Beyond Victims and Perpetrators of September 11: The Implicated Subject in Inaam Kachachi’s The American Granddaughter

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Abstract
September 11 events took a heavy toll on many countries, particularly Iraq. Ever since those events, the white American literary and critical responses dominated the mainstream of the 9/11 novel subgenre with a significant focus on the resulting trauma on white Americans. Therefore, this paper seeks to broaden the critical scope of the 9/11 novel subgenre apart from the white American majority by implementing trauma theory to view the impact of 9/11 events on Iraqi people in their homeland as represented in Inaam Kachachi’s (2008) The American Granddaughter. Its significance lies in attempting to decenter the 9/11 trauma by shifting the debate from the ethical and legal accountability of who destroyed whom to foregrounding other sites of injustices that attest to forms of the implication and voice earlier suppressed pains and worries. The main question is how Kachachi, a Paris-based Iraqi novelist, portrayed the 9/11 traumatic aftermath in the novel through the perspective of an Iraqi/American female interpreter who worked for the American army during the Iraq War. Drawing on trauma theory, this study investigates the protagonist’s complex position, which best exemplifies Michael Rothberg’s theory of implication, where a participant in a traumatic experience occupies a position aligned with power and privilege without being a direct agent of harm. This paper finds that the novel contributes to the 9/11 novel counternarratives and confirms the implication of Iraqi/American people during the Iraq War that divulged the silenced personal and collective traumatic narratives spanning several Iraqi generations.

Keywords: The American Granddaughter, 9/11 novel, Cathy Caruth, implicated subject, Inaam Kachachi, Michael Rothberg, perpetrator, September 11, trauma, victim

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Introduction

The literature written after the September 11, 2001 attacks fluctuates between two structuring forces: the American urgency for national reconstruction and the resulting international turbulence. Thus, the corpus of 9/11 novels has grown beyond the American cultural scene. A wide range of literary responses dwells on its life-altering traumatic impact. On the one hand, the dominant White American trauma narratives oscillate between the urge to create cohesive ones to comprehend the causes and succumbing to the national demand to develop stories that manage the consequences of rising fear and anger. On the other hand, although non-American literary responses vary tremendously, the violence of the attacks and their aftermath reorient the relationship between writings and authors’ specific traumatic experiences.

Thinking of trauma as a bridge to connect with others enables non-Western 9/11 literary and critical contributions to communicate their pains and worries. The relationship between literature and trauma theory is dialogical, in which one enriches the other. Therefore, this study aims to broaden the critical scope of the 9/11 novel subgenre apart from the white American majority by implementing trauma theory to view the impact of 9/11 events on Iraqi people in their homeland as represented in the novel. The significance of this study lies in trying to decenter the 9/11 trauma by modifying the question from the dichotomy of the victims and perpetrators of the actual 9/11 events to explore other sites of injustices that indicate forms of implication and voice earlier suppressed calamities.

The main three objectives of this paper are a) to assert the viability of the contribution of female Arab writers to the sociopolitical debate of the 9/11 events, b) to challenge the dominating white American 9/11 trauma novel by presenting a counternarrative that voices the writer’s embedded anxieties and traumatic experiences, and c) to explore the complexity of traumatic experience beyond the dichotomy of victims and perpetrator where forms of implication are of equal traumatic impact. Primarily, this paper question how Inaam Kachachi, a Paris-based Iraqi novelist, portrayed the 9/11 traumatic aftermath in The American Granddaughter through the perspective of an Iraqi/American female interpreter who worked for the American army during the Iraq War. It argues, in part, that female Arab novelists, Kachachi, in this study, address enduring prior personal and collective traumas evoked by the 9/11 aftermath. Thus, it tries to prove that the tragedy of September 11 and its aftermath are neither temporally confined to the actual event nor an exclusive White American experience. By employing Rothberg’s implication theory, the study probes into the 9/11 trauma beyond the direct binary of victims and perpetrators of the events and their aftermath. Aside from the author’s gender and ethnicity, the novel was selected because it shows an explicit association with the rhetoric of the events of 9/11 and emphasizes the concept of implication. The literary verbalization of the heroine’s cumulative traumatic experiences reveals past times marred with silenced memories, proving the return of the repressed past and the challenges of overcoming it.

