
A Life in Limbo: The Dichotomy of Allegiances – Trauma, Identity and Transformation in The American Granddaughter

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Abstract

*This research explores the transformative journey of Zeina, the protagonist of Inaam Kachachi's novel *The American Granddaughter* (2010), as she grapples with complexities of trauma, identity, disillusionment and transformation. Set against the backdrop of Iraq war and its aftermath, the novel masterfully captures Zeina's struggle to reconcile her dual identity and conflicting allegiances. Through a close reading of the novel applying an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on trauma theory, literary analysis and cultural studies, this research examines how Zeina's traumatic experiences shape her sense of identity and allegiance. By applying Linderman's theoretical framework of traumatic transformation consisting of courage's war and perilous education, this study illuminates three stages of Zeina's transformation: disintegration, reconciliation and reintegration. This research contributes to a complex interplay of trauma, identity and transformation, shedding light on the profound impact of trauma on individual identity and the human experience.*

Key Words: Trauma, identity, allegiance, transformation, liminal phase, courage's war, perilous education, disintegration, reconciliation, reintegration.

Introduction

In the midst of war, occupation and cultural displacement, individuals are often forced to navigate the treacherous terrain of conflicting allegiances, loyalties and identities (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008). *The American Granddaughter* celebrates the traumatic transformation and disillusionment of an Iraqi born immigrant, Zeina, in America. Through the conflicting emotions and changing allegiances of the narrator, the tragedy of a country is highlighted which, battling to emerge out of dictatorship, found itself entrapped in foreign occupation. Zeina's experience, owing to her status with dual nationalities, serves as a powerful lens to examine the complex interplay between trauma, identity and transformation, offering a profound exploration of the human experience.

Despite the growing body of research on trauma and identity, there remains a significant gap in our understanding of how individuals navigate the complexities of dual identity (Santner, 1992) and conflicting allegiance (Hirschberger, 2018) in the context of war and cultural displacement (Gennep, 2010, p. 3). While existing studies have explored the impact of trauma on individual identity (Assmann, 2006, p. 210), few have examined the specific challenges faced by individuals living in liminal spaces (Gennep, 2010; Tal, 1996), caught between conflicting cultures, identities and allegiances (Hirschberger, 2018).

Set against the context of US occupation of Iraq and its aftermath, *The American Granddaughter* delves into the intricate web of Zeina's relationship, cultural heritage and personal history, expertly weaving together themes of trauma, identity, belonging and transformation. Through Zeina's Story Kachachi sheds light on the often overlooked experiences of individuals living in liminal spaces, caught between conflicting allegiances, cultures and identities.

This research seeks to address this gap by examining how Zeina's traumatic experiences shape her sense of identity and allegiance. By applying Linderman's theoretical framework of courage's war and perilous education, this study aims to illuminate the stages of Zeina's transformation including disintegration, reconciliation and reintegration.

By examining the transformative journey of Zeina, this research seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay of trauma, identity and transformation, and brings into limelight the often overlooked experiences of individuals living in liminal spaces. This study aims to contribute a deeper understanding of the human experience, and to inform support services and interventions for individuals struggling with similar challenges.

Hypothesis

The novel seems portraying the interception of trauma, identity and transformation as a complex and dynamic process, illuminating the challenges and struggle of living in limbo. It is hypothesized that the novel shows Zeina's experiences of trauma and transformation impact her sense of identity and allegiance, leading to a deeper understanding of the human experience and the complexities of reconciling multiple identities.

Research questions

1. How does the novel intercept between trauma, identity and transformation, illuminating the complexities of living in limbo?
2. How does the protagonist Zeina, experience and navigate the dichotomy of allegiances (Iraqi & American), and how does this impact her sense of identity and transformation?

Research Objectives

1. To analyze Zeina's transformation through traumatic experiences in war.
2. To examine the interplay between trauma, identity and transformation in the novel.

