central to the novel's critical force. Set in post-2003 Baghdad, the novel stages violence not only as a political and bodily catastrophe but also as a crisis of meaning in which prayer, saint veneration, burial, divine judgment, and sectarian identity become inseparable from grief, fear, shame, and unresolved mourning. In the Arabic original, religious language is not ornamental; it is part of the narrative's emotional grammar and a medium through which characters negotiate trauma, hope, and moral injury. (Saadawi, 2013; Al-Mahfoodh & Benny, 2025; Hussein, 2024)

Translation becomes especially significant here because the novel's religious texture is deeply embedded in Arabic cultural and sectarian specificity. Existing scholarship on Jonathan Wright's translation of *Frankenstein in Baghdad* shows that the English version is shaped by strategies of domestication, foreignization, communicative transfer, and cultural mediation, with cultural loss repeatedly identified as a likely consequence of translation across distant linguistic systems. These studies are valuable because they show that Wright's translation does not merely reproduce the source text; it also reshapes how cultural markers, ideological tensions, and literary effects are received in English. However, they have not yet focused specifically on religious trauma as an analytical problem. (Asad, 2021; Phillips, 2023; Venuti, 1995)

This gap matters because religious trauma is often carried through language that is at once devotional and wounded, intimate and coercive. In Saadawi's novel, religious references help encode experiences of loss, fear, vengeance, and desecration in ways

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that are emotionally dense and culturally saturated. When such material is translated, the question is not only whether the referential meaning survives, but whether the translated text preserves the affective and ethical force of religious suffering. Recent work in translation and trauma studies emphasizes that translation is often entangled with difficult experience and that the translator's ethical positioning, cultural mediation, and framing decisions shape how trauma is articulated across languages. (Basu, 2021; Tymoczko, 2000; Basalamah, 2023)

Accordingly, this study examines the translation of religious trauma in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* through Jonathan Wright's English version, asking how translation strategies mediate sacred language, sectarian memory, and traumatic affect for Anglophone readers. The paper argues that the novel's religious discourse is a crucial site where translation either preserves, attenuates, or reframes the intensity of trauma. By reading selected Arabic passages alongside their English translations, the study contributes to scholarship on Arabic-English literary translation, translation ethics, and the representation of religiously inflected suffering in contemporary fiction. (Saadawi, 2013; Saadawi, 2018; Phillips, 2023)

2. Literature Review

Religious language has long been recognized as one of the most culturally dense and semantically resistant domains of translation. Its force lies not only in referential meaning, but also in theological analogy, ritual use, communal memory, and doctrinal authority, which means that a religious term often carries more than one layer of significance at once (Hill, 1956; Pihlaja, 2021; Shmiher, 2016). In translation, this density creates an interpretive problem: a source-language expression may be rendered accurately at the level of dictionary meaning while still losing its devotional, historical, or affective force in the target language. For this reason, religious translation is repeatedly described in the literature as a site where equivalence is unstable and where the translator must choose between preserving source-text difference and increasing target-text readability (Obeidat & Mahadi, 2019; Venuti, 1995). This difficulty becomes even more pronounced when Arabic emphatic and repetitive structures carry semantic and pragmatic force that is not easily reproduced in English, since emphasis and repetition in Arabic can function as reinforcement, concentration, explanation, attention direction, and even threat (ALYousef & Mahadi, 2019a, 2019b).

Scholars of religious translation also stress that sacred discourse is rarely neutral. Religious terms may authorize belief, structure communal identity, regulate conduct, or mark exclusion, and these functions become especially consequential when religious language is used to express suffering or conflict (Hemel & Szafraniec, 2016; Corrales, 2024). Translation then becomes more than a technical transfer of lexical items; it becomes a form of mediation that can either preserve or soften the original utterance's coercive and affective pressure. In this sense, the translation of religious language is directly relevant to trauma studies, because injury in religious contexts is often carried through prayer, command, lament, confession, curse, or divine address rather than through explicit psychological naming (Basu, 2021; Deane-Cox, 2025). The literature therefore suggests that spiritual injury is especially vulnerable to distortion when translated into more generalized, secular, or stylistically smoothed English forms. This broader view is supported by work on multilingual academic discourse, which shows that language can function as a persuasive cultural instrument across cross-cultural settings and that translation choices reshape rhetorical and affective force rather than merely replace words (ALYousef et. al., 2025).

Within Arabic-English translation studies, this issue has been addressed most often through analyses of religious terminology, sacred collocations, and culturally marked expressions. Obeidat and Mahadi (2019), for example, show that translating Arabic religious-cultural collocations into English often involves a strategic tension between domestication and foreignization. Their findings indicate that domesticating choices may improve fluency, but they can also reduce the specificity of religious and cultural meaning, while foreignizing strategies preserve source-text texture at the cost of immediate transparency. ALYousef and Mahadi (2019a) demonstrate that Arabic verbal emphasis is shaped by semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic asymmetries between Arabic and English, while ALYousef and Mahadi (2019b) show that Arabic built-in-language repetition is more frequent and culturally marked, requiring translators to remain attentive to both linguistic systems and cultural context. Similar concerns appear in other studies of Islamic terminology, where translators are often advised to retain key source terms, use explanatory rendering, or adopt dynamic equivalence only when direct transfer would erase doctrinal nuance (Ibrahim, 2019; o'g'li, 2025). These studies are important for the present article because they show that the translation of religious meaning is never merely lexical: it is also cultural, ethical, and interpretive.

A second strand of scholarship emphasizes that translation is inseparable from power. Postcolonial translation theory argues that texts entering dominant languages are often reshaped by expectations of fluency, accessibility, and cultural legibility, which can alter how religious or culturally marked material is received (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990; Tymoczko, 2000; Spivak, 1993). This is especially relevant for Arabic literature translated into English, where the target text may be made to conform to the norms of Anglophone readability even when those norms reduce the density of source-cultural reference. Phillips (2023) demonstrates this clearly in the case of *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, arguing that the English edition participates in processes of consecration, annexation, and decontextualization. Although her focus is broader than religious trauma, her argument is useful here because it shows that translation can recast an Iraqi novel for a global readership while partially detaching it from its local cultural and

historical textures. Recent work on Arab Spring diaspora further shows that sectarian conflict produces new diasporic identities shaped by internal displacement, fractured belonging, and transnational mobility, which helps explain how translated Arabic fiction circulates through histories of rupture rather than stable national identity (Abedalqader et al., 2021). A related multilingual perspective appears in research on Jordanian academic discourse, where persuasive force is shown to emerge through the interaction of rhetoric, language choice, and cross-cultural negotiation rather than through neutral information transfer alone (ALYousef et. al., 2025).