Literature Review

To discuss the novel from the perspective of trauma theory, some areas, such as 9/11 literature, trauma theory, 9/11 trauma, and the implicated subject theory, must be highlighted.
9/11 Literature

On September 11, 2001, airplanes struck the two buildings of the World Trade Center in New York, and other attacks on two highly restricted places in the country also occurred. Even though the 9/11 literature is a recent phenomenon, it constitutes an extensive growing archive of various texts. The term “9/11 literature” is commonly used to describe a group of texts that are either loosely or closely related to the attacks of 9/11. Dawes (2011) defines “9/11 literature” as works in which “the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington provide the entire or a part of the setting, or they feature more or less prominently as a historical context” (p. 6). Keniston and Quinn (2008) identify it as “literature’s perspective on 9/11, as well as on the relationship between politics and aesthetics, and between history and narrative” (p. 2). Keeble (2014) describes the growing corpus of what has come to be called the “9/11 novel” or “9/11 fiction” as “the corpus of novels … [that] have cumulatively much to say about the nuances and patterns of the wider Western response to 9/11” (p. 5). Keeble (2014) goes further by expanding the definition to include other non-Western responses by adopting different scholarly views from three articles: Mishra’s (2007), Gray’s (2009), and Rothberg’s (2009). These articles, among other arguments, call for fiction that crosses geographical boundaries. The expansion of the territory of the 9/11 novel pushes not only the physical borders for American authors but also allows non-American novels to contribute.

Most of the debatable areas in the 9/11 novel have to do with issues of conspiracy theories, 9/11 as an evolving subgenre and its main features, the assumption of language failure, being a transatlantic genre and the rhetoric of terror, and the rebirth of Islamophobia after 9/11. However, trauma theory remains a pivotal rubric in a 9/11 work.

Trauma

“Trauma,” derived from the Ancient Greek word for “wound,” refers to a physical injury from an external cause that requires medical treatment (Brown, 2020). Trauma theory, and its broad spectrum of interpretations, have been increasingly used in literary practice since the 1990s. Although it is structured around psychological harm, its definitions vary tactfully. Caruth (1996) stressed that trauma is “a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or set of events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event” (p. 12). Caruth (1995) argues that pathology is found “solely in the structure of the experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it” (pp. 4–5). Caruth’s description of trauma focuses on the postponed reaction to a tragic incident that is healed only by reclaiming one’s voice. Luckhusrt (2008) describes trauma as “an exemplary conceptual knot” (p. 14) in contemporary areas of knowledge that expresses the field’s interdisciplinary nature, situating trauma as an intersection, or a knot, where fields of expertise can crisscross. Whitehead’s (2011) argument differs in that she connects trauma to personal and collective memory, asserting that the current “cultural obsession with memory represents … a reaction formation against accelerated technical processing” (pp. 1–2).

Similarly, Kaplan (2005) linked trauma to media culture since “the impact of a major public event” should include larger spheres of knowledge than what he described as “quiet trauma” (p. 1). Therefore, Whitehead (2011) and Kaplan (2005) relate trauma to the media and technology as both the cause and the effect of trauma. LaCapra (2014) argued that trauma is “a disruptive...
experience that disarticulates the self and creates holes in existence” (p. 41). LaCapra (2014) views traumatic experiences concerning history and identity politics, arguing that the incompleteness of an individual’s experience creates problems in the representation and writing of history. These interpretations shed light on the challenges of phrasing trauma in words.

9/11 Trauma

The inevitable intersection between trauma and seismic events, such as 9/11, results in varied literary responses. Bond (2020) described the public sphere when 9/11 took place as that of “a wound culture” (p. 408). Bond agrees with Seltzer (1997), who states that wound culture “represents itself to itself … as a culture of suffering, states of injury and wound attachments” (p. 4). They explained that America was going through a post-traumatic mood after the successive catastrophes (e.g., the Great Depression, WWII, the Cold War, and the Vietnam War) of the previous century. These crises created a shared sense of anxiety and loss of control, which provoked uncertainty and insecurity, especially when leaders were unsafe. This traumatic sphere intensified when the attacks occurred and was repeatedly reported by the media (Bond, 2020).

