

The concept of diaspora in The American Granddaughter by Inaam Kachachi [2021]

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Abstract

The American Granddaughter by Iraqi writer Inaam Kachachi explores the concept of diaspora through the experience of Zeina, a young Iraqi woman who grew up in America and returned to Iraq as an interpreter with the US Army. The American Granddaughter deals with the inner conflict the protagonist experiences between her Iraqi identity and American affiliation, allowing her to represent the diaspora experience in all its psychological and cultural complexities. This study focuses on the manner in which The American Granddaughter displays the conflict between the mother country and the exile. Zeina discovers herself torn in terms of her Iraqi roots. That means she struggles to reconcile her link to her grandmother and her new certainty as an American person who works with a foreign army in her mother country. In this paper, the analyses show the effect of war on belonging and identity, demonstrating that Zeina is not just an individual in the diaspora. This narrative falls short of expectations and is typical of many migrants who live in a grey area between a past to which they no longer fully belong and a future that does not give them a full sense of home. Finally, the exploration shows that the narrative highlights the concept of diaspora not only as a geographical condition but as a complex mental and psychological condition.

Keywords: Diaspora, identity crisis, Iraqi diaspora, dual identity

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المستخلص

يهدف البحث الى استكشاف مفهوم الشتات من خلال تجربة زينة في رواية الحفيدة الأمريكية [2021] للكاتبة العراقية إنعام كجحي، وهي رواية عراقية نشأت في أمريكا وعادت إلى العراق كترجمة مع الجيش الأمريكي. تتناول الرواية الصراع الداخلي الذي تعيشه بطلة الرواية بين هويتها العراقية وانتمائها الأمريكي، مما يسمح لها بتمثيل تجربة الشتات بكل تعقيداتها النفسية والثقافية. تركز هذه الدراسة على الطريقة التي تعرض بها الرواية الصراع بين الوطن الأم والمنفى. تجد زينة نفسها ممزقة من حيث جذورها العراقية. أي يعني أنها تكافح لغرض التوفيق بين ارتباطها بجدها ويفينها بأنها شخص أمريكي يعمل مع جيش أجنبي في وطنه الأم. ومن خلال هذه البحث، توصل الباحث إلى بيان مدى تأثير الحرب على الانتماء والهوية، مما يدل على أن زينة ليست مجرد فرد في الشتات. وتعد هذه الرواية نموذجاً لكثير من المهاجرين الذين يعيشون في منطقة رمادية بين ماضٍ لم يعودوا ينتمون إليه تماماً ومستقبل لا يمنحهم إحساساً كاملاً بالوطن. وأخيراً، يُظهر الاستكشاف أن الرواية تُسلط الضوء على مفهوم الشتات ليس فقط كحالة جغرافية، بل كحالة ذهنية ونفسية معقدة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الشتات، أزمة الهوية، الشتات العراقي، الهوية المزدوجة

Introduction

The concept of diaspora for Iraqis is a prominent phenomenon as a result of political conflicts, wars, and economic and social instability, which cause many Iraqis to migrate to different parts of the

world. This migration is not limited to geographical change only. However, it is considered a complex experience of dual identity that migrants suffer from, as well as fluctuating

belonging between the previous identity of the mother country and the host country and cultural conflict.

This research explores how identities are formed in the diaspora and how historical and political factors affect Iraqi immigrants, leading to a continuous redefinition of belonging and identity in light of these transformations.

Inaam Kachachi is an Iraqi writer, novelist and journalist. She has finished her bachelor's degree in journalism at the University of Baghdad. She left Iraq to earn her Ph.D. from Sorbonne University, Paris. She has numerous works, the first of which is *Lorna*, about a British woman journalist who married famous Iraqi sculptor Jawad Salim. In 2008, Kachachi published her novel *The American Granddaughter*, which won an international award for Arabic fiction. The novel has been translated into many languages, including English, French, and Chinese.

Dar Al-Jadid Beirut published *The American Granddaughter* in 2008. The novel's main themes are identity conflict, diasporic identity, and the struggle between two cultures. Moreover, the impact of the American occupation of Iraq in 2003 plays a central role. This novel considers the true picture of history and social context of the Iraqi individuals who lived in that time. This novel describes the situation of the Iraqi people under the American invention and the political and historical events [Abdulrahman, 2012]. When Dar Al-Jadid published the novel, many people found that it reflected the reality of what happened in Iraq in 2003. Moreover, this novel is also considered a new production of Iraqi literature because *The American Granddaughter* reflects a specific aspect of literature, which is characteristic of the novel. Many academics have researched and critiqued the story and its different perspective.

