

Frankenstein's Legacy: A Study of the Technoscientific Grotesque and the Geopolitical Implications of Victor Frankenstein's Monster's Terrorist Idealism

Dr. Mamta Roy

Guru Kashi University, Talwandi Sabo

Abstract: The present study aims to analyze the characters of Frankenstein's monster and Frankenstein, the creator of the monster himself as the transgressive figures arising out as a result of some unholy amalgamation between man and animal and the implications of this has been analyzed mainly under the lights of Bakhtinian idea of 'Grotesque' and 'Carnavalesque' and the Foucauldian idea of networks of power.

Introduction: *'Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus'* by Mary Shelley is one of those earliest novels, where we see how the terror and its creator keep operating inside a closed signifying system where each and every attempt made by the maker to otherize, exclude and dehumanize his creation ends up reinforcing the very paradigm of terror itself. Although the novel itself never mentions explicitly anything about terrorists or terrorism, it is remarkable to see how and why the imagery of Frankenstein's monster has become a staple of political reporting on the rise and spread of global terrorism. The very creation of Frankenstein bears parallel to the creation of nations like Israel, the creation of radical, Islamist, terrorist organizations like Al Qaeda and ISIS, and even the rise of the belligerent nations like North Korea or its dictator Kim Jong-Un among many others. Last but not least, Frankenstein's monster functions like a disruptive symbolism, which thwarts all our attempts at the linear, hierarchical and organizational categorization of entities into either total good or total evil.

Discussion: Now, Frankenstein's monster can fit in a plethora of symbolisms, as for example it can symbolize the consequences of abandonment, or the desire for reanimation and reemergence from the state of otherized and ostracized etc. Frankenstein, as the male figure represents the mechanical creator who had intended to create a new form of life by appending the body parts of different animals and when it actually came into being Frankenstein rejected the creature as a totally deformed and degraded 'Other', which can never gain a meaningful place in the established hierarchy. Frankenstein's monster thus was left with no guidance or maternal care to look for and as such it started representing everything that was unnatural. He became the archetypal outcast - the uninvited and unwanted one whose very presence threatened to subvert the dominant epistemological structure. He began to be perceived as a flaw in the God-like experiment intended to reverse the natural process of death itself. His 'carnavalesque' presence opened up myriads of possibilities for fusion between apparently irreconcilable binaries of dualistic opposition, as well as prepared the ground for further renewal and rejuvenation. The monster of Frankenstein is depicted as a soulless, mindless lump of

mass which moved and talked and was of violent and barbaric nature: ‘the monster’s narrative is a philosophical meditation on what it means to be born without a “soul” or history, as well as an explanation of what it feels like to be a “filthy mass that move[s] and talk[s]”, a thing, an other, a creature of the second sex’ (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979). He was a refugee who came from the outside and sought shelter in the civilized world which was simply too rigid and exclusive to accept him as one of its own. So, he went on a rampage to make others feel his presence and also to vent his long-suppressed anger, hopelessness, despair and utter and terrible frustration at the system which could not provide a space for him.

His struggle can now be seen to be more in line of those of millions of refugees who have been displaced as a result of either natural or some man-made catastrophes and disturbances. Refugees often bring with them their own cultures, traditions, customs and crafts which often stand in stark contrast to the set of ideals, values and cultural codes upheld by the mainstream society and if the refugees cannot accept those ideals or adapt themselves with the existing and the predominant framework, they are treated as anti-socials and subsequently ostracized. Similar to a refugee, an android is also a being who is different both from a robot and a cyborg in that the former, i.e., the android is not necessarily a being made out of fusion between metal and flesh or human and machine; rather an android can be created out of fusion between man and animal too and as such he is only a special type of hybrid creature, the type that the first category in Donna Haraway’s demarcation of hybrid beings into three separate types envisages (Haraway, 1984). Frankenstein was both a refugee and an android who/which was constructed from parts and pieces of dead animals. With his presence he introduced dissolution of boundaries – living and dead, culture and nature and real and synthetic etc. So, the natural reaction of any civilized society would be to isolate and then eliminate such a threatening presence from their view and this was what exactly happened with Frankenstein also. In fact, we find mention of several overt and covert techniques for emasculating, disempowering and dehumanizing the monster in the novel. The first and foremost was to not provide him with any name whatsoever. It was only with the adaptations of the story of Frankenstein through different movies, TV Shows, plays and live performances that the name Frankenstein came to be associated with creature itself; but nowhere in the original text do we find any mention of the name of the monster. This act of namelessness or lack of an identity was one of several strategies intended to eliminate and ostracize him even further from the mainstream society thus increasing his alienation even more.

