

Transcultural
**Journal of
Humanities & Social Sciences**

Print ISSN 4239-2636 Online ISSN 4247-2636

**Proceedings of the conference:
DIALOGUE AND EXCHANGE:
AN INTERDISCIPLINARY
CONFERENCE IN THE HUMANITIES**

24-26 OCTOBER 2020
CAIRO/ EGYPT



BUC
BADR UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO
جامعة بدر بالقاهرة

**Vol. 1, Issue 2
Winter 2021 Winter 2021**



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Transcultural Journal for Humanities and Social Sciences (TJHSS) is a journal committed to disseminate a new range of interdisciplinary and transcultural topics in Humanities and social sciences. It is an open access, peer reviewed and refereed journal, published by Badr University in Cairo, BUC, to provide original and updated knowledge platform of international scholars interested in multi-inter disciplinary researches in all languages and from the widest range of world cultures. It's an online academic journal that offers print on demand services.

TJHSS Aims and Objectives:

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| ▣ Print ISSN | 2636-4239 |
| ▣ Online ISSN | 2636-4247 |

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The Interpreter as a Traumatized Protagonist in Inaam Kachachi's *The American Granddaughter* (2008)

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It is in the encounter with trauma (its occurrence and the attempt to understand it) that there might be a possibility of history; a history that is not straightforward nor referential (Caruth 182).

“Why do you scatter our family all over your wide world, dear God?”
(Kachachi 54)

Abstract

Ever since the publication of Cathy Caruth's articles and books on trauma in the 1990s, Western literary circles have witnessed an interest in literary trauma studies, which have gradually connected psychology, in an interdisciplinary manner, to other cultural and scientific aspects like postmodernism, postcolonialism, history and translation studies. This paper argues that the trauma resulting from both indigenous dictatorship and colonial war on Iraq has created national as well as individual fragmentation. One of the prominent Iraqi writers writing on Trauma is Inaam Kachachi with her postmodernist text, *The American Granddaughter*. This is examined in the story of Zeina Behnam, the American/Iraqi interpreter for the American Army during the Second Gulf War who is argued to be a dissociative personality due to trauma. It is a story that does not give the readers the relief of taking sides or the clarity of a one-sided vision. The paper follows a qualitative method based roughly on analysis of psychological texts, the primary text and an ethnographical search of the main character's history as revealed in the story.

Key Words: Inaam Kachachi, War on Iraq, Gulf War, Trauma Studies, Literary Trauma, Cathy Caruth, Immigrant trauma.

Introduction: Interest in trauma studies has started decades ago in the West and as is the usual case with most critical theories, the application and the analyses have used Western literary trauma products. This is why more work on non-Western literary trauma works is needed. Among the works that has been published

in the last ten years handling Middle Eastern literary trauma is *The American Granddaughter* by the Paris-based Iraqi writer Inaam Kachachi. It is a story “like no other” that can be considered a classic in literary trauma of the American War on Iraq. The novel presents the readers with Zeina, an Iraqi/American interpreter working for the American Army during the Second Gulf War in Iraq. Zeina is

forced by the dictatorial Saddam regime to leave Iraq at fifteen with her family, but returns at thirty to work as an interpreter for the American Army. The novel starts as Zeina is coming to grips with different kinds of trauma she has been into throughout her life. Zeina brings the readers into her world of shattered identity and devaluation of language due to the strain of belonging to two contrasting worlds at the same time: the colonized and the colonizer. In the turmoil of her personal narrative, Zeina never fails to picture in the subtlest and most panoramic way what has been going in Iraq and the US during the last fifteen years; that is to say, she uncovers the relation between the personal and the national and relates both to real public figures and events through the presentation of documented reports and newspaper cuts. National trauma as well as individual ones are referred to in an unsentimental way that reminds the reader with Hemingway's iceberg theory. The readers are never the same after reading *The American Granddaughter*; they are never allowed the relief of taking one side rather than the other. After reading *The American Granddaughter*, the readers possess wider perspectives and narrower hopes.