The protagonist, Zeina Sabah Behnam, an Iraqi woman living in America, shows the impact of being exposed to another culture and language and a sense of being away from home. Zeina returned as a translator with the American army invasion occupying Iraq. For the first time, she returns to Iraq having a place in the American identity as an interpreter of the American army. This opposing idea establishes the thought, leaving her in "a liminal space" [Anthias, 2001: 623]. She put herself in a difficult position being hung between two cultures: can she be loyal to her homeland and the land host to her identity? She starts her journey with an identity crisis.

The American Granddaughter was translated into English in 2021, and Mona Elnamoury completed her first study. Elnamoury declares that the interpreter has her trauma and gets her own traumatized from Previous Experiences. Elnamoury states, "There are three types of traumas: the acute, the chronicled, the complex" [Elnamoury, 2021: 4]. The protagonist of *The American Granddaughter*, Zeina, has complex trauma because she is in a position between the colonized and the colonizer, which can be understood as suffering. As Richards remarks, "The impact of colonialism on the identity of the colonized causes him a kind of psychological illness" [2010: 11]. Zeina was obligated to leave Iraq by the forces of Saddam Hussein; this was the first step of conflict for Zeina, "she forced deployment and immigration by the dictatorial regime" [Kachachi, 2021: 5]. Furthermore, Zeina returned to Iraq with American army, according to Enamored "the media trauma of 9/11 and returning to Iraq in a terrorizing parade riding a tank and receiving a different reception is another trauma" for this reason Zeina is surrounded with trauma wherever she goes "I froze where I stood.

Every American did “I remained Frozen, not blinking, not breathing, not registering what I was seeing” [Kachachi, 2021: 7].

1.1 Research problem

The research problem is to study how the Iraqi identity is formed in the diaspora, and whether this identity remains constant or evolves according to new surrounding factors. The study also seeks to analyze the internal conflicts that Iraqis face in the diaspora, and the extent to which cultural and social dynamics affect their belonging. To achieve this, the theories of Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha, and Avtar Brahm, which discuss diasporic identities and the third space, will be employed, in addition to studying *The American Granddaughter* [2021] by Inaam Kachachi as a literary model that reflects this conflict.

1.2 Objective of the Study

The aim of this study is to analyze the experience of the Iraqi diaspora from a theoretical and literary perspective by studying the impact of displacement and migration on identity and belonging. The study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. Study the impact of the diaspora on the Iraqi identity and determine whether the identity is fixed or variable due to integration into new societies.
2. Analyze the identity conflicts of Iraqis in the diaspora as they try to reconcile their original culture with the new values in the host societies by understanding their cultural, social and political challenges.
3. Apply the concepts of diaspora to a literary model that reflects the experience of dual identity and the conflict between Iraqi and

American affiliations, the novel *The American Granddaughter* by Inaam Kachachi.

4. Highlights the role of historical and political factors in shaping the diaspora experience and their impact on the collective perception of national identity.

By reaching these objectives, the research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the Iraqi diaspora concept and contribute to academic studies on identity, migration, and belonging in the context of globalization and geopolitical changes.

1.3 Research Question

This research focuses on the impact of the Iraqi diaspora experience on identity and belonging by answering the following questions:

1. What is the concept of diaspora? How do contemporary theorists such as Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha, and Avtar Brahm explain it?
2. How does the Iraqi diaspora influence individual and collective identity? Does Iraqi identity remain constant or change under the influence of cultural and social factors in host societies?
3. What are the prominent psychological and social clashes that Iraqis face in the diaspora? And how do they deal with cultural integration and homesickness?
4. How does the novel *The American Granddaughter* [2021] by Inaam Kachachi reflect the experience of dual identity and the conflict between Iraqi and American affiliations?
5. What is the role of historical and political factors in shaping the experience of the Iraqi diaspora? How have key events such as occupation, wars, and center conflicts affected the formation of the identity of Iraqis abroad?