Trauma study adds another crucial dimension to this discussion. Trauma is commonly associated with fragmentation, repetition, silence, and the difficulty of fully narrating overwhelming experience (Caruth, 1996; Herman, 2015). In literary texts, trauma often appears not as direct explanation but as a pattern of broken or intensified speech, bodily imagery, compulsive repetition, or indirect symbolic form. Basu (2021) and Deane-Cox (2025) extend this insight into translation studies by showing that trauma is not only represented in language but also mediated through it. Their work is especially relevant for religious trauma, because sacred language can become the vehicle through which grief, coercion, shame, or fear are articulated. When such language is translated, the translator does not simply transfer meaning; the translator also reshapes the rhythm, intensity, and ethical pressure of the traumatic utterance. A related argument appears in recent work on necropolitical temporality, which shows that authoritarian violence can colonize memory, immobilize the present, and foreclose futurity; this perspective is useful for understanding how trauma in literary texts is not only emotional but also temporally organized and politically produced (Abedalqader, 2025). The significance of repetition here is especially important, because studies of Arabic verbal emphasis and repetition show that reiterated forms often carry expressive intensity and pragmatic pressure that may be diluted in English translation if normalized for fluency (ALYousef & Mahadi, 2019a, 2019b).

Although literature provides strong tools for analyzing religious language and translation, direct work on religious trauma in literary translation remains limited. Most studies focus on sacred texts, theological discourse, audiovisual subtitling, or lexical problems in translating religious terms, rather than on trauma-bearing narrative prose (Kanakri et al., 2025; Pihlaja, 2021; Rustom, 2014). Even when spiritual crisis or wounded subjectivity appears, it is usually addressed indirectly. Rustom's (2014) study of Ibn 'Arabī, for instance, is valuable for its attention to spiritual struggle and certitude, but it does not address trauma as a literary or translational category. Likewise, studies of religious discourse and performativity show how sacred speech can shape experience, yet they stop short of examining how translation mediates harm, vulnerability, or wounded faith in fiction (Hemel & Szafraniec, 2016; Pihlaja, 2021). This leaves an important gap between the translation of religious meaning and the translation of religious injury. Other recent translation research, especially on machine translation, remains primarily concerned with system design, transfer stages, and output quality rather than with the ethical and affective mediation of literary trauma (AL-Yousef, et. al., 2025). Similarly, broader bilingual work on Arabic-English code-switching foregrounds identity and lexical gaps, but it does not address trauma-bearing sacred discourse in literary translation (Al Yousef, et. al., 2025).

Although existing studies have examined *Frankenstein in Baghdad* through the lenses of trauma, identity fragmentation, postcolonial violence, and cultural translation, they have not specifically analyzed how religious trauma is translated from Arabic into English in the novel, especially in passages where sacred language, devotional speech, and sectarian memory carry the emotional burden of grief and injury (Al Mahfoodh & Benny, 2025; Hussein, 2024; Phillips, 2023). The present article addresses that gap by focusing on how Jonathan Wright's translation mediates sacred language that is already marked by loss, fear, and spiritual disorientation in the Arabic original. This focus is important because it allows the study to examine not only whether religious content is preserved, but also how its traumatic force is recalibrated in English.

The literature reviewed here therefore converges on three points. First, religious language is semantically dense and culturally embedded, so it resists simple equivalence in translation (Hill, 1956; Shmiher, 2016). Second, translation strategy matters because domestication, foreignization, transliteration, and explanatory rendering shape whether sacred meaning is preserved or softened (Obeidat & Mahadi, 2019; Venuti, 1995). Third, trauma theory shows that emotional injury is often encoded through repetitive, fragmented, or devotional language, which makes sacred discourse especially important in trauma narratives (Basu, 2021; Deane-Cox, 2025). The findings of ALYousef and Mahadi further strengthen this point by showing that repetition and emphasis in Arabic are not ornamental forms but meaning bearing, pragmatically loaded structures whose force may diminish in English translation if treated as stylistic excess (ALYousef & Mahadi, 2019a, 2019b). Taken together, these studies establish the need for a focused analysis of religious trauma translation in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*.

3. Theoretical Framework

This article examines the translation of religious trauma in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* as a culturally situated and textually mediated phenomenon. In the novel, religious language is not decorative but structurally central to the representation of grief, fear, sectarian injury, and spiritual disorientation. Prayer, saint veneration, liturgy, curse speech, and scriptural quotation all function as trauma-bearing forms, carrying emotional and cultural force that often exceeds their literal lexical meaning. For this

reason, the study treats religious trauma not as a purely psychological category, but as a discursive and translational problem shaped by language, culture, and power (Basu, 2021; Deane-Cox, 2025; Pillen, 2016).

The theoretical framework combines three interrelated perspectives. First, it draws on Venuti's distinction between domestication and foreignization to examine whether Wright's translation smooths religiously marked expressions into familiar English forms or retains the source text's cultural and devotional specificity (Venuti, 1995). In this article, domestication refers to translational choices that increase target-language fluency and readability, while foreignization refers to strategies that preserve the strangeness of Iraqi Christian and sectarian references. These categories are not treated as absolute but as analytical positions along a continuum of translational decision-making. Their value lies in showing how translation affects the visibility of religious trauma in the target text.

Second, the study is informed by trauma theory, especially its emphasis on repetition, fragmentation, silence, and the difficulty of narrating overwhelming experience in stable form (Caruth, 1996; Herman, 2015). Religious trauma in Saadawi's novel is often indirect and cumulative rather than explicit; it appears through ritual habit, devotional speech, recurring prayer, and morally charged invocations. Such language does not merely represent trauma but performs it, embedding emotional injury within forms of sacred address and communal memory. This perspective makes it possible to analyze how translation alters not only meaning, but also tone, rhythm, and affective pressure in passages shaped by religious suffering (Basu, 2021; Deane-Cox, 2025).

Third, the framework adopts a postcolonial orientation in order to situate translation within unequal cultural circulation. Arabic literary texts entering English are not transferred into a neutral space; they are repositioned within a global literary market that often privileges fluency, transparency, and familiar cultural cues (Tymoczko, 2000; Phillips, 2023). In this context, religious trauma may become more accessible to Anglophone readers, but also more generalized or culturally softened. Translation is therefore understood here as an ethical and ideological act that mediates Iraqi religious suffering while also reshaping the terms under which that suffering becomes legible in English. This approach aligns with broader postcolonial scholarship that views translation as a site of power, representation, and cultural negotiation (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990; Gentzler & Tymoczko, 2002; Spivak, 1993).

Methodologically, the article adopts a qualitative comparative-analytical design. The primary texts are Ahmed Saadawi's Arabic novel *Frankenstein fi Baghdad* and Jonathan Wright's English translation *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (Saadawi, 2013, 2018). The study uses purposive sampling to select passages in which religious language carries clear traumatic force. These passages include scenes of prayer, saint devotion, curse speech, liturgy, scriptural quotation, and divine sanctions. Purposive sampling is appropriate because the aim is interpretive depth rather than exhaustive coverage of all religious references in the novel (Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2014).