This paper claims that Zeina, the American/Iraqi interpreter suffers from a complex trauma and is consequently possibly dissociative. She is traumatized as a child when her Saddam-oppressed parents are forced to leave Iraq with their kids. Their living standard changes in their adoptive country from sublime to ridiculous. The father, a famous TV host and the mother, a university professor become a hotel receptionist and a porter respectively in the US. The same trauma affects Zeina's brother, Yazan, who turns into a drug addict. As it appears from the narrative, trauma has given Zeina a life-time detachment, a possible psychic dissociation, devaluation of language

resulting in traumatic silence and a sarcastic attitude to life. This paper uses Cathy Caruth's classical work on trauma *Unclaimed Experience* as a starting point while consulting more recent sources and websites.

In its most general definition, Caruth describes trauma as an overwhelming experience of sudden, or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena (181). The experience of the soldier faced with sudden and massive death around him, for example, who suffers this sight in a numbed state, only to relive it later on in repeated nightmares, is a central and recurring image of trauma in the twentieth century. As a consequence of the increasing occurrence of such perplexing war experiences and other catastrophic responses, physicians and psychiatrists have begun to reshape their thinking about physical and mental experience, including most recently the responses to a wide variety of experiences (like rape, child abuse, auto and industrial accidents...etc.) which are now often understood in terms of the effects of "post-traumatic stress disorder" (Ibid 181-182).

Similarly, Anderson defines trauma "as a reaction to events so terrible, so painful, that victims cannot properly understand or incorporate the events into their normal existence" (4). Trauma studies began in the nineteenth century as clinicians began to notice victims of railway accidents having prolonged and unusual reactions that extended beyond their physical injuries. However, it was not until the 1880s that doctors began psychological examinations of women suffering from strange symptoms with no apparent cause. Their "hysteria", as the doctors named it, was initially considered a feature of their gender's weakened

constitution. With the advent of WWI trauma studies were brought back into the public consciousness. Moreover, as women were pushed to silence for being hysterical “females”, soldiers were also judged according to their constitutions and blamed for their weakness of character and mind. Many doctors refused to sympathize with their experiences while others supported them and encouraged their personal stories. The British poet Siegfried Sassoon is the most prominent case and according to Anderson he was encouraged to write and speak about his trauma in his poetry (5).

Since this paper claims that Zeina, the major character of the American Granddaughter is traumatized and dissociative because of prolonged PTSD, a simple reference to this disorder is a must here. “*Post-traumatic stress disorder* is the name given by the American Psychiatric Association in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 3d ed. (1980), to what had previously been called *shell shock*, *combat neurosis*, or *traumatic neurosis*” (Caruth 130). According to Caruth, Freud differentiated between two symptoms of PTSD called the “positive symptoms” (flashbacks and hallucinations) and the “negative symptoms” (numbing, amnesia, and avoidance of triggering stimuli) (130). “Trauma theory often divides itself into two basic trends: the focus on trauma as the “shattering” of a previously whole self and the focus on the survival function of trauma as allowing one to get through an overwhelming experience by numbing oneself to it” (131).

In his article, “Literary Trauma Reconsidered” Michelle Balvae, believes that trauma in literature has been critically tackled for decades ever since a theoretical trend was introduced by scholars like Caruth. She has pioneered a psychoanalytic post structural approach that suggests trauma is an unsolvable

problem of the unconscious that illuminates the inherent contradictions of experience and language in the 1990s. This Lacanian approach crafts a concept of trauma as a recurring sense of absence that sunders knowledge of the extreme experience, thus preventing linguistic value other than a referential expression (1). As shall be explained later, the readers cannot miss this sense of absence in Zeina’s narrative. Some things remain unspoken, hidden; though the readers can see its effects working. They witness personal and national histories through Zeina’s realization of her own traumas.