Keeble (2014) “locates trauma in the corpus of the 9/11 novel as an inherently unstable phenomenon that can relate to both a singular moment and a larger timespan” (p. 10). Greenberg (2003) went beyond the temporality of trauma in Keeble’s argument and explained that the book title *9/11 Trauma at Home* registers a sense of surprise, suggesting that “the ‘coming home’ of trauma was inevitable” (Greenberg, 2003, p. 151). Greenberg’s contradictory perspectives of 9/11 trauma as both expected and unexpected are, she argues, symptoms of the traumatic experience of the attacks. The line between anticipation and surprise in 9/11 trauma narratives is blurred because literary texts often reflect the traumatic struggle between the “urge to know and the need to deny” (p. xxiii). Greenberg also agreed with Bond (2020) in relating the traumatic impact of 9/11 to earlier traumas. The reawakening of previous painful experiences necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the historical contexts that led to such catastrophes.

The immediate traumatic impact of 9/11 was anti-narrative. Luckhurst (2008) notes that the experience “generate[d] the manic production of retrospective narratives that seek to explicate the trauma” (p. 80). Bond (2020) also reaffirms that early publications of 9/11 trauma were wedded to the tropes of wound culture. Two oppositional narrative tendencies manifested: the first shows a refuge from the chaos of public life by focusing on ordinary domestic life, and the second presents the hyperbolic conversion of personal matters into national concerns. This nationalization reinforces the American hegemony over 9/11 trauma narratives that hinder other responses to the attacks. Bond (2020) also argues that the 9/11 corpus returned to “types of silence and amnesia, evoking buried or repressed pasts, whose unavailability to recall destabilizes the very coordinates that make it possible to interpret the world,” thus reflecting typical symptoms of trauma (pp. 408–409).

The drawbacks of the Eurocentricity of trauma theory after 9/11 also became a vital area of criticism. Gibbs (2014) and Bond (2020) argue that the aftermath not only exposed the “increasingly monolithic and programmatic critical prism” of trauma studies but also “enable[d] a sense of false innocence to take root and deflect attention from America’s complicity in actions both before and after 9/11” (Gibbs, 2014, p. 121). Therefore, two main sections are evolving; master narratives and counternarratives that work against each other. In addition, Cavedon (2015) raises some concerns about the limited validity of trauma theory in its current status to offer “an
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explanatory matrix for the exploration of public discourses” and to perceive 9/11 as “a symbolic event that lays bare the dysfunctionality of American foundational myths” (pp. 39–40).

Undoubtedly, the meaning of a tragedy that happened on American soil to those non-White Americans will differ tremendously according to their positions. Al-Maleh (2009) asserts two notions: a) the increasing intellectual demand to acquire further knowledge about the Arabs after the tragedy of 9/11, which anglophone Arab authors transmitted to a broader audience, and b) those authors did not serve, to some extent, the typical Arab cultural roles of being byproducts of diasporic experiences.

The narratives of/about Arab women after 9/11 fluctuate between inducing compassion and subverting stereotypes, as discussed in Alsultany’s (2021) and Cainkar’s (2021) articles. Both agreed on the symbolic signification of women’s bodies in response to the East/West political and cultural tension. The culturally insensitive Western representations of Arab Muslim women as oppressed, veiled, and suffering from serious predicaments oversimplify complicated situations. These representations promote the East as violent and aggressive against women. Meanwhile, oppressed women remain mute and passive (Alsultany, 2021).

Similarly, Cainkar (2021) questions why Muslim women were subjected to more hate crimes than men after 9/11. Although preliminary answers point to the visibility, vulnerability, and ease of targeting Muslim women, Cainkar suggests that the real reasons lie in three aspects: racial domination, white supremacy, and hegemonic femininity. Cainkar assumes that the White communities in America after 9/11 considered wearing the head veil (i.e., the hijab) as a threatening symbol that carries un-American and anti-American values for signifying female cultural submission to masculinity and rejecting the white American standards of freedom (Cainkar, 2021).

Implicated Subject

According to Merriam-Webster, “implication” means a “close connection, especially an incriminating involvement,” which links implication to an evil action (Brown, 2020, implication). Rothberg (2019) defines “implicated subjects” as people who “occupy positions aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm” (p. 1) and describes them as neither victims, perpetrators, nor passive bystanders. However, Rothberg underscores their role in generating the dichotomy of victims and perpetrators. They indirectly proliferate the violent legacies of the perpetrators and build structures of injustice. No matter how complicated and multifaceted the modes of implication are, they thwart efforts toward justice (Rothberg, 2019).