3. To evaluate the novel's contribution to understanding human experience with respect to war trauma.

Significance of the study

The research will deepen the reader's understanding of the impact of trauma on individuals, particularly those living in limbo or liminal spaces. The study also sheds light on how traumatic experiences shape identity and allegiance, informing theories of identity formation. The findings can inform support services for individuals experiencing trauma, particularly those from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Literature Review

War trauma and PTSD are increasingly prevalent due to ongoing global conflicts (Ibrahim, 2017). Fictional narratives play a crucial role in exposing the devastating consequences of war (Lorenzo, 2014). Studying trauma in fiction and scholarly disciplines helps understand its impact on individuals and society (Apple & Richter, 2007). Trauma and PTSD are complex concepts often misunderstood, but comprehending their history and development is essential for understanding their portrayal in fiction and developing effective treatments. This study examines a novel, *The American Granddaughter*, for the portrayal of trauma, identity, and transformation, shedding light on the complexities of living in limbo and the impact of traumatic experiences on individuals. This literature review aims to contextualize the research hypothesis and objectives by examining existing scholarship on trauma, identity, and transformation.

However, to provide a deeper understanding of this study, it would be pertinent to first trace the historical development and evolution of trauma studies, encompassing various theoretical perspectives and empirical findings that have shaped our comprehension of trauma and its complex manifestations. The study of trauma, actually, has developed into a significant discipline, engaging scholars from various fields (Mackinnon, 2000), including historians, scholars, clinicians, philosophers, and literary personnel. The diagnosis of PTSD first appeared in APA's diagnostic manual in 1980, based on symptoms observed in Vietnam War veterans (Suleiman, 2008). Since then, researchers have applied trauma studies to analyze various types of trauma, including colonial trauma, Holocaust, and 9/11.

Trauma is characterized as an "overwhelming experience" that results in delayed reactions and repetitive suffering (Caruth, 1996). Theories on trauma highlight the importance of internal and external faculties in coping with traumatic events. For instance, Freud's concept of belatedness emphasizes the delayed reaction to traumatic experiences (1924). Historical developments in trauma studies include Charcot's work on hysteria and Freud's introduction of psychoanalysis. Charcot's focus on hysteria led to a greater understanding of trauma's psychological impact (Ringel & Brandell, p.1, 2012). Freud's psychoanalytic theory further expanded on the concept of trauma, introducing the idea of repression and the unconscious mind (1924).

The study of trauma continues to evolve, with scholars from various disciplines contributing to our understanding of trauma and its complex, multifaceted nature. Despite progress, many questions remain unanswered, and the study of trauma remains a dynamic field. Researchers continue to explore the long-term impacts of PTSD, treatment options, and coping strategies, aiming to provide better support for individuals affected by trauma.

Trauma research has established that traumatic experiences can significantly impact an individual's sense of identity and allegiance (Herman, 1992; Kirmayer, 2014). The concept of liminality, introduced by Turner (1967), describes the state of being in transition, where individuals experience a disconnection from their previous identity and struggle to form a new one. This liminal space is often characterized by feelings of disorientation, dislocation, and disidentification (Bhabha, 1994).

Studies have shown that individuals living in limbo, such as refugees or immigrants, experience a heightened sense of trauma and disorientation (Papadopoulos, 2002; Summerfield, 2000). The novel under investigation offers a unique perspective on this experience, exploring the protagonist Zeina's navigation of multiple allegiances (Iraqi and American) and her transformation through traumatic experiences in war.

Research has also highlighted the significance of cultural background in shaping identity and response to trauma (Kirmayer, 2014; Summerfield, 2000). The novel's contribution to this field lies in its nuanced portrayal of the interplay between trauma, identity, and transformation, offering insights into the complexities of reconciling multiple identities.