This paper claims that Zeina suffers from a complex trauma, and intends to follow after Caruth’s definition of trauma which follows Freud’s lead: trauma is “a shock that appears to work very much like a bodily threat but is in fact a break in the mind’s experience of time” (Caruth 61). However, though helpful as a starting point in trauma theory and in clarifying Freudian and Lacanian views of trauma, Caruth’s work, moreover, could not extend itself to examine the traumas of people of color or the Middle East and least of all the delicate problems of immigrants with their traumatic experiences and identity issues. *The American Granddaughter* enriches trauma studies by highlighting such aspects.

Before detailing Zeina’s trauma in *The American Granddaughter*, a brief hint at types of trauma is needed. There are three types of trauma: the acute, the chronic and the complex. It is almost impossible to say for sure what kind of trauma Zeina suffered from; one answer could be all of them. The safest answer to this is that she suffered from complex trauma, where “complex trauma results from exposure to varied and multiple traumatic events or experiences” (Psylegal). There is also the important term of the “intergenerational trauma” or “transgenerational trauma” but this is left

for further research. Zeina starts her narrative with admitting her friendship with sorrow, “Sorrow...has turned the world and everything in it a strange color with unfamiliar hues that my words stutter to describe and my eyes fail to register” (Kachachi 1). Soon she tries hard to find a metaphor for her inner feelings; so she is once “Miserable, that’s what I am ‘A dressing table turned upside down, its mirror cracked” (Ibid), and then, “a woman who bears a cemetery inside her chest” (1). She is also “a squeezed rag, one that we use to mop the floor” (2). However, she will trade her sorrow for nothing, “My beautiful sorrow which makes me feel I am no longer an ordinary American but a woman from a faraway and ancient place, her hand clutching the burning coal of a story like no other” (3).

It is the sorrow of coming to terms with her first trauma and apprehending the rest of them together. Zeina’s complex trauma comes from the first trauma of forced deployment and immigration at hands of Saddam Hussein’s regime; his closest friend being the one who got him into trouble “his crime being that he’d protested about the news bulletins being too long and had said that the news was merely recycled leftovers from the day before” (70). The news, logically, propagated the party and the regime.

They had knocked on their door in the neighborhood of Al-Amin at three in the afternoon. Batoul was washing lettuce at the kitchen sink, her husband sitting by the fridge in his pyjamas bottoms. When Yazan opened the door, solid hairy arms pushed him aside. Their swearing came in before them. ‘Where’s the handsome nightingale? Where’s your pimp of a father’ Sabah sprang up and in one leap was standing before them. ‘Yes...wha...what is it? Is

everything all right? He received a slap on the face in lieu of a reply. They dragged him away as he tripped over his pyjamas that had slipped down and gathered around his feet (69).

Had it not been for a high connection in the party, no one would have heard of Sabah the TV announcer again. Beating him up, breaking his teeth, pulling his tongue with pincers, extinguishing cigarettes on his skin, sitting him down naked at a table and shooting videos for him while reading the news bulletin that tells about “the execution by hanging of TV presenter Sabah Shamoun Behnam after his having been convicted of conspiring against the party and the revolution” (70)—all this was but “messing with him” as Batoul’s university dean, a party member himself, assured her laughing. “Real torture would have been something else completely, something that went beyond a few playful tickles and the dislodging of teeth” (70). Escaping under forged name to Jordan and asking for asylum was the only way out. Thus, both teenager Zeina and her brother Yazan had to bear the trauma of being snatched from their folks and bearing the humiliation of moving to a strange land where they lived as socially and financially lower people from what they used to be,

My early days in Detroit hadn’t been promising, mind you. I was homesick and would cry every night before going to sleep. Every night for three months. Until my mother started to worry about my health and thought about sending me back to Baghdad. But in the fourth month I started school, and my tears eventually dried up (81).

In Detroit, there was the mother’s nightly crying, her suicidal smoking habits, and sense of oppression on the day

of swearing the oath to become an American citizen, “She had on her old baggy dress, the one that usually meant it was a major cleaning day... My mother walked apart from us and looked like she was in a funeral procession” (20). After uttering the oath and while everyone was celebrating finally becoming US citizens, the mother broke into tears wailing “Forgive me, Father. Yaabaa, forgive me” (21). There was also the marital separation that ended a long love story, and her younger brother’s drug addiction--all testify to the depth of this family trauma.