Nevertheless, as Rothberg points out, complicity differs from implication in that the former presupposes the latter, whereas implication does not necessarily include complicity. For example, people are implicated in their historical legacies but are not complicit in wrongdoings before birth (Rothberg, 2009). Therefore, implication and complicity are not interchangeable.

Forms of implication are complex and changing and sometimes show obscurity due to conditions of “psychic and social denial” (Rothberg, 2019, p. 8). However, Rothberg (2019) names four avatars of implicated subjects: “the descendant,” “the beneficiary,” “the perpetuator,” and “the internationalist” (p. 12).
The Descendant

Rothberg drew on the history of slavery and theories ushering from it to infer two forms of implication, both of which have to do with descendants. The first is the genealogical one, in which the descendant has a blood connection to his enslaved ancestors. The other is structurally implicated, who is not by blood a direct descendant of the enslaved people but is implicated with slavery in terms of resulting economics, politics, and social privileges. Rothberg (2019) highlights a further paradox through the two forms of the descendant implication, questioning the theoretical possibility of tracing back a family tree and examining the actual traumatic experience of both the genealogical and structural forms of implication (Rothberg, 2019).

The Beneficiary

The beneficiary benefits from the past pains of others and the existing inequality. According to Rothberg, human rights agencies fit perfectly into this category. Meister (2011) critiqued the discourse on human rights during and after the Cold War, shedding light on the role of human rights agencies that received adequate support from declining regimes and continued to have appropriate social aid in new orders. The troubled relationship between former victims and perpetrators necessitates an “antipolitical” discourse in which reconciliation had better overcome justice. Although perpetrators might be punished, victims are encouraged to give up their claims for “moral victory” (Meister, 2011, pp. 25–26).

The Perpetuator

In Rothberg’s 2019 “From Gaza to Warsaw: Multidirectional Memory and the perpetuator,” he turns to the Israel/Palestine conflict. He associates the perpetuator concept with ideological implications by examining the relationships between diasporic Jewish communities and the Israeli occupants of Palestine. Setting victims of different histories against each other, Rothberg (2019) assumes that further injustice is produced via “an antagonistic logic of competition” (p. 124). Rothberg observes the erupted controversy at the University of California after Professor W. Robinson sent an image via email to his students. The image contained “parallel images of Nazis and Israelis,” and in the email, he asserted that “Gaza is Israel’s Warsaw” (Rothberg, 2019, p. 128). Although the logic of solidarity links slavery and the Holocaust, it falls apart when the Holocaust memory is decentered in both participants and locales. Rothberg (2019) stresses that “the implication is multidirectional,” and citizens who “bear political responsibility of a nation’s foreign policies” are “perpetuators” (p. 145) because of the ideological support they provide.

The Internationalist

Lingering on the idea of internationalism as a form of mindful implication, Rothberg (2019) discusses “long-distance solidarity” (p. 147) to explore the internationalist subject. He explains how some victims of certain nations project their predicaments by standing in solidarity with other countries. Here, the victim of one context turns into an ally in another. He gives a detailed example of the narratives of a Holocaust survivor and French filmmaker who defended the cause of Algeria and Vietnam in the context of decolonization in films. The films reveal “a politicized form of remembrance” (Rothberg, 2019, p. 159). They not only decenter the Holocaust
memory but also show sensitivity toward the ongoing traumatizing experiences against other people with whom she shares no direct affinity.

Rothberg’s (2019) basic notion of the implicated subject opens a large productive venue examining Caruth’s maxim: “We are implicated in each other’s traumas” (Caruth, 1996, p. 24). Rothberg proposes an advanced understanding of trauma beyond the binary of victim and perpetrator. The presence of the implicated subject further elucidates the mechanisms enabling tragic experiences to be passed and inherited by the descendant, to be taken advantage of by the beneficiary, to be continued and immortalized by the perpetuator, and to be transported across geographical and cultural boundaries by the internationalist.

Recently, Altwaiji (2023) presented an updated comprehensive understanding of the evolving 9/11 novel subgenre by considering various perspectives in the American cultural scene, categorized into neutral narratives, political ones, and immigrants’ contributions. Similarly, Rashid (2022) expressed that the 9/11 tragedy exposed the American politicized cultural trauma before and after the attacks and the failure of the American center to support its minorities. Therefore, leading American writers and critics have recently urged to rewrite the 9/11 memory taking into consideration minorities’ traumas before and after 9/11.