1.4 Methodology of the study

This study relies on the descriptive and analytical approach to understand the phenomenon of the Iraqi diaspora and its impact on identity and belonging, in addition to the literary critical approach in analyzing *The American Granddaughter* [2021] by Inaam Kachachi as a model that reflects the experience of the diaspora.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The importance of this study lies in shedding light on the experience of the Iraqi diaspora as a complex social and cultural phenomenon that affects the identity of individuals and groups in the diaspora. The importance of the study can be summarized thus:

1. Understanding the impact of diaspora on identity and belonging
 - The research helps to clarify how forced displacement and migration affect the cultural and national identity of Iraqis in the diaspora.
 - It discusses how a diasporic identity is formed due to living between two different cultures, according to postcolonial theories such as the ideas of Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, and Avtar Brahm.
2. Analysis of literature as a mirror of social reality
 - By studying the novel *The American Granddaughter* by Inaam Kachachi, the research shows how literature can reflect the life experiences of exiles and immigrants.
 - It highlights individuals' internal conflicts in the diaspora, such as the contradiction between loyalty to the original homeland and integration into the new society.
3. Contribution to academic studies on migration and identity

- The research adds to the literature related to diaspora and migration by providing an integrated theoretical and literary analysis.
 - Links social studies and literary criticism to provide a deeper understanding of the cultural and identity transformations that Iraqis are going through in the diaspora.
4. Highlights the political and social dimension of the Iraqi diaspora
 - The research examines the historical and political factors that led to sustained Iraqi migration, such as wars and internal conflicts.

2. Theoretical Review of Diaspora

The concept of diaspora is considered important for scholars and cultural theorists, who examine its psychological and physical impact on culture. The diaspora dimension concerns geographical displacement and cultural hybridity, identity, and belonging. In this manner, this study will focus on the concept of diaspora and the contributions of Stuart Hall, Howi K, Bhabha, and Avtar Barh to this concept. These prominent pioneering theorists explore the difficulty of existence.

Diaspora and cultural identity, according to Stuart Hall is based on the nature of cultural identity. I Hall states that "identity is not fixed but rather constructed through historical and cultural context" [Hall, 1990: 67]. He attributes the formation of identity to concepts rooted in the human being born, and there is a possibility to change it, but disturbances this change has its own that are difficult to overcome. Therefore, this explanation of diaspora identities may resist the essentialist consideration of static understandings of culture. However, according to Hall, diaspora is a recipe for negotiation because

the individuals develop themselves through their roots and the new land where they find themselves. In contrast, the diaspora continues in rupture. The people who live in the diaspora zone of cultural transformation in this new land retain elements of their former land. As McLeod asserts, “diaspora peoples often remain isolated and excluded from a sense of belonging to the ‘new country’, and their cultural practices suffer from ridicule and discrimination” [2000: 140]. This perspective challenges nationalist and homogeneous notions of identity, proposing a hybrid and fluid conception of the self instead.

Homi K. Bhabha, *Hybridity and the Third Space*: Homi K. Bhabha’s work on diaspora is deeply intertwined with his theories of hybridity, mimesis, and the third space [Bhabha, 1994]. Bhabha argues that individuals who experience this are in an intermediate space that belongs to neither of the two cultures, neither to the home culture [the mother country] nor to the host culture, where cultural meanings and identities are often negotiated. Bhabha calls this space the third space, which is not only a site of intercultural conflict but also a site of cultural creativity and production. Bhabha explains this concept of hybridity through how diasporic communities blend cultural adaptations, creating new and dynamic identities as a hybrid of the mother and host cultures. The role of this hybridity is to disrupt dominant colonial and nationalist narratives, demonstrating that identity is not pure but rather a hybrid shaped by cultural interactions. Through this concept of the third space, Bhabha demonstrates how diasporic individuals create unique identities that blend two cultures that do not belong to each other, challenging binary oppositions such as home and exile or self and other.

Through Hall, Bhabha, and Brah’s multidimensional perspectives on diaspora and the impacts of each, Hall’s emphasis on fluid cultural identities, Bhabha’s concept of third space, and Brah’s analysis of the dynamics of belonging and power, diaspora experiences are shed light on the complexity of diaspora experiences. Diaspora is about physical displacement, the negotiation of identity resulting from blending two cultures, and psychological belonging. These theories challenge fixed and essentialist views of culture and draw new dimensions to the diaspora, demonstrating that diasporic identities are constantly evolving and deeply intertwined with historical, political, and social contexts.

The three theorists’ proposals can be closely related to the situation of the diaspora in Iraq, specifically during the period in which the novel was published, which was a period of conflict and struggle that led to the migration of many Iraqis. Many Iraqi expatriates suffer from dual identities and feel a strong connection to their homeland due to their attachment to their customs and traditions while adapting to their host societies. The ongoing attempts of Iraqis to assimilate in terms of language, traditions, and cultural practices while incorporating new societal norms into the host culture demonstrate the fluid and evolving nature of identity within the diaspora. Additionally, Hall’s argument that the generational shift among Iraqi expatriates portrays the ideas of continuity and rupture is highlighted. As for the third space that he proposes, Iraqis living in Western societies regularly find themselves in the third space, as they negotiate between their Iraqi heritage and the cultural expectations of their host countries into which they are trying to assimilate. This hybridization of the cultures of the home and host

countries is reflected in religious practices, social behaviors, and language use.