However, this is not everything that traumatized Zeina. There is the vicarious media trauma that Zeina and the rest of the Americans had to bear in witnessing 9/11 events live as they were happening and the war on terrorism. Kaplan believes that psychologists have been studying how the narratives therapists hear in the course of treating trauma survivors may evoke such strong reaction that the therapist is “vicariously” traumatized. Kaplan stresses that studying vicarious trauma is especially important in an era when global media project images of catastrophes all over the world as they are happening. Most of us generally encounter trauma vicariously through the media rather than directly. Since such exposure may result in symptoms of secondary trauma, we need to know as much as possible about the process (87).

I watched a plane crashing into a tower. There was another tower burning next to it on the screen. I froze where I stood. Every American did. ... I remained frozen, not blinking, not breathing, not registering what I was seeing...I turned up the volume to find out if this was a movie or a special effects scene being shot, but my eyes fell immediately on

the phrase ‘breaking news’ at the bottom of the screen (11-12).

Zeina’s narrative about this period is in a suppressed and sarcastic way that conveys a devaluation of language and reminds the readers of a young Hemingway ashamed of his naivety at WWI propaganda,

How could a powerless immigrant like me serve the great United States of America? It was impossible to remain indifferent after witnessing that inferno, impossible to be content with my small hopes and to carry on living with my mother’s coughing and my brother’s drugged stupor” (12).

Zeina’s decision to join the American army was a complex one; a decision shared by many Arab/Americans. Who would refuse a “NINETY_SEVEN THOUSAND DOLLARS A YEAR. All expenses paid. That was the mantra that started it all. It spread among Iraqis and other Arabs in Detroit, setting suns alight underneath heavy quilts” (8). A sum of money that can secure her tired mother, treat her drug addict brother and finally move the family from a ghettoized area. That sum of money and the honor that belonging to the American Army would come with it may change an impoverished immigrant to a respectable American,

I repeated after Fox News that I was going on a patriotic mission. I was a soldier stepping forward to help my government, my people, and my army, our American army that would bring down Saddam and liberate a nation from its suffering (10).

Zeina’s war experience is typical: the discomforts of life there, the constant dangers doubled for the interpreters, “Interpreters and translators were especially vulnerable. They were being

hunted down and slaughtered like animals” (112), witnessing comrades being shot and shipped to the US in wooden coffins or witnessing complacent Iraqis being shot dead by Almahdi Army. All these issues are mentioned in a calm disillusioned manner and so is Zeina’s expression of her personal fear, “I didn’t want to see my mother sitting on the grass like Gina, her white-streaked hair falling across her face, smoking and coughing by my grave” (129).

Zeina’s traumas that took place in the span of 15 years have probably led her to become a dissociative person which is expressed by Kachachi as a fragmentation of loyalties. As Kaplan analyzes Hitchcock’s film, *Spellbound* on the atrocities of WWII and sees the film as picturing the trauma as split in the national spirit, one tends to analyze Kachachi’s novel in the same way: “we are shown trauma as dissociation or “splitting” on the national level, a phenomenon that allows sentimentality and a focus on individual suffering to stand in for an uncompromising look at national catastrophe and at its political causes” (Kaplan 21). Zeina’s trauma is manifested in the story as a split of consciousness: she is a dog with two masters; feeling at home in none. She cannot bear losing her American comrades and cannot bear being a part of the Army that bombards her American Iraqis.

So, why did Zeina go to Iraq? Was it for money only? Or was it curiosity to go back to the homeland? Was she fooled by American propaganda and the War on Terror slogans? Definitely part of Zeina’s dilemma in the novel is identity crisis for being a part of a colonial army subjugating her indigenous homeland; the fact that she is the colonial and the colonized at the same time,

Was I a hypocrite, a two faced American? I collapsed into myself as I watched Baghdad being bombed and the columns of smoke rising after each American attack. It was like watching myself use my mom’s cigarette lighter to set my own hair on fire” (13).