The selected passages are analyzed through close reading of Arabic-English text pairs. This one is already fine; no real change needed. Each passage is examined in terms of lexical choice, syntactic structure, register, imagery, and pragmatic effect, with special attention to how Wright renders religiously charged expressions in English. The analysis asks whether the translation domesticates, foreignizes, paraphrases, explicates, compresses, or omits sacred language, and what those choices do to the emotional and cultural texture of the passage. Because the relevant shifts are often subtle, the method prioritizes textual density and contextual interpretation over quantification (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2014).

To organize the discussion, the article groups the examples according to the type of religious trauma they express. The main categories are ritual and grief, saintly devotion, curse and prayer, liturgy and displacement, and scripture and sacred violence. These are analytical categories rather than fixed divisions; they help trace how religious trauma moves across different narrative situations and how translation mediates each one differently. This thematic organization allows the article to show that religious suffering in the novel is distributed across both ordinary devotional practice and extraordinary scenes of fear and moral violence (Basu, 2021; Deane-Cox, 2025).

Overall, the framework and method allow the article to read translation as a process of meaning shift rather than simple equivalence. A phrase may remain lexically accurate while becoming less locally marked, more explanatory, or emotionally smoothed in English. Conversely, a translation may preserve the content of a religious utterance while altering its pragmatic force. This broader understanding of meaning shift makes it possible to examine how Wright's translation reconfigures the novel's religious trauma across linguistic and cultural boundaries (Venuti, 1995; Tymoczko, 2000; Phillips, 2023).

4. Discussion and Findings

The discussion shows that Wright's translation largely preserves the religious and traumatic intensity of Saadawi's Arabic text, yet it does so through an English idiom that frequently recalibrates the source text's cultural density. Across the selected passages, sacred language functions not as ornamental religiosity but as an affective medium through which grief, fear, sectarian injury, and spiritual disorientation are articulated. The translation consistently negotiates this material through a mixed strategy: key religious terms, images, and scriptural references are retained, while their pragmatic force is sometimes clarified, streamlined, or

subtly normalized for Anglophone readers. From a translation-theoretical perspective, the text moves between foreignizing religious content and domesticating narrative fluency, generating a recurrent pattern of meaning shift rather than straightforward loss or equivalence (Venuti, 1995; Phillips, 2023; Deane-Cox, 2024).

4.1 Religious ritual as trauma language

ST:

"لقد اكتسبت الكثير من عادات الحي الذي تسكن فيه، لذا نظرت الى الأمر على انه نذر تفي به الآن. رغم أن ابونا يوشيا يصحح لها دائماً هذا " (Saadawi, 2013, p. 71). "الاعتقاد الذي تمضي فيه

TT:

"Having adopted many of the customs of the neighborhood, Elishva saw it as a vow she was now fulfilling, although Father Josiah always corrected her." (Saadawi, 2018, p. 60).

Wright's choice of 'نذر' as 'a vow' preserves the devotional force of the original with notable precision, but the passage matters less for lexical equivalence than for the way the vow is embedded in Elishva's everyday spiritual life. In the Arabic, the act is not presented as a dramatic act of piety; rather, it is folded into the ordinary rhythms of neighborhood habit, communal memory, and religiously inflected grief. That subtle embedding is important because Elishva's faith is not detached belief but a lived form of survival, a ritualized response to absence and loss. The translation retains this structure, yet the phrase "the customs of the neighborhood" slightly levels the local density of the Arabic by converting a socially saturated Iraqi environment into a more general English phrase. The English thus remains faithful to the scene's emotional logic, but it does so through a smoother idiom that softens the local weight of the original.

From the perspective of domestication and foreignization, this is a restrained domesticating move: the sacred act remains visible, but its neighborhood-specific Iraqi texture becomes more legible for Anglophone readers. Trauma theory helps explain why this matters. The passage does not narrate grief directly; instead, grief is displaced into ritual repetition, where faith becomes a way of managing injury without naming it. From a post-colonial perspective, the translation mediates a minority Christian experience in Baghdad for readers who may not know the social and religious habits that give the passage its full resonance. The result is not a loss of meaning, but a shift in density: the devotional meaning survives, while some of the cultural and historical pressure that sustains it in Arabic becomes less pronounced in English.

Example 2: Elishva and her patron saint

ST:

كانت تريد مواجهة شفيعة بوعده لها، ولكنها انتظرت حلول الليل، فخلال النهار لا تبدو صورة مارغورييتس أكثر من صورة. تبدو جامدة وساكنة تماماً، أما خلال الليل فإن نافذة ما تفتح ما بين عالمها والعالم الآخر. ينزل الرب ليحتسب في هيئة صورة القديس ليتكلم من خلاله مع هذه العجوز "البائسة التي افردتها قطع الحياة شيئاً فشيئاً حتى لتكاد تسقط في هاوية الضياع والتخلي الكامل عن الإيمان (Saadawi, 2013, p. 23).

TT:

"She wanted to challenge her patron saint on the promises he had given her, but she waited for night to fall because during the day the picture was just a picture, inanimate and completely still, but at night a portal opened between her world and the other world, and the Lord came down, embodied in the image of the saint, to talk through him to Elishva, the poor sheep who had been abandoned by the rest of the flock and had almost fallen into the abyss of faithless perdition." (Saadawi, 2018, p. 16).

The force of this passage lies in the way it transforms devotion into a nocturnal threshold experience. Elishva does not simply believe in the saint; she waits for a time when the image ceases to be inert and becomes a living channel through which the divine can speak. The Arabic builds this effect gradually, moving from the stillness of the daytime icon to the opening of a window between worlds at night. That movement is crucial because it makes faith feel fragile, bodily, and dependent on ritual time. The saint is therefore not decorative religious imagery but part of Elishva's struggle against abandonment, grief, and the slow erosion of faith. Her relation to the saint is shaped by loneliness, and the spiritual encounter becomes one of the few remaining forms through which her injured self can still address loss.

Wright's translation preserves this mystical structure with considerable care, but it also turns the scene into a more explicated and syntactically guided English passage. The phrase "a portal opened between her world and the other world" is especially significant because it makes the symbolic threshold highly legible, almost cinematic, for Anglophone readers. In the Arabic, the

image is more compressed and less overtly clarified, which allows the sacred ambiguity to remain denser. The translation therefore foreignizes the passage at the level of religious imagery, since it keeps the uncanny crossing between worlds intact, but it domesticates the passage at the level of readability by smoothing the sentence flow and clarifying the spiritual logic for the target reader.

From a trauma-theoretical perspective, this passage is one of the strongest examples of grief being transformed into devotional vision. Elishva's saint is not just an object of belief; he is a response to abandonment and spiritual disintegration. The text suggests that trauma has made the sacred world more necessary, but also more unstable, since the saint appears only in a liminal nocturnal space where longing, hallucination, and faith overlap. Within a postcolonial framework, the English version makes this distinctly Iraqi Christian mystical experience accessible to a wider readership, but it also shifts the passage slightly toward a more universal Christian register. The result is a meaning shift through recalibration rather than a simple loss: the scene remains spiritually dense and emotionally wounded, yet its local religious texture is more transparent and more easily absorbed into Anglophone literary expectation.