The research objectives align with existing scholarship, seeking to analyze Zeina's transformation through traumatic experiences, examine the interplay between trauma, identity, and transformation, and evaluate the novel's contribution to understanding human experience with respect to war trauma. The significance of this study lies in its potential to deepen our understanding of the impact of trauma on individuals, particularly those living in limbo, and inform support services for individuals experiencing trauma from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Methodology

Research design

This research undertakes a qualitative metissage of analytical approaches, synthesizing trauma theory, psychoanalysis, and reception theories to examine the representation of trauma in Andria Busfield's novel, *The American Granddaughter*. The study utilizes convenience sampling to select relevant sources and random sampling to identify instances of trauma, memory, and representation within the text. The primary source, *The American Granddaughter*, offers a unique perspective on trauma and its effects, set against the backdrop of war in Iraq. The main focus is on the investigation of the portrayal of trauma, identity, and transformation. The study also employs a close reading technique to identify and trace elements of trauma, identity, and transformation throughout the text. Narrative analysis approach is used to examine speech and content, including philosophical meanings and socio-

politico-cultural contexts. Moreover, the study draws on existing scholarship on trauma, identity, and transformation to contextualize the findings.

Theoretical framework

Linderman's theory of traumatic transformation, as outlined in the introduction, describes the three stages of transformation that individuals undergo in response to traumatic experiences: disintegration, reconciliation, and reintegration. This theory is closely related to his theory of Courage's War and Perilous Education, presented in his book *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (1987), which posits that individuals must navigate a "war" within themselves to reconcile their conflicting allegiances, identities, and loyalties. "Courage's War" deals with a person's ideals and expectations who joins war; and, "A Perilous Education" describes the process of disillusionment and transformation of that person when he finds that war was not like what he had been informed or had imagined.

The connection between the two theories lies in the idea that the process of traumatic transformation is, in itself, a form of "courage's war" and "perilous education". The disintegration stage of traumatic transformation can be seen as the initial "war" within the individual, where their previous identity and sense of self are broken down. The reconciliation stage can be seen as the "perilous education" phase, where the individual gradually comes to terms with their conflicting allegiances and identities, and begins to form a newfound understanding of themselves and their place in the world.

The reintegration stage, where the individual emerges with a new, transformed identity, can be seen as the culmination of the "courage's war" and "perilous education" process. This transformed identity is the result of the individual's courageous navigation of their internal conflicts, and their willingness to confront and reconcile their conflicting allegiances and identities.

In this sense, Linderman's theory of traumatic transformation and his theory of Courage's War and Perilous Education are intimately connected, and offer a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between trauma, identity, and transformation. By examining Zeina's transformative journey through the lens of these theories, this research aims to shed light on the profound impact of trauma on individual identity and the human experience.

Theoretical Assumptions:

1. Traumatic experiences have the potential to transform individuals.
2. Transformation occurs through a process of disruption, disorientation, and reorientation.
3. Social support and self-awareness play a crucial role in the reorientation process.

Conceptual Model:

Grounded in Linderman's theories, this research has developed the Phoenix Cycle of Trauma and Recovery, a conceptual framework that illuminates Zeina's transformative journey from

war to peace, tracing her path from traumatic disruption to resilient rebirth. The cycle is as following:

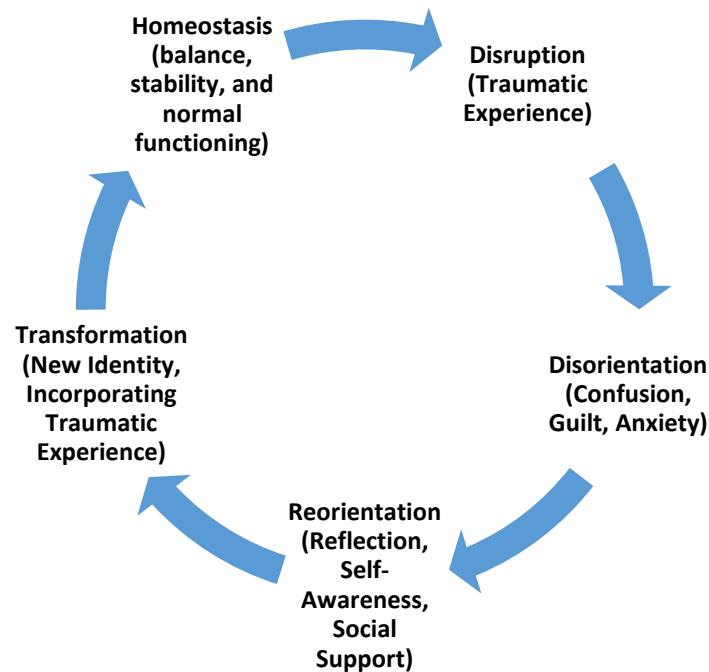


Fig. 1. Phoenix Cycle of Trauma and Recovery

This phoenix cycle will guide the analysis of Zeina's transformation in *The American Granddaughter*, exploring how her traumatic experiences lead to disruption, disorientation, and ultimately, reorientation and transformation.

Discussion

The present study conceptualizes trauma as the victim's emotional response to a horrific event that shatters their previously held beliefs and ideologies, leading to a transformation of the self. This transformation initiates a new direction of dealing with memory and its dynamics, originating new perceptions and understandings of self and others. As Tal (1996) asserts, trauma, by its very nature, resides beyond "normal conception," necessitating the recreation of the event to present it accurately. Building on Freudian concepts, memory and trauma require the recreation or abreaction of the event through narration or writing. Critics like Freud, Tal, and Caruth posit that reactions to traumatic experiences, including cognitive chaos and division of consciousness, are fundamental features of traumatic experience and memory.

The American Granddaughter opens with Zeina, the protagonist, grappling with the trauma she experienced as a translator in Iraq. Zeina's journey in the Green Zone is marked by a shattered cognitive self and a transformed consciousness. Initially, she embarks on a personal and innocent journey, driven by a desire to improve her family's life, reconnect with her hometown of Baghdad, and support Iraq's transition to democracy. However, her experiences

in Iraq gradually become politicized, leading her to realize that "freedom in this country tastes like vinegar" (Kachachi, 2010, p. 81). Ashamed of her actions, which are deemed a betrayal by her family and friends, Zeina faces harsh judgments from her grandmother Rahma, who sets out to "re-educate" her. The conflicts with her family and friends, including her milk brothers Muhaymen and Haydar, and her nanny Tawoos, contribute to Zeina's disillusionment and traumatic transformation. She becomes like a "dog with two homes" (Kachachi, 2010, p. 69), struggling to navigate her relationships and identity. Her connection with Muhaymen becomes particularly complicated after he joins the Mahdi Army, forcing her to confront the harsh realities of war. Despite her attempts to remain neutral, Zeina is haunted by the scenes of death and destruction, leading to a profound transformation, leaving her "laden with a gravel of sorrow" and "bearing a cemetery inside her chest" (Kachachi, 2010, p. 1). As Leed notes, "when a person internalizes war, he must first acknowledge his status as a victim in order to sort out the vagueness surrounding his identity and revive his connection to civilian society" (1979, p. 118).

As Linderman's theory suggests, individuals like Zeina who join war with high ideals and expectations often undergo a traumatic transformation when reality contradicts their beliefs. Zeina's enthusiasm for the mission, driven by financial motivations (\$97,000 a year), a desire to escape her difficult neighbourhood, and aspirations for a comfortable life (a grand house and a new car), aligns with Linderman's concept of "Courage's War". Her conviction that she is contributing to Iraq's freedom also resonates with this idea. She confesses:

I wasn't afraid of the war or of dying or returning with a disability. There was no time to think about such real things in the midst of raucous of carnival of excitement. I repeated after the 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 the nation from its suffering. (Kachachi, 2010, p. 4)

