

**Between Victim and Victimizer: Narrative of Forced Complicity
in Inaam Kachachi's *The American Granddaughter***

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Abstract

The paper examines the victim and victimizer relationship in Kachachi's *The American Granddaughter*, which shows that profession makes victims who embrace ways of oppression. It focuses on the character of Zeina, an Iraqi-American intermediary of US forces, who brings out the paradox of her role as both victim and victimizer. The analysis discovers the relationship between identity, alienation, and psychological trauma. The methodology is based on postcolonial ideas of Said, Baba, Fanon, and Spivak. The findings indicate that Zeina is a forceful engagement wherein her position is constraining. The interpreter turns out to be an instrument of strengthening power relations, and language becomes a source of power and manipulation, which shows that translation is not neutral. The paper shows how a weak version of the self is created by the interplay of cultural and political connections, and a novel discussion of some of the implications of colonialism and the intersecting place of the dominated and the dominating.

Keyword: postcolonialism, victim/victimizer, translation, Inaam Kachachi, *The American Granddaughter*.

بين الضحية والجلاد: سرد التواطؤ القسري في رواية إنعام كجه جي "الحفيذة الأمريكية"

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الخلاص

تحلل هذه الورقة العلاقة بين الضحية والجلاد في رواية "الحفيذة الأمريكية" إنعام كجه جي من منظور ما بعد الاستعمار، انطلاقاً من فرضية أن الاحتلال يُنتج ضحايا يتبنون أساليب القمع. وتركز على شخصية زينة، وهي وسيطة عراقية أمريكية للقوات الأمريكية، كنموذج يكشف ازدواجية موقعها بين الضحية والجلاد. يستكشف التحليل التفاعل بين الهوية والاغتراب والصدمة النفسية. وتستند المنهجية إلى مفاهيم ما بعد الاستعمار لسعيد ويايا وفانون وسبيفاك. تُظهر النتائج أن زينة تُمثل تفاعلاً قسرياً حيث يصبح دورها كترجمة أداة لتعزيز ترتيبات السلطة، وتتحول اللغة إلى وسيلة للتأثير والسيطرة، مما يُشير إلى أن الترجمة ليست محايدة. تكشف الدراسة عن تشكّل الذات الهشة من خلال التفاعل بين الروابط الثقافية والسياسية، وتستكشف الرواية بعض تبعات الاستعمار وتداخل أدوار المضطهد والمهمين. **الكلمات المفتاحية:** ما بعد الاستعمار، الضحية والجلاد، الترجمة، إنعام كجه جي، الحفيذة الأمريكية

Hypothesis and Research Question

The analysis in Kachachi in the book *The American Granddaughter* is done through Zeina symbol of the indistinct victim/victimizer relationship occupied. The study explores the way language and cultural knowledge are used by colonial power as instruments of power, which connects the sufferings of Zeina to symbolic power. Her hybrid identity is examined by the family memory and by coerced participation. The novel is in favor of the theory that power structures at war determine victimization, and Zeina doubles as both as a result of systemic relations in which translation is symbolic violence emphasizing the fact that colonialism creates subjugated and collaborative subjects.

Introduction

Kachachi's *The American Granddaughter* explores the 2003 Iraq occupation, focusing on the occupier/occupied dynamic. Iraqi-American interpreter Zeina embodies this tension. She uses language as a tool for dominance rather than for communication. The issue of how a person may be both actively participating in the occupying power and related to the victims of war is brought up by this narrative viewpoint.

Examining power and multiple identities is made easier by post-colonial theory. The paper focuses on the ideas of victim and victimizer as interrelated and shifting roles. These roles are produced by colonial circumstances, rather than as permanent moral positions. Drawing on Bhabha's concept of "the third space", Zeina is presented as a hybrid character who struggles with belonging and alienation, as she is neither entirely American nor Iraqi.