Through closely examining the concept of diaspora, Avtar Brah [1996] introduces the concept of diaspora space, which is distinct from mere physical displacement and reaches other dimensions. Brah argues that diaspora should be viewed from a broader perspective, not only as a movement of people but also as a site of new identity formation and a sense of belonging to a new place. She highlights how strong relationships between historical contexts and new social structures shape diasporic experiences. Brah's elucidation extends the simple concepts of exile and homesickness, focusing instead on how diasporic communities construct a sense of belonging within this geographic space and into new social and political realities [Brah, 1996, p. 193]. Her concept of borders is reflected in how diasporas simultaneously move across cultural and national boundaries to reach their new home, often experiencing both inclusion and exclusion. The Iraqi experience of diaspora is characterized by its complex boundaries of belonging, as many face discrimination and marginalization in these countries while also experiencing homesickness for their still politically unstable countries. For example, global politics after 9/11 have racialized Middle Eastern identities, making it more difficult for Iraqi immigrants to fully integrate into Western societies.

The Iraqi diaspora illustrates the dynamics as Iraqis navigate their history, inherited Iraqi culture, cultural transformations, and aspirations for the future. Through these theoretical perspectives, we gain deeper insights into how displaced Iraqi communities form identities, maintain cultural ties, and engage in ongoing integration, belonging, and adaptation processes in their bicultural world.

3. Dual identity of the protagonist in *The American Granddaughter*

The American Granddaughter by Iraqi writer Inaam Kachachi vividly portrays Iraqi expatriates' diaspora experience and cultural hybridity even after their return. Kachachi reflects the experiences of Iraqi expatriates who find themselves torn between two cultures, including the home and host cultures, and two conflicting identities, making *The American Granddaughter* a rich subject for analysis considering the diaspora theories put forward by Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha, and Avtar Brah.

The protagonist of *The American Granddaughter* reflects key concepts of diaspora theories, such as the shifting identity illustrated by Stuart, Bhabha's third space, cultural hybridity, psychological boundaries, multiple belongings, and the cultural diaspora experiences. We will also discuss how the novel shows the psychological and social effects of alienation on the main character and her relationship with both Iraqi and American society. I wanted to flaunt my kinship in front of them, show them I was a daughter of the same part of the country[...] However, all that would have been against orders[...] Orders demanded to be. to simultaneously be their daughter and their enemy, while they could be my kin and my enemy [Kachachi, 2021: 11].

As the protagonist of the novel, Zeina, returns to Iraq, she faces the first real test of her dual identity. Her first visit to Mosul, where her family roots extend, represents a pivotal moment in her self-awareness, where feelings of belonging and alienation are evident simultaneously. Mosul is not just a city for Zeina but rather a symbol of a scattered memory, carrying within it echoes of the family's past and stories that she did not live by herself but carried with her as a cultural and

psychological legacy. This journey embodies the internal conflict that Zeina experiences between being Iraqi by blood and lineage and being American by upbringing and culture. When she arrives in Mosul, she realizes that she is not purely Iraqi as she had imagined, but she is also not fully American. This sense of duality reveals one of the most important concepts of diaspora, where individuals are stuck between two homelands, to neither of which they fully belong. From her first moment in Mosul, Zeina finds herself a stranger to the place that is supposed to be her home. She does not understand all the cultural references intuitively and finds herself observing the details with a Western eye, contemplating the city's houses, streets, and smells as if she were a visitor rather than a daughter of this land. At the same time, however, she feels an incomprehensible attraction towards these places, as if they pull her towards a part of her absent or postponed identity [Safran, 1991: 83-99].

Zeina's sense of identity is closely linked to place. She carries an Iraqi heritage from her family, but she has never experienced Iraq directly before. This "postponed" or "suspended" identity makes her wonder: are blood and roots enough to be Iraqi? Or is it the lived experience that determines belonging? Here, the concept of hybrid identity that Homi Bhabha spoke about appears, where identities overlap in a third space that is neither completely American nor completely Iraqi but rather a mixture of the two.