With innocent conviction, Zeina enters the war, confident that courage alone will suffice. For her, demonstrating courage is a matter of both responsibility and grandeur. Moreover, she believes her actions will significantly impact the war's outcome, further fueling her determination. She boasts:

The poor people of Iraq. They won't believe their eyes when they finally open onto freedom. Even old men will become boys again, when they sup from the milk of democracy and taste of the life I lead here. These were the kind of thoughts that were glowing in my head. (Kachachi, 2010, p. 10)

Thus, Zeina's initial beliefs are rooted in idealistic concepts, reinforced by fearlessness, patriotic feelings, morality, and chivalry, as described by Linderman. These concepts empower her to embark on her journey with conviction. However, as her experiences unfold, she encounters a "Perilous Education" that relentlessly challenges her initial beliefs, leading to, as Linderman states, a disintegration of her idealism. This disintegration marks the

beginning of a profound transformation, as Zeina's reality is shattered, and she is forced to confront the harsh truths of war.

In the second phase of her transformation, Zeina undergoes "a Perilous Education" (Linderman), where her initial idealism confronts the harsh realities of war. Her experiences in Iraq create a dichotomy of allegiance, as she struggles to reconcile her past and present selves. She reflects, "My life was broken in two: 'before Baghdad' and 'after Baghdad'. I was confused and felt that this wasn't yet the end of the story" (74). Her journey, built on innocent illusions, begins to transform in the face of brutal reality. Zeina's concept of courage evolves, and she becomes disillusioned and melancholic, confessing, "I returned defeated, laden with the gravel of sorrow" (7).

The transformation begins early, as Zeina grapples with guilt and the consequences of her choices. At the outset of her journey to Iraq, she senses the gravity of her new role, "Folding away all her past life" to enter a "brand new" life, knowing "from this moment onwards my life would no longer be the same" (9). Despite her enthusiasm for war, she experiences a strange, ununderstood pain, contemplating the conflicting allegiances that will come to define her transformation. She contemplates;

Was I a hypocrite, a two-faced American? A dormant Iraqi like those sleeping cells of spies planted in an enemy land and lying in wait for years?...I collapsed into myself as I watched Baghdad being bombed and the columns of smoke rising after each American attack. It was like watching myself use my mom's cigarette lighter to set my own hair on fire, or cut my own skin with my nail scissors, or slap my left cheek with my right hand. (Kachachi, 2010, p. 12)

The TV coverage of the war in Iraq, showcasing the impact of external factors on her emotional transition, also significantly contributed to Zeina's emotional transition. The vivid images of smoke, explosions, and chaos, accompanied by the sounds of men desperate to escape death, and the haunting faces of yellow-faced boys clutching signs of victory, provoked introspection about the harsh realities of war. As Linderman argues, the trauma of death and horrors on the battlefield play a significant role in the transformation of one's personality. The haunting memories of "terrified children and innocent civilians dying in Baghdad" continued to torment her. Her journey to Iraq was also marked by hopelessness, as she endured a gruelling flight on a C-17 cargo plane, with makeshift seats and earplugs to block out the deafening noise, making it a "shitty, exhausted flight". She exposes:

We couldn't hear each other throughout the five-hour-long flight, so we flew in a silence that was charged with anticipation and anxiety. Every now and then someone would make a hopeful attempt to dispel the tension by forcing small talk, but they were like actors in a silent movie, their voices lost to the roar of the engines. (Kachachi, 2010, p. 19)

Then they are welcomed in Iraq by the darkness and sandstorm. And then the behaviour of the people in Iraq which disrupts her ideals all the more,

These were people eager for regime change, dreaming of freedom and welcoming to the arrival of the US Army. Why, then, were the black eyes looking out from behind the abyss overflowing with all that rejection? There was no friendliness in those eyes, or joy. Their irises seemed to be made of the same substance of sadness. (Kachachi, 2011, p. 23)

As Zeina arrives in Baghdad, she begins to grasp the harsh realities that await her. The monotony of life in the base, the prolonged nature of war, and the danger of venturing outside the base alone all take their toll. However, the most devastating blow to her sense of adventure comes with the brutal murder of a teenage collaborator who had fallen in love with a soldier at the base. The young woman's throat is slit, and her eyes are gouged out, leaving her body on a heap of garbage. For Zeina, this is the "first real shock" that shatters her reckless sense of adventure and brings her face-to-face with the tragedy of war (45).