Example 3: Curses as grief speech

ST:

كانت تدعو عليه وترمي عليه لعنتها كلما شاهدته في الطريق. استمر الأمر لفترة طويلة، حتى غدا أبو زيدون يتحاشى لقاءها أو مصادفتها. لم "يعد يمر بزقاق ٧ خشية أن تخرج عليه من باب بيتها فجأة لترمي عليه لعنة جديدة مخيفة" (Saadawi, 2013, p. 76).

TT:

"She cursed him in her prayers and whenever she saw him on the street. Abu Zaidoun no longer went down Lane 7 in case Elishva suddenly came out of her house to curse him." (Saadawi, 2018, p. 65).

Wright's translation preserves the emotional violence of the scene without reducing it to ordinary hostility, and that restraint is essential because the curse in the Arabic is not simply an outburst of anger. The phrase "in her prayers" keeps the religious register active, so the curse remains suspended between devotion and injury, between sacred address and social retaliation. What makes the Arabic passage so charged is the way grief becomes repetitive speech: the curse is not a single act but a recurring one, returning each time Elishva sees Abu Zaidoun and accumulating force through duration rather than through immediate intensity. The threat therefore emerges not only from what is said, but from the fact that it is said again and again, and from the way Abu Zaidoun's movement through the neighborhood becomes reorganized around the possibility of encountering that speech.

The English translation retains this structure, but it condenses the passage's temporal layering. In the Arabic, fear grows through repetition, delay, and the slow sedimentation of avoidance; in English, the menace is still present, but it is rendered in a more direct and fluent narrative sequence. That shift matters because it changes the texture of trauma from something socially thick and cumulative into something more immediate and legible. From the perspective of domestication and foreignization, this is a restrained domesticating move: the sacred and traumatic force remains visible, yet the Arabic's layered atmosphere of menace is smoothed into English narrative flow. Trauma theory helps explain why this smoothing matters, because the curse is not merely speech but a form of embodied injury that produces spatial fear, social withdrawal, and repeated anticipation of harm. Within a postcolonial framework, the translation makes the scene readable for Anglophone readers, but in doing so it slightly softens the neighborhood-specific tension that gives the curse its full Iraqi resonance. The result is not loss but a shift in pressure: the wound survives, but its local density is translated into a more transparent idiom.

4.2 Sacred imagery and devotion

Example 4: The saint as living presence

ST:

لا أحد يستمع لها بشكل مخلص حين تتحدث عن ولدها الذي فقدته قبل عشرين عاماً سوى بنتها والقديس مارغورگيس الشهيد الذي تصلي لروحه "كثيراً وتعتبره قديسها الشخصي" (Saadawi, 2013, pp. 13–14).

TT:

"Nobody really listened to her when she spoke about the son she had lost twenty years ago, except for her daughters and Saint George the Martyr, whose soul she often prayed for and whom she saw as her patron saint." (Saadawi, 2018, p. 8).

This passage is crucial because it presents saint devotion not as a supplementary religious detail, but as the very medium through which unresolved mourning is sustained. Elishva's grief is so deeply embedded in her life that ordinary human listening

has effectively failed; her loss has outlived conversational reception and now finds its most responsive addressee in the saint. The saint therefore functions as a living relational presence rather than a symbolic ornament: he is the one figure capable of receiving a grief that has become too persistent, too intimate, and too historically burdened to remain within ordinary social exchange. That is why the passage matters so much for a reading of religious trauma — it shows mourning not as private introspection but as a devotional relation through which injured memory is preserved, externalized, and kept active.

Wright's rendering of مارگورگيس الشهيد as "Saint George the Martyr" preserves the semantic meaning of the reference while subtly shifting its cultural weight. In Arabic, the saint's name carries a local Iraqi Christian resonance that is not reducible to the English equivalent, because the phonetic texture and communal familiarity of the original name locate Elishva's grief within a specific minority world in Baghdad. The translation therefore keeps the devotional structure intact, but it also universalizes that structure by placing it within a more broadly recognizable Christian register. This is a clear example of meaning shift through cultural mediation: the emotional architecture of the passage survives, but the local density that gives it much of its historical force becomes more transparent and more portable for Anglophone readers.

From the perspective of domestication and foreignization, the passage is double-coded. The saint remains foreign in the sense that his sacred status is preserved rather than neutralized, and the English text does not secularize the scene. Yet the translation also domesticates the reference by aligning it with a familiar Christian idiom that makes the passage easier to process outside the Iraqi context. Trauma theory helps explain why this is important: the saint becomes a sacred addressee for injured memory, allowing grief to be spoken outward rather than remaining locked inside the self. Within a postcolonial framework, Wright's translation mediates a minority Christian experience through a global literary language, making it accessible while slightly reducing the local singularity that the Arabic name carries so powerfully.

Example 5: The Mass and the prayer

ST:

انفرد وجهها بابتسامة راضية، وشكرت الأب يوشيا. وخلال الوقت اللاحق، كانت تتابع قراءة القُداس، ثم تردد بشفتيها دون صوت تسبيحتها الأثيرة "«المجد لله في العلى وعلى الأرض السلام وللناس المسرة» بينما ذهنها مشغول بالمكالمة المتأخرة لثلاثة أسابيع (Saadawi, 2013, p. 106).

TT:

"Her face lit up with a contented smile, and she thanked Father Josiah. Then she followed the Mass, mouthing her favorite prayer silently: 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.' But her mind was on the phone call that was three weeks late." (Saadawi, 2018, p. 95).

Wright's rendering of the Mass and the prayer preserves the liturgical surface of the passage with notable care, but the deeper significance lies in the way the scene organizes coexistence rather than resolution. Elishva's face brightens, she thanks Father Josiah, and she participates bodily in the Mass, yet her interior life remains fixed on the delayed phone call. The passage therefore stages a divided consciousness in which ritual does not absorb grief and grief does not interrupt ritual; both proceed together, each occupying a different register of experience. That tension is central to the scene's emotional logic, because it shows devotion not as consolation that cancels waiting, but as a mode of endurance that survives alongside uncertainty.

The prayer itself is especially revealing because Wright translates it into a familiar biblical English register that is immediately intelligible to Anglophone readers. This gives the line a recognizable sacred cadence, but it also subtly broadens the prayer beyond the local Catholic or Assyrian environment of the Arabic original. In the source text, the liturgical moment feels grounded in a particular minority Christian world where prayer, memory, and communal belonging are closely interwoven; in English, that density is softened into a more universal Christian idiom. From the perspective of domestication and foreignization, the translation preserves the sacred image but domesticates the liturgical texture by widening the prayer's audience.