During her visit, Zeina finds herself torn between her Iraqi feelings and her actions, which remain American. She desires to adapt to Iraqi society but cannot escape her Western customs easily. Even her language, which mixes English and Arabic, reflects this conflict. Sometimes, she tries to assume the role of a reliable Iraqi. However, she

soon realizes that her actions reveal her differences, whether in how she speaks, her clothes, or even her facial expressions when encountering unfamiliar situations.

Another contradiction appears in her dealings with her family in Iraq. She feels affection for them, but at the same time, she finds it difficult to understand some aspects of their thinking or customs. When they talk about the war, she experiences a moment of psychological detachment; they talk about it as a daily reality that they lived in all its details, while she, despite knowing the event, did not live it in the same way. This difference in experience makes her feel like she is simultaneously an insider and outsider: she is part of the family by blood but separated from them by experience.

Mosul is used in the novel as a mirror that reflects Zeina's psychological and cultural diaspora. The city represents her Iraqi past, which she did not experience directly but which she carries in her consciousness intermittently. Through her scenes in Mosul, Zeina realizes that her identity is not linear or clear-cut but a mixture of multiple layers of memory, experience, and cultural influences. This realization reflects Stuart Hall's concept of identity as a constantly evolving narrative, not a fixed essence.

Zeina's visit to Mosul is a moment of true confrontation with herself. This experience does not provide her with a clear answer about her identity. However, it makes her realize that belonging is not just an internal feeling but also the product of a life experience shaped over time. Through this journey, Zeina becomes a living example of the concept of diaspora, where the individual lives between two worlds, trying to build an identity beyond traditional definitions of belonging [Hall, 1989: 10-25].

Through the metaphor of song, the temporal reference to space in the novel is a subtle indicator of the dual identity Zeina experiences, as the influence of American culture appears to transcend its geographical borders to become part of the Iraqi experience. The presence of an American song in an Iraqi context is not just a passing detail but a symbolic embodiment of the third space that Homi Bhabha speaks of, where cultural identities interact intricately without remaining confined within clear boundaries. As Bhabha declares, “It occupies a position in space lying on the border between outside and inside” [Bhabha, 1994, p. 109], indicating that the diasporic identity does not belong entirely to its homeland or the country of immigration but rather is formed in an intermediate zone that combines different influences. For Zeina, hearing an American song in Iraq reflects the nature of the cultural hybridity that she experiences, as her American culture becomes intertwined with her Iraqi roots, leaving her in a constant state of negotiation between the two affiliations. This cultural interpenetration is one aspect of postcolonial identity, which Bhabha describes as, “extra-territorial “conditions, “cross-cultural initiations” and “in between reality” [Bhabha, 1992: 141] where culture is not consumed in a unidirectional manner but rather reshaped according to individual context and personal experience, highlighting the complexities of diaspora and dual identity. One of the most important critics of this field is Edward Said, who urges the study of colonial policy and its connection to the reality of life [Said, 1995: 5-14]. Stuart Hall emphasizes that identity is not fixed but a continuous process of negotiation and reshaping, especially in immigrant communities. Individuals in the diaspora live in an interstitial space between their original culture and the new

culture with which they interact.

In *The American Granddaughter*, we notice that Zeina suffers from a complex identity split between her Iraqi identity on the one hand and the American identity that she was raised with on the other. Walder states, “Nostalgia begins in desire and may well end in truth” [Walder, 2011: 3]. This duality in her identity is reflected in her behavior, attitudes, and even her thinking. She has Iraqi origins, specifically from a Shiite background, but she was raised in the United States and was greatly influenced by Western values and culture. This division is evident in the novel through the writer Inaam Kachachi’s use of many scenes that show Zeina’s internal conflict. On the one hand, she feels connected to Iraq through her family heritage and her grandmother’s memories, but at the same time, she finds herself a stranger to Iraq and its culture when she returns to it. The events that she goes through in Iraq are shown through the contrast in their comments, as customs and traditions seem strange while they seem normal to the Iraqis who live there.

On the other hand, Zeina’s behavior seems strange as it is somewhat close to the American culture in which she grew up, represented through the way she speaks or deals with others or even her positions on individual freedoms and women’s rights. This can be clearly revealed especially when Zeina deals with the other Iraqi characters in the novel, which shows their differences in their way of thinking and behavior. This duality between Zeina’s two identities, which do not belong entirely to Iraqi culture or American culture, reflects the concept of “hybrid identity” discussed by many diaspora theorists such as Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha, where her identity is a mixture of different cultures formed due to her

experience of living between two culturally different worlds.