According to Linderman, the idealism that drives individuals to war and their belief in personal efforts undergo a radical transformation when confronted with the harsh realities of war. This transformation changes one's understanding of himself, his concept of war as a liberating force, and his relationship with the civilian population. In another traumatic episode, Zeina and her comrades raid a house in search of a security officer from the old regime, but they break into the wrong house, belonging to a university professor. The humiliating treatment of the professor by the army officers in front of his family is an unforgettable and "moving" episode that haunts Zeina for a long time.

I was still carrying a mental image of the university teacher with his cheek pressed to the floor, and his attempts to hide his humiliation in front of his wife and children, and even worse, asking us to excuse him. That image would be responsible for many nights of insomnia to come. (Kachachi, 2010, p. 50).

Another devastating blow to Zeina's notion of war as something glorious is the tragic suicide of her friend Malek. While in Mosul, Zeina befriends a young Oxford PhD working as an interpreter for the US army. War has taken a toll on him, leaving him with "boredom and chronic depression" (57). After every conversation, he would lament, "We ate shit. Zeina my dear." Eventually, he takes his own life by crashing his car into a palm tree at full speed, perhaps seeking to escape the suffering and "nibble on dates (with the angels) instead" (88). Zeina discovers a list of terms commonly used in Iraq since the start of the war, which poignantly highlights the trauma she and many others have endured. The list includes terms like "thief," "car bomb," "dead," "battle," "kidnapped," "abducted," "assassinated," "explosion," "no reception," and "mortar," serving as a stark reminder of the harsh realities of war.

As Zeina's experiences unfold, she comes to a stark realization: war is not a "dance" or a picnic party, but a "rotten onion" (67). She learns that death leaves a "bitter aftertaste" and that the war continues to claim its victims, with new grieving mothers joining the "club" (67). Death becomes a constant presence, with an "extravagant taste" for human life, settling in beside Zeina and her comrades, "sitting on the edge of our beds; planting itself under our

pillows and settling at our feet" (70). Just as Zeina is struggling to come to terms with the relentless scenes of death, she is confronted with yet another devastating and horrific episode: the Abu Ghraib scandal. A woman army officer, serving in Iraq like Zeina and her comrades, is shown on Fox TV dragging a prisoner behind her like a dog on a leash, a shocking and inhumane act that further shatters Zeina's illusions about war.

The Abu Ghraib scandal marks the final blow to Zeina's transition, cementing her hatred for the US occupation. Zeina's initial mission to "topple the throne of a single man" (78) is replaced with the harsh reality of war and the ugliness of the mission, stripping away her illusions. With newfound clarity, she sees that "They were all a bunch of hypocrites and corrupt rulers who'd clung with their teeth to power until the bitter end" (29).

The final nail in the coffin is the death of her grandmother, which completes Zeina's transformation. Consumed by guilt, Zeina holds herself responsible for her grandmother's passing, who couldn't bear the shame and humiliation of Zeina's job and army uniform. Her grandmother was ashamed of having "an American granddaughter". Defeated, laden with sorrow, traumatized, and transformed, Zeina returns to Detroit, but her memory remains in Iraq, as she poignantly declares, "I'd give my right hand if I should ever forget you, Baghdad" (88). Leed, as cited in Tal, astutely observes, modern war serving as an agent of trauma, disillusionment, and transformation, perfectly encapsulating Zeina's poignant journey.