Within a trauma framework, this matters because the passage does not permit ritual to absorb grief, nor does it allow grief to erase ritual; instead, it presents waiting and liturgy as parallel forms of endurance. That parallelism is what gives the scene its emotional force, since Elishva's prayer is not an escape from absence but a way of moving through it without resolving it. The result is a controlled meaning shift in which the emotional intensity remains intact, but the Iraqi-Christian texture of the scene becomes more legible and more portable for English readers. In postcolonial terms, Wright's translation mediates a local devotional world for a wider readership while preserving the scene's sacred seriousness and its quiet, unresolved sadness.

Example 6: The saint speaking at night**ST:**

أنت لم تقتل ذلك التين. أليس كذلك أيها الحربي. سألت مجدداً وانتظرت رده بصبر. نهضت وظلت تحد النظر إلى الوجه الوسيم للقديس الصامت. سينتهي كل شيء يا إيليشوا.. لما العجلة؟ قال لها ذلك، دون أن يحرك شفثيه حتى. لم يتحرك أي شيء في الصورة وملأ صوته، مع ذلك الصامت. (Saadawi, 2013, p. 237).

TT:

"You haven't killed this dragon, have you, you warrior?" she said, then waited patiently for his answer. She stood up, still staring into the handsome face of the silent saint. "Everything will come to an end, Elishva. Why the hurry?" said the saint, his lips not moving in the slightest. Nothing in the picture moved, and yet she could hear his voice clearly." (Saadawi, 2018, p. 203).

This passage is one of the most revealing in the section because it collapses the boundary between sacred presence and traumatic perception without resolving either pole. The saint remains materially fixed as an image — silent, unmoving, visually intact — yet he is also experienced as a speaker whose voice reaches Elishva with unmistakable clarity. That doubleness is not incidental but central: the passage stages devotion as a threshold condition in which the sacred becomes audible precisely because grief has made ordinary reality unstable. Elishva's question, her waiting, and the saint's calm reply all unfold within a rhythm of suspended expectation, so the scene becomes less a miracle in the conventional sense than a dramatization of how injured consciousness seeks address beyond the limits of the visible world.

Wright preserves this instability with considerable precision, but the English subtly regularizes the passage's movement through syntax that is smoother and more explicitly literary than the Arabic. The phrase "Why the hurry?" is especially important because it captures the saint's consoling tone while also leaving intact his unnerving ambiguity: the voice is tender, but it is not demystified; intimate, but not fully human; reassuring, but not explanatory. In this sense, the translation foreignizes the sacred encounter at the level of event — the miracle is not rationalized away — while domesticating the sentence flow so that English readers can move through the scene without stumbling over its estrangement. The meaning shift is therefore not one of loss, but of pacing: the Arabic's compressed, uncertain atmosphere becomes a little more legible, even as the passage continues to hover between faith, hallucination, and trauma-shaped vision.

From a trauma-theoretical perspective, the scene is powerful because it shows how loss produces a need for speech that ordinary human relations cannot satisfy. The saint's voice does not heal Elishva's grief; rather, it gives form to her need to hear something that can answer the loneliness created by loss. That is why the image matters so much in the novel: the sacred is not a decorative layer over trauma but one of the modes through which trauma is lived, displaced, and temporarily held. Within a postcolonial framework, Wright's translation renders this Iraqi Christian nocturnal intimacy intelligible to an Anglophone readership, but the very clarity of the English version also means that the local density of the original is slightly redistributed into a more universally readable literary sacredness. The result is a carefully mediated passage in which the saint remains strange enough to preserve his aura, yet clear enough to enter the English text as a recognizable figure of wounded devotion.

4.3 Sectarian trauma and displacement**Example 7: Sectarian cleansing****ST:**

"وفي مطلع هذه السنة طلب منها الأب يوشيا استضافة عائلة سنخيرو التي هربت من التطهير الطائفي في حي الدورة جنوبي بغداد" (Saadawi, 2013, p. 75).

TT:

"At the beginning of that year, Father Josiah asked Elishva if she could put up the Sankhiro family, who had fled sectarian cleansing in the southern Baghdad district of Dora" (Saadawi, 2018, pp. 64–65).

This sentence is deceptively simple, but its simplicity is part of its force. The Arabic compresses a major social wound into a single factual statement, and Wright preserves that restraint by translating it in equally direct terms. The phrase "sectarian cleansing" is particularly significant because it carries the violence of forced displacement without turning the sentence into commentary or spectacle. The result is a passage in which trauma is embedded in ordinary narration rather than isolated as a special event. That matters because the novel repeatedly treats sectarian violence as something that reorganizes everyday life, movement, and shelter, rather than as an abstract political crisis.

Wright's translation remains strong precisely because it does not sentimentalize the event, but the English phrase also widens the reference into a more general idiom of ethnic or religious persecution. In Arabic, the historical and spatial pressure of the Iraqi context is sharper: the violence feels specific to Baghdad's post-invasion realities and to the particular vulnerability of Christian families in that environment. In English, the phrase is still clear, but it becomes more globally legible, and that legibility slightly flattens the local density of sectarian experience. From the perspective of domestication and foreignization, the sentence keeps its force while domesticating its historical texture through a more widely recognizable term. Trauma theory helps explain why the understatement is effective: the passage does not dwell on suffering, yet the forced movement of the family is enough to mark the social world as damaged.

Within a postcolonial framework, the translation makes the violence readable to Anglophone readers without fully reproducing the Iraqi specificity that gives the phrase its political weight. The English version therefore acts as a mediation of sectarian trauma rather than a neutral transfer of information. The meaning shift is subtle but important: the emotional and factual content remains intact, yet the local historical pressure is translated into a broader category of displacement. That shift does not weaken the sentence so much as reposition it within a translatable literary vocabulary of persecution and survival.

Example 8: Religious conversion and social strife

ST:

هناك غائبون كثير، ولا بد أن يعود بعضهم. وهذا ما ظل يحصل تبعاً. حتى أن أحد أخوة نينوس نفسه عاد من أسر طويل في إيران والصدمة التي ظلت يتحدث عنها الكثيرون في وقتها أنه ترك عقيدته الأصلية وغدا مسلماً على المذهب الشيعي الاثني عشري، وظل على هذه الحال عدة سنوات قبل أن يعود تدريجياً إلى عقيدته، أو هكذا أوههم من أجل إنهاء الفتنة التي حصلت بسببه (Saadawi, 2013, p. 73).

TT:

"One of Ninous's brothers had come back after years in prison in Iran, and at the time many people had talked about the shock of learning that he had abandoned his original religion and become a Shiite Muslim of the Twelver branch. He remained a Shiite for several years but gradually converted back to Christianity, or at least that's what he had his family believe in order to put an end to the strife that his conversion had caused." (Saadawi, 2018, p. 63).

This passage is dense with social pressure because the religious change is never just a private spiritual decision; it is narrated as a rupture that produces rumor, shock, and communal unrest. Wright's translation preserves that burden with considerable clarity. The phrase "the strife that his conversion had caused" is especially effective because it keeps the social wound visible without overinterpreting it. The English sequence is explanatory, but not excessively so: it allows the reader to follow the chain of events while still feeling the weight of the family and communal tension attached to the conversion.