Zeina feels incredibly estranged on a several of levels. She has a conflicted relationship with Iraq, which she knew primarily through her grandmother's stories and jumbled recollections. She also has a difficult relationship with America, where her Iraqi identity remains visible. While serving in the US army, she experienced the brutality of war, especially after knowing about events like the Abu Ghraib torture scandal, which intensified her sense of helplessness and moral conflict.

At the same time, she became a victimizer because of her work as a translator for the US military. Zeina's position allows communication with the occupied Iraqi society. It also transforms language from a tool of mediation to a tool of symbolic control. This role makes her an unarmed participant in the machinery of occupation despite her personal sadness. Her role makes her an unarmed participant in occupation, showing how language, work, and power shape identity.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical basis of studying power is based on the post-colonial theory hegemony, and the self during occupational situations. It constitutes the essential critical framework for this paper. Said believed that Orientalism displays colonial domination as a discursive unit the influence of which is not restricted to military or

material power in itself, and also appears in forms that make the subjugation of colonized cultures (1979).

This school of thought explains the influence of vocabulary, cultural exploitation of imagery and the generation of knowledge is used as a platform. oppression, which is also backed by postcolonial theory.

Bhabha's concept of the third space is one of the most important concepts for understanding hybrid identity. The third space is where languages, cultural narratives, and values come together to form identities that are difficult to define (1994). Through constant negotiation, conflict, and tension, hybridity challenges rigid dichotomies such as colonizer and colonized or centre and periphery rather than emerging as peaceful integration.

The relationship between victim and victimizer is theorized through the combined observations of Fanon and Spivak. Fanon claimed that colonialism produced oppressed people who were forced by political, economic, and psychological forces into joining the colonizer's system (1961). Rigid portrayals of colonized people as either pure oppressors or pure victims were critiqued by Spivak (1988), who instead emphasized the variety of identities produced amid unequal power dynamics. According to their combined perspectives, victimization and complicity are social constructs rather than individual moral choices.

Venuti and Todorov argued that translation is a second important analytical basis in postcolonial critique. Translation is a tool of cultural and ideological control, challenging the idea that it is a neutral linguistic activity. While Todorov demonstrated how translation functions as a tool of conquest by spreading the

prevailing culture's perspective, Venuti emphasizes the power inherent in the translator's position (1995). As a result, translation becomes a space where representation, power, and knowledge come together. Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence offered another perspective for understanding how dominance exists outside of physical force. When dominated people embrace dominant norms and values and view them as normal or acceptable, they maintain their power (1998). Thus, the reproduction of hierarchy through language, institutional functions, and everyday behaviour is explained by symbolic violence. By combining postcolonial theory, hybridity, translation studies, and symbolic violence as complimentary analytical viewpoints, the framework establishes a cohesive analytical foundation for examining colonial power, forced complicity, and symbolic domination.

Previous study

Studies on translation and authority under occupation examined the ethical and political challenges of linguistic mediation in *The American Granddaughter*. According to Warner's argument in *Translation as Treason: The Interpreter's Dilemma in Inaam Kachachi's The American Granddaughter* (2019), translators find themselves in a risky position when their language is used to convey orders that could put their own people in danger. She focused on interrogation situations to show how language becomes a tool of psychological coercion rather than a communication tool.

Warner argued that the translator's job is formed more by necessity than by moral choice, criticizing the oversimplification of exchanges between the interpreter and the American soldier. Warner highlights translation as a question of ethics, but rather than fully examining how translation simultaneously created positions of victimization and complicity, her study mostly focuses on professional conflict. Studies on identity, diaspora, and hybridity has also been helpful to the study of the novel. Cheng (2020) analyzes *The American Granddaughter* as a key example of Iraqi diaspora writing in *The Third Space of Identity: Hybridity and Belonging in Iraqi Diaspora Literature*, focusing on Zeina's navigation of a third space where Iraqi and American identities connect. He argued that rather than being an easy method of cultural integration, nostalgia serves as a coping strategy for separation. Cheng's research focuses little on how gender, social class, and political power combine to complicate hybrid identity in occupational contexts.