Therefore, this paper sought to extend the 9/11 novel critical studies beyond the American geographical and cultural borders and to develop a thorough perception of the 9/11 aftermath by employing trauma theory and the implication theory to examine how it affected Iraqi people in their homeland. The implication framework significantly loosens the traumatic experience by shifting from the ethical and legal accountability of who destroyed whom in the 9/11 tragedy to foregrounding other sites of injustice that reveal past times marred with disturbing memories. The attempt to decolonize the critical debate on the 9/11 trauma by investigating the tragic aftermath on Iraqis challenges the dominating white American trauma narratives and voices their successive individual and collective traumas.

Analysis

“[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, 2008, p. 1); Zeina, the heroine, agonizes. The first lines of Kachachi’s (2008) *The American Granddaughter* delineate the accumulative traumas that have changed her. The September 11 tragedy goes beyond its timeframe and locale from the perspective of a female Arab novelist. Instead, the tragedy evokes earlier personal and historical traumas and enhances the theory of trauma culture and mediated trauma discussed by Kaplan, Greenberg, and Bond. Because these personal and historical traumas span an extended timeframe and affect a broader population than punctual and private traumas, they are socially entrenched and necessitate what Rothberg (2019) termed the implicated subject. Although situating the protagonist within the affiliation paradigm of traumatic experiences varies from being a victim or a perpetrator to an implicated subject, her expertise and many other Iraqi characters’ expertise point to the idea of eventual irreconcilability.

*Trauma and 9/11 trauma in the novel*

Many 9/11 critics (e.g., Greenberg, Keeble, and Bond) consider the 9/11 trauma “an inherently unstable phenomenon that can relate to both a singular moment and a larger timespan” (Keeble, 2014, p. 10). This more expansive space frees traumatic narratives from time or locales.
Greenberg (2003) and Bond (2020) recall broader traumatic experiences than the punctual trauma directly connected to the 9/11 attacks, as they extensively examined several 9/11 literary responses. The American Granddaughter ponders over the accumulation of personal and collective traumas in Iraqi culture. By presenting Zeina as a descendant of a scattered Christian Iraqi family, the novel portrays successive cycles of unfathomable distressing experiences, individual and collective, that result from historical/transgenerational and cultural traumas.

To begin with, the novel introduces the heroine, Zeina, as a young American interpreter returning from the Iraqi battlefield, whose relatively short work experience allowed her to live in person what her parents and other relatives had told her. She goes to the places they had been forced to desert and met the people she knows as figures of her parents’ nostalgic stories. One of the intense traumatic experiences they suffered was emigration, which became a collectively distressing experience for many Iraqi people. Al-Ali (2007) exhibits a linear account of Iraqi women who emigrated, which not only traces their stories across several social and political changes but also offers alternative histories that voice the female plight on Iraqi soil and beyond its borders. Al-Ali (2007) locates two waves of Iraqi emigration: the first between the 1940s and the 1970s for educational and financial purposes and the second from the 1970s until the present day to flee the political conflict during and after the political conflict Ba’ath period (1963–2003). Being scattered worldwide has resulted in diverse diasporic experiences for successive generations. Furthermore, Iraqi hopelessness to return to their homeland urges the need to construct narratives documenting their experiences (Al-Ali, 2007).

Kachachi (2008) does not present a war-wrecked female heroine; instead, Zeina enables the other Iraqi characters to narrate their predicaments that constitute a collective trauma “where people entertain themselves with memories of oppression and abuse” (p. 44). The novel portrays emigration experiences with considerable variation. However, all were traumatizing, especially considering the motives that caused them to move to other countries. Zeina’s family trauma, like many others, took place during the reign of Al-Ba’ath when she had to leave Mosul, Iraq, with her parents, Sabah Behnam and Batoul Saour, and her only brother, Yazan, to settle down in Detroit, United States. Zeina’s mother instigated a crucial family decision to flee Iraq when she did not feel safe after the disappearance of her husband, who returned later with a disfigured face. Dreadfully, the perforation of his tongue was used as evidence in his family’s asylum application. “The ruling party” accused Zeina’s father, the handsome soft-spoken TV presenter, of conspiracy because his closest colleague allegedly reported that Sabah had protested about the length and outdated news he had to present (Kachachi, 2008, p. 69). Although Zeina’s mother took the initiative to flee Iraq, she always felt guilty about settling down anywhere other than Iraq. The overwhelming scene of her crying, asking for her father’s forgiveness while repeating the U.S. national anthem upon being granted American citizenship, marks a new entrenched trauma in which she became a victim of a political predicament. Thus, the novel employs the tragedy of 9/11 as a gateway to different arenas of personal and collective traumas in which the personal trauma of physical subjugation illustrates political corruption and long-lasting historical trauma in Iraqi history.