At the same time, the translation transforms an Iraqi-specific history of sectarian vulnerability into a more accessible narrative of religious change and family conflict. That accessibility is useful, but it also shifts the passage away from the charged atmosphere that surrounds sectarian identity in the Arabic original. The English makes the event readable as a documentary account, whereas the Arabic carries more of the pressure of local history, communal suspicion, and the fragility of religious belonging in wartime Iraq. In terms of domestication and foreignization, the translation leans toward clarity and explanatory flow, which makes the passage easier to absorb for Anglophone readers while reducing some of the density of its original context.

From a trauma perspective, this matters because the passage links conversion to the social afterlife of injury: the wound is not only in the act itself, but in the way the act continues to circulate through family memory and communal talk. Viewed through a postcolonial lens, the translation mediates this experience for an English-speaking audience that may not share the historical code that gives the event its full force. The result is a controlled meaning shift in which the emotional burden survives, but the social and historical texture becomes more explicit and less overdetermined.

Example 9: Communal Distance and Sectarian Trauma

ST:

"حتى النساء في الكنيسة، أصبحن أكثر برودة حين تتحدث أمامهن عن ولدها الذي فقدته في الحرب. لا جديد لدى العجوز، إنها تكرر الكلام ذاته، كذلك الأمر مع جاراتها المعجائز... وكلما تقادمت السنوات تخسر العجوز إيليشوا مؤيدين سابقين يبقونها الغريب أن ولدها الذي له قبرٌ بتابوت فارغ لم تعد تتحدث مع أحد عن خرافاتها هذه، تنتظر، فحسب." (Saadawi, 2013, p. 14)

TT:

"Even the women at church grew distant when she began to talk about her son—because she just said the same things over and over. It was the same with the old women who were her neighbors... Elishva was gradually losing people who had once

supported her strange conviction that her son was still alive, even though he had a grave with an empty coffin in the cemetery of the Assyrian Church of the East. Elishva no longer shared with anyone her belief that Daniel was still alive.” (Saadawi, 2018, p. 8)

This passage is important because it shows that trauma is not only contained in spectacular acts of violence or displacement, but also in the slow erosion of communal listening. The women at church grow distant not because Elishva’s grief is trivial, but because grief repeated too long can exhaust the social space around it; what the translation captures so well is the way her speech begins to sound like a loop that others can no longer absorb. Wright’s plain wording keeps that exhaustion visible without moralizing it. The sentence therefore registers trauma at the level of relation: Elishva’s suffering remains real, but the church community can no longer hold it in the same way, and that withdrawal becomes part of the novel’s emotional landscape.

The force of the line also lies in its understated social diagnosis. By pairing “the women at church” with “the old women who were her neighbors,” the passage links sacred space and neighborhood space, showing that the collapse of attentive companionship is not limited to one setting but extends across the ordinary textures of minority life. In the Arabic, the repetition of her telling “the same things over and over” marks grief as both compulsion and burden; in English, Wright preserves that iterative quality, allowing repetition itself to become the sign of a wound that has outlasted sympathy. From the perspective of trauma theory, this is a subtle but powerful shift: the injury is not dramatized, but sedimented into habit, fatigue, and the failure of listening.

Within a postcolonial framework, the passage matters because it presents Christian minority life not as an exoticized emblem of suffering, but as a fragile social world shaped by depletion, repetition, and quiet estrangement. The translation remains restrained, and that restraint is part of its ethics: it refuses to intensify the scene artificially, yet it also refuses to neutralize the pain behind the social distance. The result is a meaning shift that is minimal at the level of plot but dense at the level of affect, since the English version preserves the sense that trauma can hollow out community from within even when no overt crisis is named.

4.4 Scripture, revenge, and sacred-violent ambiguity

Example 10: Scriptural quotation as resistance

ST:

"لا تخافوا من الذين يقتلون الجسد" (Saadawi, 2013, p. 245).

TT:

"Fear not those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul." (Saadawi, 2018, p. 208).

Wright’s translation preserves the scriptural register with very little loss, but the deeper significance of the line lies in the way it functions inside the novel as a compact ethics of survival. The Arabic quotation is brief, almost abrupt, and its force comes precisely from that compression: it does not explain fear, but turns against it. In the narrative world of *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, the verse works as both comfort and resistance because it refuses to let bodily destruction have the final word. The line therefore does not simply cite scripture; it activates scripture as a response to violence, making religious language into a form of endurance under threat.

Wright’s English version expands the Arabic slightly by supplying the second half of the verse, and that expansion is significant because it shifts the passage from compact allusion toward more explicit biblical recognition. The quotation becomes more immediately legible to Anglophone readers, but in doing so it also loses some of the sharpness and restraint of the Arabic phrasing. That is why the translation can be read as a mild domesticating move: it preserves the verse’s authority while making its scriptural identity more transparent and accessible. In terms of meaning shift, the passage moves from compressed invocation to fuller biblical articulation, but the ethical force of resistance remains intact.

From a trauma-theoretical perspective, this matters because the verse does not merely refer to fear; it gives language to a world in which fear has already become ordinary. The line refuses the reduction of human life to bodily vulnerability alone, and that refusal becomes especially powerful in a novel marked by death, fragmentation, and coercive violence. Within a postcolonial framework, the translation makes the verse readable in English without erasing its function as a local act of moral and spiritual defiance. The result is a controlled shift in density: the English version is clearer and more recognizable, but the Arabic’s compressed force is somewhat redistributed into explanatory clarity.

Example 11: The monster's sacred rhetoric

ST:

عتلاتُ لقانون لا يستيقظ دائماً. اجتمعت دعوات الضحايا وأهاليهم مرة واحدة ودفعها بزخمها الصاحب تلك العتلات الخفية فتحركت أحشاء " العتمة وأنجيتني. أنا الردُّ على ندائهم برفع الظلم والاقتصاص من الجناة (Saadawi, 2013, p. 157).

TT:

"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." (Saadawi, 2018, p. 143).

This is one of the strongest examples of Wright's ability to preserve traumatic ambiguity because the monster's self-description is never simply mythic or political, but both at once. The Arabic passage moves through densely layered metaphor, linking collective suffering, hidden mechanisms, and violent emergence into a single prophetic utterance. The image of "the innards of darkness" is especially important because it turns trauma into generative darkness: injury does not remain inert, but produces a figure who speaks in the language of justice and revenge. The monster is therefore neither fully condemned nor redeemed; he is a response to accumulated harm, and the passage sustains that ethical instability without trying to resolve it.