Zeina’s job as an interpreter intensifies her psychological burden; “An interpreter who not only transferred words between two languages but also offered the soldiers her sociological expertise.” (Kachachi 83) Translation of this kind involves a deeper delving into cultures, more than a simple linguistic translation. In times of wars, this inevitably touches politics as well. For Zeina the Iraqi/American interpreter, this is a totally stressful situation.

Has Zeina chosen to do all this? Wasn’t it forced on her somehow? Hasen’t she been snatched from her home and sent to the far away foreign land with two traumatized parents? Hasn’t she been moved from a well-to-do life filled with grandparental love and care to a ghetto in the US where the parents worked per day and cried per night? Did she have anything left but her precious mother language to exchange for money?

There is a way of seeing Zeina’s identity problem as no problem at all; she is larger than being Iraqi and larger than being American and not exactly either. There is also a way of seeing her as an alienated person whose identity has been shattered by her previous traumas. Zeina’s narrative reveals the depth of her wounds, “what crazy times did we live in, if the dress uniform of an Iraqi colonel could give birth to a bulletproof vest that was made in America? (82). Zeina’s narrative is filled with silence, evasion and resistance; her talk about the war is suspiciously neutral and fearfully calm, at best satirical. She tells of the casualties on

both sides and the grieving mothers in a reporting way that suppresses the pain more than reveals it: all pointing to the way trauma (s) have affected her. Kachachi seems to say that this is the price one pays for immigrating. If one immigrates, lives up the new culture, becomes loyal to one's new homeland, one is probably turned into a fragmented being unable to feel at home anywhere.

Caruth explains that post-traumatic stress disorder "reflects the direct imposition on the mind of the unavoidable reality of horrific events, the taking over of the mind, psychically and neurobiologically, by an event that it cannot control" (58). Zeina's trauma manifests her inability to find the right linguistic expressions at the times of painful flashbacks, despite her linguistic talents. Hence, there arises the need to translate her inner experience by inserting different and significant bicultural intertexts/references. Moreover, the text's metafictional elements intensify the acute sense of trauma that the readers are left with. These are literary, cinematic, religious or folkloric references from the Iraqi and the American cultures. Many a time, it is not clear who is narrating: Zeina, her grandmother, Zeina's split personality or the author. If this reveals anything, it is the effect of both dictatorships and colonialism in causing the trauma of Zeina's family. Thus, the reader is not only reading a literary work but bearing witness to a historical crisis.

Why Study Literary Trauma?

Laurie Vickroy contends that "literary and imaginative approaches [to trauma] provide a necessary supplement to historical and psychological studies" (Trauma & Survival, 222). These texts also serve important socio-cultural and political functions as well. The contribution of trauma writers, as Vickroy

stresses, is not only to "mak[e] terrifying, alien experiences more understandable and accessible" (Ibid), but also to provide a means of "witnessing or testifying for the history and experience of historically marginalized people" (Ibid). Thus, one tends to believe that highlighting the effects of trauma is a way of centralizing marginalized people, people who might not be able to talk about the damage themselves; like Iraqi immigrants in the US. Whether it will be admitted or not, accessing traumatic experience in literature means engaging the readers and making them secondary witnesses to the injustice of human existence. Michele Balvae claims that by nature it is necessary to understand that trauma writers have a burden feeling that it is their responsibility to enlighten the world to the terrors of human existence and what people could do to one another. Kachachi is surely one such writer. Likely, Fadwa K. AbdelRahman argues that Kachachi, as a journalist has always been an advocate of the freedom of expression; her experience with the stifling censorship under Saddam Hussien's regime was her first incentive to leave her country of birth and settle in Paris. Since then she has been preoccupied with giving voice to Iraqi people in their dilemma both in her fictional and non-fictional works (1). Kachachi does not only delineate a war-wrecked protagonist but a whole punch of characters whose lives are altered forever. For example, Rahma the grandmother who prays for all her immigrant relatives,

Kamal and Siham and their children in New Zealand...Batoul and her husband in American and their children Yazan and Zeina...Liqaa and Saad in Syria...Samer in Dubai, Youssef, Sabah and Ruwaida in Canada, and bless my sister Ghazala in Jordan and her children and grandchildren

in Sweden, London and I don't know where (53).