The monster’s creator had alienated himself from the society of his own volition, while the monster itself always sought company of the human beings and their acceptance and recognition. The creature was first confronted with rejection from his own ‘father’ who was none other than Victor Frankenstein himself. Victor was terrified to find the monstrosity he had created: “but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room and continued a long time

traversing my bed-chamber, unable to compose my mind to sleep” (Shelley, 1818). From the moment of his birth the creature faced total rejection and complete alienation and was left in the big, bad world to fend for himself.

In another instance, he felt this pang of alienation even more horribly when the entire community of the villagers attacked him and he was forced to flee: “... but I had hardly placed my foot within the door before the children shrieked, and one of the women fainted. The whole village was roused; some fled, some attacked me, until, grievously bruised by stones and many other kinds of missile weapons” (Shelley, 1818). So, the more he tried to cope with the existing power structure and society the more he felt threatened and finally after meeting all those rejections, vehement oppositions and extreme hatred from almost everyone, he unleashed the true beast within and embarked on a murderous rampage. There was only person who was really inclined to converse with him and listen to his story and he was the blind father of the DeLacey family. The other members of the DeLacey family had been highly inimical to him and constantly threatened to hurt him badly. The creature gradually realized that the secret method of articulating their feelings into concrete words was what had empowered the people around him with a godlike and almost magical ability to exert their authority over him. The monster, however, was never permitted to partake in this dynamic and constantly evolving network of power and influence. Foucault also viewed the world created by the language from an essentially poststructuralist point-of-view according to which, the language itself has been shaped by social structures, discourse, cultural norms and codes of conduct. Thus, language became one of the most fundamental cornerstones around which the power structure of the society has been built. So, the epistemological quest of uncovering the true source of power has led Foucault to interpret language and knowledge as two main constituents of hierarchical structure of power. Language is essentially tied to the ideas and is thus seen as vehicle of knowledge and in turn symbol of power and control. Also, Victor Frankenstein’s devotion towards scientific process and endeavor and his belief in the power of scientific experiment to change the world can be seen in the light of Immanuel Kant’s theory of Enlightenment which envisaged the very act of Enlightenment as a long, slow and uphill quest for a sacred truth and any revolutionary breakthrough synonymous with a sign of progress. The creation of the monster however, from a Foucauldian sense, created a sudden shift or discontinuity in the epistemic quest for some higher truth or enlightenment. The creation of the monster was such an act which should have been treated as a potentially dangerous act by Victor before finally helping it to come to being. Foucault also laid stress upon the process which he called ‘technologies of the self’, through which the dominant authorities employ processes of classification, objectification, exclusion, individualization and finally normalization. In case of Frankenstein’s creature, the process ended with exclusion and the monster was nowhere given any more chance to enter into the mainstream of life. Foucault’s discourse actually treated the ‘otherness’ as the one true problematic element in the discourse which can get transformed into a symbol of resistance for its

refusal to get assimilated within the framework of 'sameness'. Frankenstein's creature exemplifies this function of resisting 'otherness' in all its true glory. The 'Other' is extremely hard to be integrated and assimilated within the discursive framework not only because of its ability to unleash untotalizing influences but also because it tells of deaths, gaps, fissures and voids. So, while objects belonging to the normal order like words slide from one referent to another and cease to exist when there is nothing else to refer to, the 'other' stands tall primarily because it has no need to refer to anything else, and also because there is nothing like it for it to refer to. Frankenstein's creature is such an example of irreducible 'other' whose very presence threatened to disrupt the homogenous and the hierarchical. The scientific grotesque incarnate in the form of Frankenstein's monster served an embodiment of the essence of Foucauldian postmodern elements which tried to break the shackles of totalizing and unifying principles and attempted to go beyond the accepted ideas of identity formation, normalization and discourses of exclusion.