(The modern day war) fundamentally altered traditional sources of identity, age-old images of war and men of war. The Great War was a nodal point in the history ... because it brought together material realities and traditional mentalities in an unexpectedly disillusioning way...the disillusioning realization of the inherent similitude of industrial societies and the wars they wage...Eviscerated, drained and confounded the logic upon which the moral significance of war and the figure of the warrior have been based. (Tal, 1996, p. 117)

Upon her return to the US, Zeina finds herself in limbo, unable to reconnect with her surroundings. She becomes stuck in a liminal state, suspended between her home and the war-front. In this in-between space, she ritualizes her identity, reenacting her traumatic experiences by bearing witness to the testimony of trauma. This process allows her to momentarily reconcile her disjointed sense of self, oscillating between her pre-war and post-war identities.

I got home and took a long shower. But the dust of sorrow didn't come off and flow down the drain with the soap. It stuck to me like another layer of skin. It stayed to complete the project of my re-education. It's there when I drive around and watch people laughing, shopping, eating and putting on weight. Do these people know what I've been through? Do they know what's still going on over there? Our sons and daughters in the army have become mute numbers who carry their tombstones on their shoulders as they walk. (Kachachi, 2010, p. 88)

Suspended in a state of limbo, torn between her pre-war and post-war identities, Zeina embodies a dichotomy of allegiances, struggling to reconcile her past and present selves. Despite acknowledging the devastating impact of war, which has left her "defeated and laden with the gravel of sorrow," Zeina surprisingly finds solace in her melancholic state of mind. She confesses, "My laughter has changed. I no longer laugh from the depths of my heart like I used to...flirting no longer suits me now. Who would flirt with a woman who bears a cemetery inside her chest?" (1). Zeina's newfound affinity for her somber state reveals a complex and introspective individual, grappling with the consequences of war and her own transformed identity.

I feel the softness of its gravel as I wade with bared soul into its fountain, and I have no desire to shake off its burden. My beautiful sorrow, which makes me feel that I am no longer an ordinary American but a woman from a far away and ancient place, her hand clutching the burning coal of a story like no other. (Kachachi, 2010, p. 7)

According to Leed, Zeina's experiences have shaped her identity, as she has traversed the borders of two disparate worlds, journeying from peace to war and back again. This transformative passage has reshaped her outlook, fostering a unique perspective "along the margins of civilization" (Tal, 1996, p. 117). Her path has been marked by encounters with the unknown, sparked by curiosity, wonder, and confrontations with the monsters. As she reflects on her odyssey, Zeina acknowledges the profound impact of her experiences, which have redefined her sense of self and her place in the world. So, she says

From that day on I became aware of the malady of grief that afflicted me, to which I adapted and for which I sought no cure. For how do I fight a malady that brought about my rebirth, that fed me and let me grow, and rocked me to sleep, that honed and educated me, and disciplined me so well? (Kachachi, 2010, p. 8)

According to Linderman's theory of transformation, individuals who undergo a traumatic experience, like Zeina, are transformed by the encounter. This transformation involves a ritualization of identity, where the individual re-enacts his traumatic experience through symbolic reproduction. This process allows him to momentarily reconcile his disjointed sense of self, oscillating between his pre-trauma and post-trauma identities. Zeina's transformation has drastically changed her philosophy of life, and she now views ordinary articles in human experience through a new lens. For example, symbols that once held specific meanings now carry entirely different significance for her, reflecting her transformed identity. Hence, she registers:

Miserable, that's what I have become. A dressing table turned upside down, its mirror cracked. I laugh joylessly from the outer shell of my heart. A fat-free laugh, low-cal, like a tasteless fizzy drink. I don't even really laugh, but just struggle for the briefest smile. It's as if I have to repress any possible joys or fleeting delights. I have to keep my inner feeling well covered for fear they'll

boil over and reveal the state I have been in since Baghdad. I came back feeling like a squeezed rug, one that we use to mop the floor. (Kachachi, 2010, p. 7).