The grandmother dies as a saddened person who has witnessed her Zeina wear the American military uniform. There is also Zeina's parents with their own traumas, yearnings and wretched lives in US,

At the hotel, Mom worked in the kitchen for three years then was transferred to reception. She cursed her bad luck every day, until she ran into the former head of the philosophy department at the University of Baghdad arranging vegetables at Farmer Jack's (142).

Together with Zeina, the grandmother and the parents, there are many other characters that are sick with war in *The American Granddaughter*. Yazan, Zeina's younger brother whose own traumas make him a drug addict is one of them and part of Zeina's need for interpretation money is to put him in a rehabilitation center. Haydar and Mohaymen, Zeina's milk brothers in Iraq are doomed; one is constantly dreaming of departing, the other is dangerously involved with Al-Mahdi Army. There are all the Arab/American interpreters who are slaughtered in Iraq for being traitors. There are the mothers of the lost American soldiers grieving at their sons' graveyards in the news every night as well as the Iraqi mothers "wearing black abayas and weeping over the children they lost in the streets of Baghdad" (128). The readers see this collage of intertwined lives traumatized and forever changed by war. The novel is about "the bleak life led by Iraqi and other Arab refugees and exiles in the West: about divided loyalties and shattered lives—the simultaneity of conspicuous togetherness and conspicuous otherness in a predominantly globalized world" (AbdelRahman 2).

More than five million Iraqis were forced to flee from their country as a result of the war; it is "the nightmarish nature of the American dream where immigrants are ghettoized into slum-like areas with limited chances of upward mobility" (Ibid 5). Mohaymen utters the whole situation when he says, "emigration is like captivity; both left you suspended between two lives, with no comfort in moving on or turning back" ((Kachachi 130). The impoverished immigrants barely lived decent lives; they had to wear themselves out in order to improve their standard of living; that is to say, Zeina's acceptance for what seemed to be an easy job of translation is quite justified for. It is left to writers like Kachachi to bring such lives from peripheral existence to the centrality of being witnessed, from being just numbers to possessing whole lives.

Vickroy argues that trauma literature writers try to enlarge our understanding of the relationship between individual traumas and the social forces of injustice and oppression. Further, she argues, their work provides striking examples of how the devastating effects of trauma—whether sexual, socioeconomic, or racial—on individual personality can be depicted in narrative. "These literary narratives contextualize trauma for readers by embedding them in scenarios of social and historical significance" (Contemporary Novel 1). This cannot be truer of Kachachi's novel in question. Zeina's forced relocation as a child is typically the trauma of millions of children in the Middle East and so are her crises in accepting/being accepted and surviving in most likely wretched contexts; namely the US as an adopting country and Iraq as a colonized country at war. The media trauma of 9/11 and returning to Iraq in a terrorizing parade riding a tank and receiving a totally different reception is another trauma. Finally, falling for her milk brother but being refused by him for religious reasons that mean nothing to Zeina

enforces the unattainability of belonging to Iraq once and for all for her. The novel ends while Zeina has seen her past in retrospect and with it a national history of her two homelands. She is resilient enough to go forward, but she would lose her right arm rather than forget Iraq.

Narrative techniques in *The American Granddaughter* are non-traditional. There is no linear narrative; but a cinematic technique based on alternating scenes of the present moment and the past, a past in Iraq and a past in the US. This cinematic aspect is supported with actual intertextuality of movies, documentaries and televised reports. What starts as a first person narrative turns into a collage of flashbacks, intertexts and a host of narrators. In a postmodernist manner, the readers are being helplessly engaged in this complex narrative if they are to understand fully the complexity of Zeina's inner cultural conflicts and the traumatic existence she leads as a translator at war.