In contemporary Iraqi literature, the psychological consequences of war have been examined in connection with trauma and collective memory. In *Narratives of Suffering: Collective Memory in Contemporary Iraqi Literature* (2021), Claire Murphy explored how narrative devices such as flashback, repetition, and broken structure represent collective grief. She demonstrates how individual pain shapes group memory. Murphy's research, however, concentrated more on psychological trauma and less on the institutional and structural dynamics of occupation.

The novel's portrayal of Iraqi women examined by postcolonial feminists. Drawing on the writings of Mohanty, Fujimoto (2022) analyzed Rahma, Batoul, and Zeina as figures who resist Western ideas of subservient "Third World women". She highlighted how patriarchal and colonial oppressive institutions are woven throughout the narrative. The study advances gender analysis, but it ignores socioeconomic status and the ethical implications of women's participation in colonial institutions.

Critical addressed the novel's ethical inconsistency and complicity. García (2023) examined moral compromise as a means of surviving in times of war through the philosophical positions of Arendt and Butler. He saw Zeina's acceptance of a desirable job as an example of the moral challenges associated with coercion. While García's method offered a valuable ethical perspective, it paid less attention to the language and economic elements that essentially lead to complicity.

Previous studies on *The American Granddaughter* and Iraqi diaspora literature have examined issues such as translation, gender, and moral ambiguity. These methods address problems on their own, concentrating on psychological trauma, moral dilemma, or cultural affiliation. Despite Murphy's analysis of trauma and Warner's discussion of translation, nothing is known about the relationship between linguistic power, identity development, and the dual position of victim and victimizer.

Paper has not yet developed a comprehensive analytical model that explains how victimhood and victimization operate simultaneously as structurally produced positions shaped by colonial power, language, and identity. The present study seeks to address this gap by integrating postcolonial theory and translation studies to examine the victim/victimizer dynamic as a central mechanism in the construction of subjectivity within the novel.

Discussion

Zeina As a victim from a post-colonial perspective

Fanon explained that cultural alienation occurs when the colonized are forced to abandon their original cultural identity and adopt the colonizer's culture as a replacement (1952). Zeina represented an advanced case of this alienation. She has not only adopted American culture but has distanced herself from her Iraqi roots to the point of losing her mother tongue "He's stuck in Sadr City,' sadr being the Arabic word for 'breast'. The soldiers' laughter would rise, and he would answer with literal translations of insults from colloquial Arabic" (p. 126).

Her mother tongue becomes as alien to her as it is to others, demonstrating the extent of her identity loss. Zeina has a sense of inner alienation, which divides her between integrating into the new culture and her broken connection to her old one. The difficulties she encounters in addressing the rhetoric of dual colonialism are better understood as a result of this cultural fragmentation.

Said showed how the self-consciousness of the colonized is distorted by colonial rhetoric (1993). Colonialism relies on a cultural narrative that imposes a particular image of the colonized, depicting them as weak through literature, media, and education, until it reaches society. The colonized distort their self-awareness and identity as they start to perceive themselves through the colonizer's view and unconsciously embrace the notion that they are inferior to the colonial center.

Zeina faces this dual perception: in America, she is viewed as a rescuer, but in Iraq, she is viewed as a betrayer "The whole truth was that Iraqis thought of my comrades as the foot soldiers of the occupation, merely performing their military service and following orders [...] But they saw me as a traitor" (p. 116). She was unable to develop a cohesive self-image as a result of this contradiction, which led to an identity crisis. She is directly exposed to the symbolic violence employed by the occupier to maintain its control as a result of the tension between these exterior representations.

According to Bourdieu, symbolic violence happens when victims start to believe that the oppressive system is legitimate. (1970). Zeina experiences this violence through her initial belief in the discourse of "liberation":

"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" (p. ١٣).