To convey these traumas to readers, several narrative techniques were used. Not only did Kachachi (2008) use multiple ambivalent voices that intersected with each other, but she was also determined to silence the presence of the perpetrator’s voice, calling it “the ruling party” and using third participle pronouns instead (Kachachi, 2008, p. 69). The intersection of voices points to memory distortion and could also indicate the desire to suppress it and blur the specific
whereabouts of emigration. Furthermore, the absence of some details about the family’s last days in Iraq before heading abroad contended that the hasty departure and brief goodbyes tell more than an elaborated portrayal of the journey. Skipping parts of their story echoes the desire to place veils of secrecy over a collective traumatizing occurrence that many Iraqi immigrants share, signifying “an escape to a faraway land [that] felt like death, no later reunion expected or hoped for” (p. 71). The vague speaker of this line not only indicates the possibility that the characters and the author share this idea, but it also reflects the emigration experience intrusiveness in the Iraqi cultural consciousness, as it signals an end to the possibility of living in Iraqi soil ever again.

The novel goes back to Iraqis’ older generation, represented by Rahma, the grandmother, who lived through three phases of Iraqi history: the prosperous days before Al-Ba’ath, during its reign, and after its collapse. She anchors the Iraqi determination to survive their traumas, including the emigration of loved ones. Rahma sought refuge in her prayers for her scattered relatives and lamented the forceful change in her social contacts. Her prayers to several acquaintances substantiated that emigration constitutes one of the significant collective traumas in Iraqi culture. The variety of personal, cultural, or economic reasons instigating the emigration from Iraq, backed by desperateness, made it the only way to lead safe, thriving lives in foreign locales. However, immigration was not a luxurious option to any; instead, it was a matter of survival to Zeina’s father; it signified the disintegration of the family to her mother, and it represented death in the eyes of the grandmother.

The 9/11 tragedy not only led to the pitfalls of warfare and the collapse of the then-ruling government but also brought back earlier traumas of fear, poverty, and previous war atrocities that caused social fragmentation and a lack of trust within inner social circles. Exploring the public sphere in the aftermath of 9/11 in the Iraqi collective psyche reveals many deep-rooted pains that typify Greenberg’s (2003) and Bond’s (2020) claims that September 11 brought earlier traumas to the fore. Zeina exposes the overlap of the public and private spheres by fluctuating between being a traumatized and a traumatizing figure. The main question is where Zeina stands from her family’s perspective and her country of origin, whether a victim, a perpetrator, or an implicated subject.

**Victims and Perpetrators of the Novel**

The relativity of the traumatic position of Zeina in the novel becomes inevitable not only because of her hyphenated identity as an Arab-American but also because of the sociopolitical context to which she struggled to adapt. The role she plays, willingly or not, might also depend on how a recipient assesses the context. Although being a hero in one’s story might mean being a villain in another’s, Zeina was an undisputable victim in her childhood. The ruling party snatched her from her grandparents and extended family. Kachachi (2008) puts Zeina’s traumatizing childhood into words through which Pederson’s (2008) tropes can be traced. Pederson (2008) suggests three tropes in traumatic narratives: silencing, indirection, and repetition. The victim’s voice is silenced to suppress the traumatic incident, a trope the narrator could circumvent without direct expression. For example, “The scenes of my childhood poured over me like hot rain, burning instead of cooling” (Kachachi, 2008, p. 39), reflecting that Zeina did not have a delightful childhood. Kachachi (2008) thus attempted to point indirectly to the fears and anxieties Zeina experienced as a child. Observing dusty plazas, destroyed minarets, and Bedouin veiled women, among other scenes, stirred Zeina’s suppressed memories. The portrayal of unpleasant images to Zeina indirectly voices her childhood worries.
However, Zeina also experienced blissful days, but most of these memories were narrated by her grandmother and other relatives. One of the few memories she recalled was her days in church. “Everything had changed in Baghdad except the churches,” Zeina contemplated (Kachachi, 2008, p. 156). She recalled the prayers, nuns, friends, and chants. This repetition compulsion marks the protagonist’s need to vent her nostalgia for her childhood. In contrast, the novel does not talk about her juvenility in the U.S., how her brother, Yazan, became an addict, or how her parents separated. Zeina suppresses these childhood traumatic experiences by silencing the whole narrative. Thus, it was when she was in the church that she could reclaim part of her childhood, probably because she found peaceful spiritual refuge in religion. Meanwhile, she either silenced or indirectly expressed specific segments of her childhood related to traumatic narratives of incidents that she might have either missed or lamented.