Chapter five which tells of Zeina's preparation camp going to war in Iraq, for instance, is not followed by a chapter telling about her journey nor her first day there. On the contrary, Kachachi chooses to follow the departure with a metafictional chapter written by what one believes is Zeina's split personality from what is apparently the front line of war. Zeina's split personality revolts against the one-sided vision of the writer and appears asserting her complexity and heaviness,

THE WORDS FILLING MY head are white clouds taking flight. They move and merge and change shapes, then all at once pour forth their acid rain.... I write knowing that death would come at any moment...I ignore the writer who'd intruding on my space at the computer, sitting shoulder to shoulder by my side, as if we were a duet forced to play on one

piano...I keep pressing the backspace key, deleting the words she writes" (26).

The situation of the war triggers another war inside Zeina and pushes the novel into creation; it is as if the war puts her American side at war with her Iraqi side and triggers her previous traumas in the way that causes her dissociation. Any simple delineation cannot be tolerated. That split personality tries more than once to take over the narrative; she is against the author all along, "I am stronger than her and I almost pity her naïveté and patriotism" (26), she tells us. "She's been irritating me since I realized she had circled and maneuvered in order to force out a patriotic novel at my expense" (Ibid). She reappears in the last chapter telling us she has killed the author "I couldn't wait around for the writer to take off her abaya and dance on my grave. So, I arranged a roadside bomb for the writer. I killed her off before she could kill me" (178). The reference to the abaya and the previous reference that "'It's not me who's writing. It's Rahma" (Kachachi 90), add up to the nontraditional narrative in *The American Granddaughter*.

The plurality and vagueness of narrative voices in *The American Granddaughter* is typical of postmodernist writing. Trauma and postmodernism are closely connected; postmodernism is the offspring of the twentieth century war traumas. Vickroy argues that one may tend to believe that trauma fiction flourished because of postmodernism, "trauma narratives . . . are personalized responses to this century's emerging awareness of the catastrophic effects of wars, poverty, colonization, and domestic abuse on the individual psyche" (Trauma& Survival, x). Vickroy writes that "trauma fiction emerges out of postmodernist fiction and shares its tendency to bring conventional narrative techniques to their limit" (Ibid).

Zeina is the best example of the hybrid nature of exiled families; they speak nothing but Arabic at home and nothing but English in the streets. Her favorite game in childhood is Arabic poetry pursuit, her Saturday nights are with Arabic friends, her music and songs are all Arabic, and her loyalties are American. The text, thus, is a dialogic amalgamation of diverse cultures, sign patterns, genres, and languages. In fact, she tries to express her post-modern experience by intertextuality and multi voices; by inserting movies, songs, poetry, Quranic and Biblical references, Zeina's fragmentation is real and genuine.

Echoing her father, Zeina ends her novel by the famous biblical quote "I'd give my right arm if I should ever forget you, Baghdad" (Kachachi 180). This connection with Iraq is enforced by her choice to write the text in Arabic. Thus, her return to America is not a triumph of the West but an acceptance of the triumph of multiplicity. Zeina's narrative is both a canonical narrative of trauma because it is about the Iraqi war after all; It is also about Zeina's complex trauma causes by dictatorship, forced immigration and colonization. Though narrating in retrospect, Zeina's narrative is torn up between the need to expose and the need to remain silent to avoid the painful memories. What is too difficult to tell turns into a metafictional /extralingual /part of the text; sometimes it forces an unidentified narrator to appear who could very well be Zeina's split personality.

The American Granddaughter is an intense novel; multi-layered and crowded with voices, intertexts and details. It best expresses the complexity of the Iraqi issue; the traumatic effects Saddam Hussein dictatorship and the long lasting effects of American colonialism. It is a novel that a reader can never forget or ignore; it disturbingly widens the reader's consciousness and shakes his/her settled

convictions about what has happened in Iraq.

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