Wright preserves the central image with striking clarity, but the English version is more streamlined and declarative than the Arabic. Some of the layered movement of the original is compressed into a cleaner sequence of statements, which changes the rhythm of the passage even though the meaning remains recognizably intact. The Arabic feels heavier, more incantatory, and more prophetically overdetermined; the English feels sharper and more aphoristic. That is a meaningful shift because the translation retains the idea of retaliatory emergence while slightly smoothing the density of the original's metaphorical pressure. In trauma terms, the TT keeps the figure of injury-made-voice, but it presents that voice in a more accessible English form.

From the perspective of domestication and foreignization, the translation sits in a productive middle space. It does not fully domesticate the image, because the darkness remains strange and unsettling, but it does clarify the syntax enough to guide English readers through the passage's ethical instability. Within a postcolonial framework, this mediation matters because the novel's wounded social world becomes intelligible in English without being converted into a simple political allegory. The result is a meaning shift from dense prophetic imagery toward cleaner declarative force, yet the unsettling relationship between trauma, justice, and violent rebirth remains fully active.

Example 12: Revenge under divine sanction

ST:

سأقتص، بعون الله والسماء، من كل المجرمين. سأنجز العدالة على الأرض أخيراً، ولن يكون هناك من حاجة لانتظار ممض ومؤلم لعدالة تأتي " لاحقاً؛ في السماء أو بعد الموت (Saadawi, 2013, p. 157).

TT:

"With the help of God and of heaven, I will take revenge on all the criminals. I will bring justice on earth at last, and there will be no need to wait for a painful, bitter justice to come later—in heaven or after death." (Saadawi, 2018, p. 143).

Wright keeps the sacred-violent fusion very clearly here, and the power of the passage lies in that refusal to separate revenge from divine language. The Arabic line is not simply about punishment; it stages a theological confusion in which justice, vengeance, heaven, and earthly action collapse into a single moral horizon. That collapse is central to the novel's messianic ambiguity because the monster speaks as if he were both avenger and executor of a higher order, yet the language never fully distinguishes sacred justice from human retaliation. The passage therefore exposes the novel's ethical instability at the point where religious vocabulary is absorbed into violence.

The English translation intensifies that clarity by making the contrast between earthly justice and delayed heavenly justice more explicit. The phrase "painful, bitter justice" clarifies the emotional and theological burden of the line, but it also expands what is more compressed and suggestive in the Arabic. As a result, the TT is slightly more legible as a political statement, whereas the source text remains more ambiguous in its sacred reasoning. That is not a weakness so much as a shift in rhetorical temperature: the English opens the line out, while the Arabic keeps it compact and morally unresolved. In terms of domestication and foreignization, the translation leans toward explanatory accessibility without dissolving the disturbing fusion of divine sanction and revenge.

Trauma theory is especially useful here because the passage shows violence speaking in the register of redress, as though injury could be answered by a purified act of force. The monster's rhetoric transforms suffering into mission, and that transformation is precisely what makes the scene so unsettling. Viewed through a postcolonial framework, the translation makes this sacred-violent logic available to English readers while preserving the line's ethical discomfort. The result is a controlled meaning shift from compressed religious ambiguity toward clearer moral articulation, but the central tension — between justice as transcendence and justice as revenge — remains powerfully intact.

4.5 Everyday religious trauma

Example 13: Religious persecution and displacement

ST:

(p. 242) وصل نادر شمووني الشماس الى بيت أم دانيال بصعوبة.

TT:

"Nader Shamouni, the deacon, had trouble reaching Elishva's house." (Saadawi, 2018, p. 205).

This sentence is minimal, but its minimalism is precisely what gives it force. Wright's translation remains almost completely transparent, yet that very transparency allows the difficulty of movement to function as a quiet sign of a damaged social world. The sentence does not narrate persecution directly, nor does it convert the moment into emotional spectacle; instead, it lets the plain fact of arrival under strain carry the weight of displacement. In a novel shaped by sectarian fragility, such restraint matters because trauma is often registered not in explicit declaration but in the obstruction of ordinary acts — reaching a house, crossing a neighborhood, moving safely through space. The sentence therefore turns logistical difficulty into a social symptom, where the friction of movement becomes evidence of a world under pressure.

The English preserves this factual economy, but its clarity also makes the passage depend more heavily on contextual knowledge. In Arabic, the surrounding social and neighborhood realities may already supply part of the meaning, whereas in English the reader must infer the violence from the situation rather than from the sentence itself. From the perspective of domestication and foreignization, this is a restrained domesticating move because the translation smooths the line into an ordinary narrative statement while leaving the traumatic implication implicit. Trauma theory helps explain why the sentence is effective: the wound is not announced, but deferred into the experience of movement itself, which is exactly how everyday religious persecution often becomes legible in fiction. Within a postcolonial framework, the passage renders a local scene of minority vulnerability in a way that is readable for Anglophone readers, but that readability also slightly reduces the density of fear embedded in the Iraqi context.

Example 14: Forced departure and family loss

ST:

سافرت ماتيلدا مع هيلدا وابنها الكبير دانيال الى العراق. اقام الثلاثة في بيت نادر الشماس في عينكاوا. وفي اليوم الثاني سافر الشماس مع الشاب الصغير الى بغداد. (p. 287)

TT:

"Matilda, Hilda, and her son Daniel had flown to Iraq and stayed in Nader Shamouni's house in Ankawa. The next day the deacon and Daniel had gone to Baghdad." (Saadawi, 2018, p. 237).

This passage presents movement across space as movement through instability. The language is plain and factual, but that plainness is deceptive because the sentence carries the burden of temporary shelter, migration, and unstable belonging. Wright preserves the structural simplicity of the Arabic, and that simplicity is appropriate because the emotional force does not depend on rhetorical embellishment. Instead, the trauma is embedded in the arrangement of bodies and destinations: arrival in one place, temporary residence, then onward movement. The sentence therefore stages displacement as a lived condition rather than a dramatic event, which makes it especially powerful as an example of everyday religious trauma.

At the same time, the English's neat sequencing can make the passage feel more neutral than the socio-religious context actually is. In a novel where Christian minority life is marked by fragility, mobility, and the need for refuge, even a travel sentence has a trauma charge that exceeds its surface calm. The translation retains this meaning, but its directness slightly reduces the density of precariousness that surrounds the scene in Arabic. From the perspective of domestication and foreignization, the passage is again domesticated through clarity: the reader receives a smooth narrative of movement, while the deeper vulnerability of that

movement remains implicit. In trauma terms, the sentence shows that displacement is not only a background condition but a form of ongoing injury. Viewed through a postcolonial lens, the translation makes the minority experience legible across languages, but in doing so it turns a locally charged sequence of movement into a more universally readable account of travel and shelter.

Example 15: The Sunday phone ritual

ST:

"وكثيراً ما كان يدخل الكنيسة ناس من أزقة حي جراج الأمانة، الذي تتوسطه الكنيسة، مسيحيون من طوائف أخرى ومسلمون، بقصد الاتصال الهاتفي المجاني مع أقاربهم في الخارج. ثم خفّ الضغط لاحقاً على الأب يوشيا مع انتشار الهواتف المحمولة، واقتناء الكثيرين لها، ما سوى العجوز إيليشوا المكتفية بطقس مكاملة الأحد" (Saadawi, 2013, p. 12).