Tal also argues that traumatic experience is a "transformative experience" that irreparably alters an individual's identity, rendering a return to their previous state of innocence impossible. Tal cites Lawrence Langer, "The survivor's sense of self is forever fractured, and the trajectory of their life is permanently deflected by the traumatic event", and that this reversal is not directed "back to the normal, but from the normal to the bizarre back to a normalcy so permeated by the bizarre encounter with atrocity that it can never be purified again" (Tal, 1996, p. 120). This resonates with Zeina's experience, as her transformation through war has drastically changed her philosophy of life, and she now views the world through a new lens, forever marked by the trauma she endured.

Zeina's journey exemplifies the profound psychological impact of trauma and the adaptive responses that emerge in its aftermath. Through her experiences, we witness the retelling process that rebuilds her shattered personality, demonstrating her resilience in the face of liminality. Though she may be seen as "a dog with two homes," Zeina finds happiness in neither, acknowledging the permanence of her transformation. Her story poignantly illustrates that trauma leaves an indelible mark, forever dividing life into "before" and "after" (Kachachi, 2010, p. 74).

The work of Linderman offers valuable insights into the personal revision process that occurs in response to trauma, shedding light on the experiences of combat soldiers and those indirectly affected by war, like Zeina. While his discussion may focus on specific contexts, he underscores the universal human struggle to cope with trauma and rebuild identity. Through Zeina's narrative, we gain a deeper understanding of the complex, transformative power of trauma and the resilience of the human spirit.

Findings of the Study

1. The novel explores the complexities of living in limbo, trauma, identity, and transformation through Zeina's experiences.
2. Zeina's dichotomy of allegiances between her Iraqi heritage and American upbringing significantly impacts her sense of identity and transformation.
3. The analysis reveals that trauma can both shatter and transform identity, leaving individuals suspended in a state of limbo.
4. Zeina's journey illustrates the struggles of navigating multiple identities and allegiances, leading to a transformed sense of self.
5. The novel highlights the resilience and adaptability required to navigate the complexities of trauma, identity, and transformation.

Conclusion

The novel, *The American Granddaughter*, masterfully intercepts between trauma, identity, and transformation, illuminating the complexities of living in limbo. Through Zeina's

journey, we witness the profound impact of trauma on identity, as she navigates the dichotomy of allegiances between her Iraqi heritage and American upbringing. This dichotomy propels her into a liminal state, where she grapples with the reconstruction of her shattered identity.

Zeina's experiences poignantly demonstrate how trauma can both shatter and transform identity, leaving individuals suspended in a state of limbo. Her struggles to reconcile her dual allegiances and adapt to the transformative nature of trauma reveal the intricate web of identity, culture, and belonging. The novel shows that living in limbo is not merely a temporary state but a permanent condition, where individuals like Zeina must continuously negotiate their sense of self and allegiance.

Ultimately, the novel offers a powerful exploration of the human experience, highlighting the resilience and adaptability required to navigate the complexities of trauma, identity, and transformation. Through Zeina's story, we gain a deeper understanding of the intricate dance between these forces and the profound impact they have on shaping our lives.

Recommendations

This study highlights the significance of narratives of trauma, like Zeina's, in investigating the effects of war on individual survivors. Literary trauma theory offers a deeper understanding of complex and personal experiences, like Zeina's journey navigating her Iraqi heritage and American upbringing.

It is recommended to employ literary trauma theory to explore other forms of trauma in various works of fiction, including stories of individuals with dual identities and allegiances. The study of war in the Muslim world, particularly with regards to Islamophobia and Muslim genocide, is an under-researched area.

By exploring trauma theory and conducting surveys or case studies, we can better understand Zeina's experiences and the likes of her, and work towards providing better support and services for those affected by war and trauma.

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