Hall sees that identity in the diaspora is divided between continuity with the past, i.e., living in the shadow of one's mother culture, and disconnection from it. This is clear in the case of Zeina, as she tries to maintain her connection to her Iraqi heritage through her relationship with her grandmother. However, at the same time, she feels alienated when she returns to Iraq, as she cannot easily integrate into Iraqi society due to the difference in her lifestyle and thinking.

Homi Bhabha believes that the children of the diaspora live in a third space which "though unrepresentable in itself, ensures that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity, that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, historicized and read" [Bhabha, 1994: 37]. That is to say, it is an emerging cultural space between two different worlds. Individuals must constantly reshape their identity in this space by negotiating between different values and traditions.

Zeina represents a clear example of the third space; She moves between the Iraqi and American worlds, creating a constant feeling of not fully belonging to either. The novel reflects this conflict through her interactions with other characters, whether Iraqis who see her as foreign or Americans who see her as an Arab.

Furthermore, cultural hybridity is evident through Zeina's language, which mixes Arabic and English, and her way of life, where American values intertwine with some Iraqi legacies. This hybridity is what Bhabha describes as a product of the third space, where identity is reshaped away from any "pure" or fixed model.

The American Granddaughter is divided into two parts, representing different stages of Zeina's

journey in search of her identity torn between Iraq and America. In the first section, the novel focuses on Zeina's self-talk, where she reflects on her thoughts and feelings towards the Iraq she knows from her family's stories versus the America in which she grew up and was influenced by its culture. This section shows the internal conflict she experiences as she tries to reconcile her American identity and her Iraqi affiliation, which puts her in a constant state of negotiation with herself. The second section is more involved in Iraqi reality, as Zeina enters into intense dialogues with her grandmother Rahma, who represents the authentic Iraqi generation. Zeina faces a new challenge regarding war, occupation, and national belonging that repeats itself once again, prompting her to reconsider her preconceived ideas, as Zeina left Iraq due to political events. Her relationship with her brother Muhaymen reflects another dimension of alienation, as she cannot determine her true place among her family members, who see her as a stranger due to her clear cultural influence. Zeina begins to tell war stories, and this conflict develops as she faces contradictory attitudes from people: some cheer and applaud her. At the same time, others attack her and accuse her of betraying the homeland. This scene embodies the deep contradiction in Iraqi identity after the occupation, where feelings of patriotism and betrayal, belonging and alienation, overlap, highlighting the psychological and social turmoil that Iraqis experience as repercussions of war.

Zeina Bahnam's experience in *The American Granddaughter* represents a complex internal conflict between loyalty and belonging, as she faces an unequal war between her American and Iraqi identities. From the beginning, Zeina believes that she is performing a "national mission" as an American soldier in Iraq, where she imagines that

she can help her home country overcome its “ordeal” [Kachachi, 2021: 15]. This idea reflects her dual loyalty, as on the one hand, she belongs to Iraq through her family roots, and on the other hand, she holds an American vision of democracy and freedom, which places her in the position of a spectator who sees the Iraqi people from the outside, saying: “They will not believe their eyes when they open up to freedom. The poor people of Iraq” [Kachachi, 2021: 14]. This perception reflects her deep influence by the American discourse about war as a tool for liberating peoples, but she soon collides with the wall of her hybrid reality. Zeina later realizes that returning to her Iraqi past is no longer possible. However, she tries to rebuild her identity on new foundations based on her present and “reconstruct it based on the present” [Coser, 1992: 40]. However, her experience in Iraq does not match her expectations, as she encounters resistance from people who see her as in need of freedom.

In contrast, they see her as a symbol of invasion and occupation. This clash exposes the contradictions of her identity, as she finds herself in a dual position: she is the Iraqi who belongs to this homeland, but at the same time, she is the American soldier whom the Iraqis see as a stranger and an enemy. This tension represents the core of her internal conflict, as she becomes part of her family group but also part of a colonial power that exercises control over this same group. She states I wanted to flaunt my kinship in front of them, show them I was a daughter of the same part of the country. However, all that would've been against orders. Orders demanded to be mute. to be simultaneously their daughter and their enemy, while they could be my kin as well as my enemy [Kachachi, 2021: 11].

Zenia lives in a constant state of psychological and social tension, unable to determine her true belonging or reconcile her two contradictory identities.