She became a victim of both direct oppression and helping to legitimize the system that still colonizes her country as a result of this perspective. It occurs when she recognizes the deception in that discourse and connects symbolic violence to the spatial alienation she experiences when she returns to Iraq.

Spivak demonstrated that women living under colonialism face a form of double oppression, as they are subjected to both colonial domination and gendered marginalization (1988). Both American soldiers and Iraqi society reject and humiliate Zeina, an Iraqi woman serving in the US Army. While she is viewed through a colonial lens by American soldiers, she is simultaneously perceived by Iraqi society as a collaborator with the occupying forces, which intensifies her position of social and symbolic marginalization:

"I was sitting cross-legged on the marble floor of the palace, my sleeves rolled up, before me a spread of kebabs [...] He looked down at me with contempt, like he was a white colonialist talking to a savage native" (p.71).

Because she collaborated with the occupiers, Iraqis simultaneously call her a traitor, saying, "But they saw me as a traitor" (p.116). Zeina's conflicting attitude has caused her to be socially and symbolically marginalized, making her susceptible to rejection from both sides.

Economic pressure exacerbates this vulnerability; rather than being a result of free will, Zeina's family's poverty is directly related to her job :

"At the start of our life in America, she used to customise trousers for Wal-Mart, shortening the legs according to customers' demands, for two dollars a pair [...] At the hotel, Mom worked in the kitchen for three years" (p. 114-115).

Thus, her job as an interpreter becomes a condition shaped by necessity rather than agency as economic survival changes a mechanism of restraint.

According to Said, exile is an existential condition where the traditional concept of location transcends to become an expression of alienation and estrangement. (2000). Zeina reflected that "You, my darling,

represent the American minority in our midst” (p. 15). In Iraq, “But they saw me as a traitor” (p.116). She is positioned as a person poised between two cultures and two locations, unable to completely inhabit either, and this doubled rejection captures her shattered feeling of belonging.

Homi Bhabha argued that the framework of colonial authority creates a state of forced complicity that forces the colonized to take on both roles concurrently, making it nearly hard to distinguish between victim and victimizer in colonial situations. (1994). She has suffered from cultural alienation, double discourse, and symbolic violence. Zeina reached a pivotal moment of awareness:

“Abu Ghraib was a far remove from The Bridge on the River Kwai, and military honour was no longer just a male issue. There were women offenders too, and that made my anger more bitter. How did that bitch, who was dragging a prisoner behind her like a dog on a leash, get into our army? Prisons were not suitable places for cinema, despite all the movies that were set in them. The real protagonist wasn’t pain; it was humiliation” (p. 112).

Her status as a victim is not diminished by this knowledge of entanglement, rather, it emphasizes how the victim is forced into becoming an instrument of the oppressor.

Zeina's change is the unavoidable consequence of a form of control that requires negotiation inside the oppressed culture to enable its dominance, rather than a choice. The question of how someone might become both a victim and a victimizer is obviously raised by dissecting her function as a victim. Furthermore, how can one exert even a small amount of influence within a more extensive oppressive system?

These points of the study, which focuses at Zeina's job as a victimizer, flows naturally from these issues. Instead of using overt violence, the colonizer use translation as a method of control, language as a means of cultural infiltration, and correct information as a weapon.

Zeina as victimizer from a post-colonial perspective

Zeina's position as a victimizer arises from the colonial structure, which forces the colonized to take part in the oppressive system through roles that appear to be professional or humanitarian, rather than through a direct propensity for violence. Despite not having a weapon or the ability to give commands, her role as victimizer in the American military establishment makes her a crucial component of the control system. Because the harm she does is symbolic and hidden within language itself, rather than clear, this makes her role much more dangerous.

Todorov asserted that translation in a colonial context is not a neutral activity, but rather a tool for cultural and political penetration (1982). Zeina painfully understands this role:

“My lips trembled and I struggled to keep my composure. On my own initiative, and without double-checking with the sergeant, I reached out and gently pushed aside the weapon that was aimed at her husband’s head. I said, ‘It’s nothing to be scared of. Just a simple investigation.’ The sergeant was asking me, ‘It this the man we want?’” (p. 77).