Thus, the conflating binary of Zeina as a traumatized versus traumatizing figure was questioned after returning to Iraq. Zeina’s situation became complicated because of the occupational framework through which she reappeared in Iraq. Although some of her relatives, her grandmother, Tawoos, Haydar, and Muhaymen, softly described her as a victim, they could not help concealing their disappointment in the assistance she provided the U.S. Army. Acting as a translator, offering her verbal skills and cultural background to serve the American enemy bluntly pronounced her, and many like her, “a collaborator” (Kachachi, 2008, p. 85). Zeina struggled with this novel role of being “a traitor” before her family and the people of Iraq (Kachachi, 2008, p. 147). From their perspective, she stepped down from being a victim to a perpetrator.

Kachachi (2008) delves deep into the psyche of victims and perpetrators by setting the granddaughter against her grandmother during one of Iraq’s most significant national occasions: Armed Forces Day. This incident underscored the contrast between the two figures and brought back the memory of Iraq before Al-Ba’ath’s reign. This confrontation between the two close relatives demonstrates the fragmentation among Iraqi families caused by a lingering political subjugation. “I felt vulnerable,” Zeina said, “and exposed and sat there waiting for the sermon of reproach. I knew what I’d done wrong and had no intention of defending myself” (Kachachi, 2008, p. 77). Although her words showed her powerlessness, they also sounded, to some extent, inconsiderate toward her grandmother’s grief over both the country and her husband. However, the seeming carelessness changed when the grandmother helped Zeina wear her grandfather’s heavy khaki suit. The heaviness of the suit on her shoulders matched the psychological weight of her grandmother’s sorrow and the historical burden of a fading country. The mourning grandmother lamented the “crazy times” in which she witnessed “the dress uniform of an Iraqi colonel [that] could give birth to a bulletproof vest that was made in America” (Kachachi, 2008, p. 82). The ironic juxtaposition of Zeina against her grandmother and grandfather on this special day asserts that she is no longer a juvenile victim; instead, she represents the perpetrator.

Furthermore, Kachachi (2008) skillfully portrays Zeina’s recognition of being a causative part of a traumatizing experience in her own family. While the novelist used the writing techniques of indirectness and silencing some memories to reveal Zeina’s victimized childhood, she created a self-fragmented protagonist to expose the perpetrator trauma Zeina suffered from and named her “the author” (Kachachi, 2008, p. 90). By allowing “the author” to take the narrative from Zeina at some point, Kachachi (2008) probes Zeina’s subconsciousness to divulge her utmost worries. “It’s not me who’s writing. It’s Rahma,’ the author” speaks (Kachachi, 2008, p. 90). “The author” appeared first when Zeina learned about false intelligence reports and the killing of Iraqi scientists
and reporters, which were the main reasons for invading Iraq. Upon receiving the shocking news, Zeina detached herself from the narrative. Her defense mechanism against being part of this falsehood is to write about it in an encrypted way. Zeina, or “the author,” said, “[writing] was a noble work … that has the power to bend the truth” (Kachachi, 2008, p. 91). Then, Zeina, as the author, handed the narrative to her grandmother, who would have pictured Zeina as “the villain” of her story and would have murdered her by shooting her in the head from a short distance after placing a black bag over it because “that’s how treason is supposed to be punished” (Kachachi, 2008, p. 92). Zeina understood the pain she had caused her family and decided how they should penalize her.