On the other hand, *The American Granddaughter* embodies the deep identity conflict experienced by Zeina Bahnam as she finds herself torn between her Iraqi-American connection and her contradictory identity. Clifford illuminated that a viewpoint of identity crisis within distinct societies is labeled as “living here” and “recollecting there” [Clifford, 1997: 255]. As Stuart Hall points out, “character develops as a sort of troubled space or an indecisive inquiry in that space, between various meeting talks” [1989: 10], and this applies perfectly to Zeina, who lives in a state of constant anxiety about her identity. She came to Iraq as a translator with the American army but soon finds herself confronted with Muhaymen, a man who belongs to an Islamic group seeking to expel American forces from Iraq. Despite their radical differences, Zeina finds herself drawn to him, not only as a blood relation but also as a representative of the authentic Iraq from which she feels alienated. Muhaymen represents the complete opposite of Zeina, as he symbolizes the Iraqi man who clings to his national identity and is proud of his country, making him heir to Iraq’s past and the bearer of its present.

In contrast, the dispersed character is reflected through Zeina, who does not fully belong to either culture but rather moves between them in a constant state of cultural instability. She is not fully American, despite her adoption of Western values of freedom and democracy. This hybrid identity makes her feel lost. She is not fully Iraqi due to her separation from her homeland’s culture, her upbringing in another country, and her lack of

a deep understanding of Iraq's political and social complexities.

This tension is embodied in the relationship between Muhaymen and Zeina in terms of their different perspectives on the nature of their culture: Zeina, who is influenced by American culture, sees Iraq from an external perspective influenced by the discourse of colonial power, while Muhaymen sees the internal Iraqi culture that rejects colonial discourses and clings to Iraq's historical legacy of resistance. This conflict culminates in the third space, Homi Baba, "where cultures communicate without completely dissolving into each other, resulting in a confused and unstable identity" [Bhabha, 1994: 90]. Ultimately, Zeina remains in constant internal confrontation, representing the Iraqi diaspora in its most extreme form, living between two worlds without fully belonging to either, reflecting the experience of many Iraqis who grew up in exile and returned to their homeland to find it alien to them [Stierstorfer, 2017].

Avtar Brah presents the concept of "diaspora space," where diaspora is more than just physical migration; it also includes the psychological and social dimensions. She states that:

Multiple journeys may be configured into one journey via a confluence of narratives as it is lived and re-lived, produced and transformed through individual as well as collective memory and re-memory. It is within this confluence of narrativity that diasporic community is differently imagined under different historical circumstances [Brah, 1996: 180].

It is a state where individuals live between a lost and incomplete homeland. Zeina lives in this space where she feels divided between an unknown history in Iraq and an unsure future America. "Ideas of fixity, boundedness, and nostalgic

exclusivity are traditionally implied by home" [Walters, 2005: 16]. This contradiction is evident in her relationship with her family and grandmother in Iraq, where she feels like a stranger among them despite her origins being with them.

One of the most prominent aspects of diaspora that Brah raises is "dual identity and homesickness" [Turner et al., 1987: 51]. Despite growing up in America, Zeina feels a sense of homesickness for Iraq, but when she returns, she discovers that it is not what she imagined it to be. This experience is common among diaspora members who discover that the homeland they have carried in their memories does not match reality. The novel shows how those who return to their homeland are not treated as native citizens but rather viewed as strangers. This is what Zeina faces when she returns to Iraq, where some see her as an American rather than a real Iraqi. On the other hand, Zeina is not treated as a full American. Despite her American citizenship, her Arab identity exposes her to looks of suspicion and discrimination, especially in light of the tense political situation between America and the Arab world.

I am a stranger even to my grandmother, my mother's mother. Hayder, Muhaymen and Tawoos are closer to her than I am because they remained Iraqis like her, whose patriotism is not tainted by any other nationality [Kachachi, 2021: 99].

This stretch reveals the depth of the alienation that Zeina experiences within her family and homeland, as she finds herself a stranger even to her grandmother. However, the relationship between grandchildren and grandmother is often one of the strongest family ties. This feeling of alienation stems not only from the difference in generations but also from the difference in experiences and identities, as she sees that her