USA, the New Frankenstein and Its Monstrous Legacies: In a vein quite similar to Victor, USA too has endeavored to establish and solidify its worldwide power and geopolitical influence by manipulating various insurgent groups and extremists. First it has sought to use them for securing its own gain and then when it has felt the heat, it has sought to name these organizations as terrorists and jihadists and common enemies of mankind etc. The hidden agenda of USA behind its continuous support of the Taliban has always been to gain control over oil and also to block the spread of Communist ideals in the Arab nations and it is exactly for these reasons that CIA has sponsored and supported groups like Mujahideen and Taliban only for later to taste the fruits of its own actions. Michel Chossudovsky in his book "America's War on Terrorism" states that "The myth of the "outside enemy" and the threat of 'Islamic Terrorists" was the cornerstone of the Bush administration's military doctrine, used as a pretext to invade Afghanistan and Iraq" (Chossudovsky, 2005). His books also states that "documented by numerous sources, the ISI (Pakistan's military intelligence) was known to have supported a number of Islamic organizations including Al Qaeda and the Taliban" (Chossudovsky, 2005). So the Frankenstein's monster of the Islamic Terrorism is the fruit of the combined activities of both CIA and ISI and as we shall see that the monster always returns to hunt his creator in the grand finale. One of the most important aspects of this naming and gaming is to see how power shifts and changes from time to time in a most imperceptible and subtle way. Foucault stressed on this aspect of power relations in his *The Order of Things, Madness and Civilization, The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *The History of Sexuality*. He maintained that power operates not in a symmetrical and structurally predictable manner in which a central authority sits at the top of a pyramidal organization and wields his authority via force, suppression, oppression and negative sanctions, but that power network is always amorphous and autonomous and various nodes in the network influence the structure of power in a different way. Frankenstein's monster should be seen as a disruptive and subversive element in the discursive framework of the master narrative and so

the combined powers of the agencies attempted to destroy him. It is only when the creature rebounded, that the situation became complex and conflicting.

Now, from a Foucauldian sense, this type of exercise of power and authority is frequently seen in the actions of the larger imperial forces in the modern world through which they no longer seek to perpetuate their authority by force and coercion but by subtle moves like creation of client states, waging proxy wars, sustaining power lobbies, orchestrating covert ops and undercover operations etc. The creation of Israel and weaponizing it in every possible way has been another such move by USA to exert its authority on a global stage. Israel becomes America's Frankensteinian monster when it sought to break free from all moral obligations and took resort to ultraviolent methods to assert its dominant presence in the global stage of affairs. In fact, it is not a new theory that Western powers have been hell bent on applying divide and rule policies to destroy large nations like Russia in order to create more client states and then draw arbitrary boundaries amongst them to keep the fire of animosity burning. This is like the creation of Frankenstein when Victor chose to assemble and adjoin various parts of dead and living animals for creating the monster of his nightmare. The efforts of superpowers like USA and NATO to combat terrorism also parallel with Victor Frankenstein's efforts to decimate his own perverse creation. The plight of the monster and his acute sense of rootlessness, the pangs he felt on not getting accepted in the mainstream society and for lacking any family, all remind us of the trouble of the millions of refugees across the world.

The creature, like a desperate refugee attempted to fit into the society in various ways and only when they all fail did he proclaim his ever-lasting war against his creator and the human society in general: "should I feel kindness towards my enemies? No; from that moment I declared everlasting war against the species, and more than all, against him who had formed me and sent me forth to this insupportable misery" (Shelley, 1818). This has what exactly happened in the global stage too and various well documented sources have revealed USA's foreign policies and their unwanted involvement in other country's affairs that have later cumulatively resulted in the creation of deadly terrorist groups like Al Qaeda and ISIS. Garikai Chengu in his article published in globalresearch.org writes, "Much like Al Qaeda, the Islamic State (ISIS) is made-in-the-USA, an instrument of terror designed to divide and conquer the oil-rich Middle East and to counter Iran's growing influence in the region" (Chengu, 2017). Angela Keaton, the founder of antiwar.com also states that ISIS is "ISIS is an entirely a creation of the United States' behavior in Iraq. That's how we got to where we are, because of war, occupation and torture." Keaton further said, "The United States government completely destabilized and wrecked Iraq. They caused it to fail miserably and that is entirely the fault of the United States government. There is no one else to blame." Whether USA is solely responsible for the creation of the monster called ISIS is a matter of intense debate but the fact that it has played a very important role in creating vacuums of power by seeking to uproot the regimes of dictators like Saddam Hussein in Iraq and Bashar al-Assad of Syria is undeniable and it is these vacuums which have then drawn power