In addition, the false reports and mass killings were not the only things Zeina wanted to rebuff. The infamous incident of Abu Ghraib, in which Iraqi prisoners were piled up naked and some were leashed like animals by American soldiers, triggered a prior trauma in Zeina and caused her to compare it to the September 11 attacks. This incident revived the suppressed trauma of her father’s earlier torture that had caused them to flee Iraq. Then, she imagined her father to be the leashed naked man dragged by “Lynndie England” and pondered sobbingly, “How would I be able to face my dad?” (Kachachi, 2008, pp. 142–143) Zeina’s disbelief and agony extend through her visualization of herself as the daughter of that man whose situation resembled her father’s earlier calamity. Her father’s trauma became her own childhood trauma, in which her passivity made her a victim. The spheres of being a perpetrator and a victim overlap, solidifying Rothberg’s theory of the implicated subject that Caruth’s (1996) Unclaimed Experience had already introduced.

The Implicated Subject in the Novel

Zeina’s role in the novel reflects the implication theory since being an interpreter with the American Army interlocks with being an Iraqi descendant. Zeina, as an implicated subject, fits the second category proposed by Rothberg: the beneficiary. Although she acknowledges the pain that resulted from September 11, she also benefits from it: first, by proving her Americaness to the host country and serving the American Army, and second, by reuniting with her Iraqi family members. The beneficiary role Zeina played when she voluntarily enrolled in the American Army as an interpreter lacks the presupposition of being antipolitical since she could not depoliticize her American stance, not only by working for them but also by choosing to return to the United States after finishing her duties. Her goal was to rediscover her country of origin and reunite with her family personally. She also joined the army, believing that America was Iraq’s savior. Zeina is implicated not only because she offers up her linguistic abilities but also because of the cultural background of the inflicted people.

In addition, Kachachi’s (2008) recall of other nations’ traumas indicates the internationalist-implicated subject, which Rothberg (2019) explains as “long-distance solidarity” (p. 147). The victims of the two traumatic incidents were intertwined despite the varying geographical and ideological contexts. Kachachi’s (2008) depiction of “the day of the fleeing helicopters” (Kachachi, 2008, p. 181), which the character of Muhaymen anticipates, not only was an alarming end of any collaboration with the Americans signaled, particularly with Zeina as a representative, but the dilemma of the Vietnamese people was also brought to the fore. This historical image warns against similar culminations yet to come and typifies Rothberg’s 2019 idea of the internationalist implication when a trauma intertwines with another.
The overlapping roles of victims, perpetrators, and implicated subjects outlined in the novel draw attention to the challenging nature of trauma on all personal and communal levels. The sorrowful accounts of Zeina’s family indicate that her mission in Iraq became a journey of mourning and remembrance that vented their victimhood and refined Zeina’s experiences from being a victim to a perpetrator and an implicated subject—a journey of redemption. Furthermore, the desperate tone prevails until the novel’s end. Kachachi (2008) concedes that “September 11 was waiting for a scapegoat,” and Iraq was held accountable for an unrelated tragedy in the United States. Ultimately, Zeina could not reach the equilibrium she had ached for, which indicates that Zeina’s healing process would take additional time and effort.

Conclusion

This paper sought to broaden the critical scope of the 9/11 novel subgenre apart from the white American majority by implementing trauma theory to view the impact of 9/11 events on Iraqi people in their homeland as represented by Kachachi’s The American Granddaughter (2008). The novel approaches the September 11 tragedy from the perspective of a female Iraqi/American interpreter who works for the US Army in Iraq, which crosses the geographical and temporal boundaries of the actual events of 9/11 and uses the colossal tragedy to voice the traumas of successive generations of Iraqi people. Thus, the novel extends the 9/11 novel subgenre and transfers a political and martial act of violence from its public sphere into the private domestic arena of a family reunion that triggers prior calamities and distressing memories. This paper also finds that the novel substantiates Rothberg’s theory of implication, where a) the heroine descends from a traumatized family and projects the agony of a leashed man to be her father’s, b) she benefits from working for the American army to get access to both parties and experience their fears and anxieties and c) finally, the 9/11 traumatic aftermath in Iraq juxtaposes the Vietnamese earlier trauma which operates as historical analogy signifying the gruesome effects of war. Kachachi puts together the fragmented pieces of wordless traumas of many Iraqi people into historically oriented accounts revived in the 9/11 aftermath without restoring the yearned equilibrium. The domestication in the 9/11 novel is a common trope as it reinforces the idea that a family serves as a steady and unyielding foundation in a community facing the created uncertainty after the attacks.

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