When she provides commands to soldiers during raids and conflicts, she crosses her role as a translator; her words become instruments of psychological torment, and victims experience humiliation ranging from overcoming the language barrier to losing their will to resist.

Applying Lawrence Venuti's (1995) idea of translation, which holds that the translator has a form of hybrid power in unequal situations since the translator becomes an essential intermediary, amplifies this symbolic power. When a security decision depends on Zeina's word, she feels tremendous authority:

“It this the man we want?’ ‘Not according to his name.’ He told me to ask him for ID. ‘Where’s your ID?’ I intervened again and whispered to the sergeant, ‘Take it easy. He’s asking his wife to bring his ID” (p. 77).

A person becomes a part of the oppressive system by taking part in the decision-making process, even if no force is used. This emphasizes how victim and victimizer are intertwined.

The exploitation of local understanding reinforces this situation, as Said articulates in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). And Bhabha, in *The location of culture* (1994), explains that colonialism leads to the formation of an elite that lends it an air of legitimacy. Zeina, thanks to her understanding of Iraqi dialects and customs, becomes a cultural guide for the American forces, and she gives the occupation an appearance of local acceptance (p. 68). Information that was meant to be protection turns into a tool of oppression, adding to her community's actual and symbolic shame.

She becomes a human facade that conceals the violence because of this use of her personality. In terms of structure, she gives her role as a collaborator in oppression an element of moral hypocrisy.

“We gave the man a compensation claim form and left through the broken door. But we didn’t return to the base right away. That night, we went and broke the outer gate of the neighboring house” (p.78).

She becomes the human facade that conceals the violence of the colonial structure.

Fanon explains the inherent violence ingrained in colonial regimes in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). The foundation of colonialism is persistent aggression that extends beyond political or economic dominance and into the occupied society's intellect, awareness, and social structure. Suppressed fury is the result of psychological tension brought on by daily tyranny. Zeina's defensive classification of the detainees, many of whom were young guys caught in poverty and desperation who often answered questions with “Wallah, I don’t know” (p. 111). illustrates how the victimizer internalizes the psychological effects of colonial violence, turning routine acts of interrogation into mechanisms of domination.

As Spivak notes in her examination of subalterns, material privilege serves to further solidify its role as an executioner. Zeina stated, “We were to stay in the palace for a few days[...]I enjoyed the makeshift shower that would later turn into a fondly remembered luxury” (p. 32). The difference highlights how tainted privilege turns the victim into a partner in oppression and creates a contradiction between her guilt and her relative well-being by materially connecting her to the oppressive machine.

Understanding Zeina as a victim is complemented by analyzing her role as a victimizer, which shows how colonialism puts people between victim and victimizer and how language, identity, and belonging become multiple tools of dominance. The practicality of preserving humanity in the occupied area is called into question by this.

Conclusion

The text provides a basis for understanding hybrid identity, highlighting neo-colonialism's cultural and psychological impact through Zeina's complex roles. Translation is central, reflecting the colonial relationship, as language functions as a tool for both cultural control and resistance, positioning the translator as an agent of symbolic power.

The novel critiques the portrayal of translation in literature. Contradictory experiences, linguistic fragmentation, and memory gaps signify an ethical engagement with conveying horrific events. This suggests literature functions as a testing ground for critical thought. The novel contributes to post-colonial criticism by offering an analytical model through the victim/victimizer dynamic in contemporary Iraqi literature. Future studies could extend this framework to other occupations or explore the role of soldier-translators and the linguistic impact on identity formation during wartime.

Finally, *The American Granddaughter* is shown to be an important literary and human achievement. Through Zeina's perspective, it offers a convincing explanation of neo-colonial power relations, demonstrating how occupation alters identity and how language, memory, and culture become interrelated instruments of resistance and dominance.

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