hungry groups of rebel militants and when these groups have later turned against USA, they have been branded as terrorist organizations. Other than weaponization and Balkanization of states on arbitrary grounds based on false perception of prevalence of Capitalism over other forms of socio-economic models, the factor which has played an increasingly dominant role in spreading and sustaining the violent idealism of the terrorists is the literal, monolithic and rigid interpretation of the sacred texts like Quran. There has been vacuum too in case of religious authorities in Muslim world and to fill up those vacuums, pseudo-religious and political figures like Osama bin Laden and his successor Ayman al-Zawahiri of Al-Qaeda and ISIS's self-proclaimed caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi have all risen up in due time. Victor in *Frankenstein* too had sought to conquer mortality and play God by infusing life into inanimate objects, thereby disturbing the natural order and symmetry of things and it was only when he finally found out what his creation had become that he decided to brand it as a terror and a living nightmare. So, the blood of all the victims in the novel namely Elizabeth, William, Justine and Chevril were both on the hands of the monster and on Victor's as well. Frankenstein's creature would appear as the true monster in the novel only when we consider his outward appearance and judge his conduct with others around him, but that should not make us forgetful about the environmental factors which had compelled the creature to unleash and unchain his barbaric side. His creator Victor, on the other hand, had been inhuman and monster-like almost from the very beginning of the novel and had chosen to remain so out of pure passion and self-willingness. He had been absorbed in his work so much that he could hardly differentiate between interactions with the living and interactions with the dead. He was self-centered and megalomaniac and also deliberately chose to discard all familial and social relationships which makes a man gregarious being. Though critics like Alicia Renfroe maintains that the "the loss of his mother, Caroline Beaufort" was what drove Victor to regenerate the dead but his neglect for the living at the cost of dead can never be supported with any amount of justifications. According to the critics like Knoepflmacher, Victor is "phallic and aggressive, capable of torturing 'the living animal to animate the lifeless clay'" (Knoepflmacher, 1974). In many respects, Frankenstein's monster's inner struggle and its evolution into a true monster capable of inflicting unthinkable amount of damage on those around him bear close resemblance to the terrorist ideology founded upon the twisted interpretations of Jihad as mentioned in some passages in Holy Quran. T.P. Schwartz-Barcott, in his book "*War, Terror & Peace*" has opined that the holiest of Islamic texts Quran itself preaches the need to convert all the world or Dar al-Harb (House of War) into one Islamic nation and only then can the dream of Dar al-Islam (or house/abode of Peace), or Dar al-Tawhid (house/abode of monotheism) can be truly realized. The believers are exhorted by Quran to engage in Jihad in four different ways: by his heart, tongue, hand, and finally his sword. Frankenstein's monster also went through these four different stages: he first tried to win the hearts of others by appeasing others; then sought to use language of the human beings to appropriate himself in the existing order; then decided to use his hand and embarked on his murderous voyage to exact revenge upon the disbelievers. A reading of *Frankenstein* and

exploring the monster's inner motives behind terrorizing people will be incomplete without an attempt to look deep into its soul. For the monster his struggle became either to accept the world as it is and isolate himself forever from the mainstream or to wage an eternal war against those who were never going to accept him; the monster choose the latter of the two paths and waged a violent war against those whom he thought would be his potential enemies. So, the act of terrorism becomes an action of liberation, a clarion call for assertion of one's might and what one perceives to be his/her god-gifted right and for all these actions when one finds legitimization of his cause the movement becomes a Jihad or a Crusade. Frankenstein's monster's struggle in a similar vein can be legitimized as a justifiable act whereby he only sought to regain his rightful place in the society and it was his act of resistance which might often appear to be praiseworthy and even heroic after considering all the odds that he had had to face in his life and it was by daunting all the challenges and overcoming all the obstacles in his path that he only endeavored to regain his rightful place.