TT:

"Often people from the surrounding Karaj al-Amana neighborhood—Christians of other denominations and Muslims too—would come to the church to make free calls to their relatives abroad. As cell phones spread, the demand for Father Josiah's phone declined, but Elishva was content to maintain the ritual of her Sunday phone call from church." (Saadawi, 2018, pp. 6–7).

This is one of the clearest examples of how ordinary communal practice can become a carrier of religious and social trauma. The scene is outwardly mundane: people come to the church to make phone calls, and Elishva preserves her Sunday routine even after mobile phones change the practical necessity of the ritual. Yet the passage is doing more than describing habit. The church becomes a shared civic and religious space in which Christians of different denominations and Muslims appear together, not as a conflictual crowd but as a community organized around need, access, and fragile coexistence. That social openness is important because it shows the church as a local institution where religious difference is lived alongside practical dependence, and Elishva's repeated call becomes part of a pattern of waiting that is both devotional and emotionally charged.

Wright's translation preserves this interfaith composition with clarity, especially in the phrase "Christians of other denominations and Muslims too," which keeps the coexistence of communities visible without dramatizing it. At the same time, "the ritual of her Sunday phone call" regularizes the Arabic *طقس* into a familiar English noun, which slightly softens the devotional texture of the practice. The translation therefore preserves repetition, waiting, and the symbolic importance of the act, but it makes the scene more fluent and less locally marked. From the perspective of domestication and foreignization, the cultural clarity of the English version is gained through a mild domesticating move that makes the practice easier to recognize as a habit rather than as a religiously saturated routine. Trauma theory helps explain why this matters: the ritual is not simply a call, but a structure of endurance in a world where communication itself is bound up with absence and uncertainty. Within a postcolonial framework, the translation renders a shared Iraqi social space intelligible to Anglophone readers, while slightly reducing the density of its local religious and communal texture.

At the same time, the translation repeatedly renders this religious world more accessible to English readers. It does so through familiar Christian phrasing, smoother syntactic flow, and occasional explanatory framing. The effect is not a simple loss of meaning, but a partial compression of cultural texture: the Iraqi Christian and interfaith setting becomes somewhat more universalized, more transparent, and less locally dense in English. In Venuti's terms, the translation combines foreignization at the level of content with domestication at the level of readability and framing. (Venuti, 1995; Phillips, 2023)

From a trauma perspective, this is especially important because trauma in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is inseparable from the forms through which it is voiced. Ritual repetition, devotional address, scriptural memory, and communal vulnerability all shape how suffering is articulated in the novel. Wright preserves these forms with considerable care, yet the English version often shifts them toward a more fluent literary register that slightly softens their Iraqi specificity. The translation therefore transmits the wound while subtly changing the voice through which the wound is expressed. (Basu, 2021; Tymoczko, 2000)

Wright's translation of *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is thus best understood not as a straightforward success or failure, but as a process of meaning shift. It retains the novel's emotional and ethical intensity while relocating part of its cultural weight into a more familiar English frame. For translation ethics, this is a crucial point: translating war literature involves not only carrying meaning across languages, but also deciding how much local religious and cultural specificity can survive that movement. (Venuti, 1995; Tymoczko, 2000; Basalamah, 2023).

5. Conclusion

This study has shown that Jonathan Wright's translation of *Frankenstein in Baghdad* preserves the novel's emotional and ethical engagement with religious trauma while also recalibrating its cultural texture for English readers. Across the selected passages,

sacred language remains central to the articulation of grief, fear, sectarian injury, and spiritual endurance, but the translation frequently renders these elements in a smoother and more accessible English idiom. As a result, the Iraqi Christian and interfaith world of the novel remains visible in translation, though its local density is sometimes partially compressed in the process.

Wright's handling of prayer, saint devotion, curses, liturgy, scripture, and sectarian displacement demonstrates that translation in this text is not a neutral transfer of content but an interpretive act that shapes how trauma is received. In many cases, the English version preserves the original's affective force with considerable care, especially where religious language functions as a vehicle for mourning or resistance. At the same time, the translation often introduces greater fluency, syntactic clarity, and explanatory legibility, which makes the text more immediately readable for Anglophone audiences but also slightly softens some of its Iraqi specificity.

This pattern is best understood as a process of meaning shift rather than simple equivalence or loss. Venutian terms such as domestication and foreignization are useful here because the translation often preserves the content of sacred experience while making its texture more familiar to English readers. The result is a text that carries trauma across languages without neutralizing it, yet also without fully reproducing the dense cultural pressure of the Arabic original.

5.1 Implications

The findings have several implications for translation studies. First, they show that religious trauma cannot be treated as a marginal feature of literary translation, because it is often embedded in the very forms through which characters speak, pray, curse, and grieve. Second, the analysis demonstrates that readability is never innocent: when sacred language is rendered more fluently, the translation may preserve emotional content while subtly reducing cultural specificity. Third, the study suggests that translation criticism needs to account not only for lexical accuracy, but also for the ethical and affective consequences of how trauma is framed in the target language.

For trauma studies, the chapter shows that injury is not represented only through catastrophic events but also through ritual repetition, devotional speech, and communal fatigue. In *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, trauma is lived through forms of address that are at once spiritual and wounded, and Wright's translation makes this dynamic legible while also smoothing some of its local pressure. This suggests that trauma in literary translation should be read as a question of voice, register, and relational force, not only as a question of thematic content.

From a postcolonial perspective, the study indicates that translation mediates minority Iraqi Christian experience for a global readership in ways that both preserve and reframe it. The English text makes the novel accessible, but accessibility comes at the cost of some cultural compression. This does not invalidate the translation; rather, it shows that translation is an act of negotiation in which cultural specificity, literary fluency, and translatability are constantly being balanced.

5.2 Recommendations

Future research could extend this study in several directions. One useful step would be to compare Wright's translation with other Arabic-English translations of Iraqi war fiction in order to see whether similar patterns of domestication and cultural compression recur across texts. Another direction would be to examine other kinds of religious references in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, especially Islamic and interfaith material, in more sustained detail.

It would also be valuable to study reader reception, particularly how English-language readers interpret the translated religious trauma and whether they perceive the same ethical and emotional intensity as Arabic readers. In addition, future work could compare *Frankenstein in Baghdad* with other novels by Ahmed Saadawi or with other contemporary Arabic novels shaped by sectarian violence, to determine whether Wright's strategies are specific to this text or part of a broader translation pattern.

Finally, the study suggests that translation ethics should remain central to discussions of war literature. Translators do not only move meaning from one language to another; they also decide how much of the local cultural and religious world can survive in the target text. In that sense, the translation of religious trauma is not merely a technical task but a moral and interpretive one, requiring careful attention to what is preserved, what is clarified, and what is inevitably transformed.

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