relatives, such as Haider, Muhaymen, and Tawoos, are closer to her grandmother because they did not leave Iraq. Thus, they maintained their pure Iraqi national identity. In contrast, Zeina feels that she lost this connection because she grew up in America and was influenced by American culture, which made her nationalism tainted with another nationality, meaning that she is no longer purely Iraqi in the eyes of her family [Kachachi, 2021: 99]. This gap between what Zeina imagines upon her return to Iraq and what she encounters on the ground highlights the concept of conditional belonging, as it is not enough to be of Iraqi origin to be accepted as Iraqi; rather, she must have lived in Iraq and gone through its harsh experiences in order to be recognized as part of it. This conflict reflects the idea of hybrid identity as presented by Homi Bhabha [1994: 2-4], where Zeina's identity is formed in the third space between two opposing cultures: she is Iraqi in origin, but she keeps American values and perceptions that make her completely incompatible with her Iraqi environment. Zeina thus feels exiled even within her homeland, as she cannot fully reclaim her Iraqi identity; she cannot completely abandon her American identity. This anxiety reflects the experience of several members of the Iraqi diaspora, who discover themselves facing an identity crisis when they return to their homeland, where they notice that they no longer belong to it as they had imagined.

There is no doubt that the novel *The American Granddaughter* sheds light on the conflict between identities, especially through the character of Zeina and her relationship with the rest of the characters that Iraqis live in the diaspora, which gives a deep understanding and a clear example of how the theories of Hall, Bhabha, and Brah affect identity, hybridity, and belonging that is formed through the

characters of the diaspora. Zeina is not just a fictional character, but rather a living example for many Iraqis and symbolizes the experience of many Iraqi refugees stuck between two cultures, between a past that cannot be forgotten and a reality that is difficult to live in, as they are unable to belong to either of them completely. Ultimately, the novel reflects that diaspora is not just an individual experience but rather a challenge for many Iraqis living in the diaspora, as it extends to be a social and psychological phenomenon that reshapes our understanding of identity and belonging in a world where cultures are constantly intertwined.

Conclusion

Inaam Kachachi's novel *The American Granddaughter* [2021] shows the complexities of identity in the Iraqi diaspora through the character of Zeina, an American girl of Iraqi origin, as her character in the novel represents a realistic example of the internal division between belonging to the motherland and the identity acquired in the diaspora. Through analyzing the novel and deeply understanding Zeina's character, the diaspora experience is not merely a geographical movement, but rather an ongoing process of renegotiating identity and belonging, where individuals find themselves stuck between two cultures, between the culture of the mother country and the host culture, and they are unable to belong to either fully.

Her crisis represents Zeina's struggle with representing her identity with her family members, as she feels strange in her relationship with her family members, her grandmother in particular, as if she is a stranger even to her relatives who remained in Iraq. This gap in the relationship between Zeina and her family members indicates

that Iraqi identity is not just a blood bond but requires real engagement and actual experience that is represented by living in the historical and collective experience of Iraqis, which Zeina lacks due to her upbringing in the United States and her long absence. This aligns with Stuart Hall's [1989] view of identity as an often fluid and unstable field shaped by experience and context rather than a fixed reality.

On the other hand, the confrontation between Zeina and her identity, which is not entirely Iraqi but is influenced by American culture, and her brother, Muhaymen, reveals the conflict of identities within the diaspora. Muhaymen, who remained in Iraq, embodies the traditional Iraqi identity free from outside influence, while Zeina represents an unstable hybrid identity that reflects contradictory cultural influences that differ from Iraqi and American cultures. This is consistent with Homi Bhabha's [1994] concept of the third space, where diaspora identity is formed in a gray area between native and acquired cultures, leading to persistent feelings of duality and internal fragmentation. Edward Said cited that living elsewhere than the home was compelling. Still, it was a strange experience, an incurable disease between home and the real home [Said, 2007].

Moreover, the novel reveals the political and cultural dimension of diaspora, as Zeina initially reflects an American vision of "liberating" Iraq through her work as a translator but later encounters a more complex reality in that she has come to represent the role of the immigrant from the perspective of Iraqis. This paradox reflects the colonial legacy and its influence in shaping diaspora perceptions of the homeland. Zeina envisions that, through this work, she serves her homeland and its aspirations for liberation, which Avtar Brah [1996] points out through her analysis

of diaspora as a process influenced by the dynamics of political power represented by colonial thought and its ideas represented by Zeina's impression.

In short, it becomes clear to us that the experience of diaspora for the Iraqi is not merely a spatial separation away from the mother country but rather a profound experience of cultural tensions represented between the culture of the mother country and the host country and psychological divisions and their consequences through the conflict of belonging and conflicts of defining identity. Through the character of Zeina, the heroine of *The American Granddaughter*, who reflects these complexities, Kachachi presents a literary model of a fragmented identity that lived the diaspora experience and distance from the changing world in the shadow of war and political conflicts.

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