U.S., much like Victor Frankenstein has always been more concerned with experimenting than maintaining peace and stability in Middle East countries. C.I.A tried to run its biggest covert operations during the 80s in Afghanistan to destroy Soviet incursion and from the deadly mixture of jihadist ideology with militant nationalism, the Regan administration unwittingly helped create the Frankenstein monster named Taliban and then Al Qaeda. In a similar vein, U.S., Britain and France can be held responsible for providing weapons to a group of militants rebels named Free Syrian Army (FSA) to topple Assad, while hardliner Islamist countries like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and even Erdogan's Islamist-inclined Turkey channeled their resources and energy towards creating a more overtly Islamist group which led to the creation of ISIS. So, if Victor Frankenstein can be equated with U.S. itself, then other Islamist countries can also be compared with other members of the society who with their channelized efforts, hatred and callousness paved the path for monsters like ISIS's rise. Now, another monstrosity which threatens to dismantle the status quo of the entire global political landscape is the dictator Kim Jong-un and his North Korea. Now any nation which threatens to use nuclear weapons on a pre-emptive basis it definitely is matter of grave concern to other nations and this is what North Korea under Kim Jong-un has been doing. It is quite clear that along with U.S.A, its chief enemy, other nations like Japan and South Korea are under the radar of North Korea's nuclear attack. In the same vein of Jihadist ideology, North Korean soldiers have been reportedly found proclaiming a "merciless sacred war" ("How potent are North Korea's threats?" , BBC). Now, if we see the history of North Korea and U.S.'s role in it we shall again start to wonder as to whether North Korea has every right to be as much inimical to U.S. as it is at present. In the paper titled "The Destruction and Reconstruction of North Korea, 1950 – 1960", Charles Armstrong states that "The US Air Force estimated that North Korea's destruction was proportionately greater than that of Japan in the Second World War, where the US had turned 64 major cities to rubble and used the atomic bomb to destroy two others" (Armstrong, 2010). So it is out

of a natural inclination to exact vengeance on its creator and perpetrator of atrocities in a most violent manner that North Korea has risen up in the world theatre as the Frankenstein's monster. U.S. indeed was the creator of both North Korea and South Korea when it arbitrarily drew the boundary named 38th Parallel between the two nations in which North Korea was backed by Soviet Russia's Communist ideals while South Korea was backed both financially and ideologically by U.S.A.-led Capitalist ideas. So we find that the action of the protagonist Victor Frankenstein in the novel at every possible instance parallels closely with the action of U.S. as they both wanted to play God and both ended up producing unimaginable monstrosities. Henk van den Belt puts it very aptly in the following words, "In discussions on biotechnology and synthetic biology, alongside and in combination with allusions to the presumed arrogance of playing God, a name is very often invoked that many scientists consider a tainted 'F-word': Frankenstein. In fact, the Frankenstein theme is closely entwined with the motif of playing God" (van den Belt, 2009).

Conclusion: So, from our analysis it is quite clear that like the Muslim extremists of ISIS or Al Qaeda or the belligerent, hyper-aggressive states like Israel and North Korea, the monster felt that the responsibility for his action should rest squarely both on himself as well as on his creator and the society. His creator abandoned him, the society rejected him and the combined action of everyone around him contributed to his degradation to a rank which was even lower than what even the beasts occupied – as such the monster justified his actions by shifting the responsibility on the society and the world around him. He expressed his broken hopes and unfulfilled dreams poetically in the following words which is still highly relevant today as it was at that time when the novel was written: "Once I falsely hoped to meet with beings who, pardoning my outward form, would love me for the excellent qualities which I was capable of unfolding. I was nourished with high thoughts of honour and devotion. But now crime has degraded me beneath the meanest animal. No guilt, no mischief, no malignity, no misery, can be found comparable to mine" (Shelley, 1818).

References:

1. M. W. Shelley, 'Frankenstein, or, The modern Prometheus: the 1818 text'. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
2. D. Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,' in Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature'. (Free Association, London, 1991).
3. M. Bakhtin, 'Rabelais and His World'. Trans. Helene Iswolsky. (Bloomington: Indiana UP. Print, 1984).
4. M. Foucault, 'Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison'. (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

5. M. Foucault, 'The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences'. (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).
6. M. Chossudovsky, America's "War on Terrorism". (Global Research, Centre for Research on Globalization, Quebec, Canada, 2005).
7. G. Chengu, 'America Created Al-Qaeda And The ISIS Terror Group.' *Global Research*, 2017.
8. A. Renfroe, 'Defining Romanticism: The Implications of Nature Personified as Female in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*.' Prometheus unplugged. (New York: Penguin Books, 1987).
9. U.C. Knoepflmacher, "Thoughts on the Aggressions of Daughters," in *The Endurance of Frankenstein*: Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel. Ed. Levine, George Lewis, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).