

The Postcolonial Subsumption of Lacan's o/Other Embedded in *The American Granddaughter*

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Abstract—With the advent of the 21st century, the world witnessed the US invasion of Iraq by which a new facet of colonialism protruded. A form of relationship between the US colonizer and the Iraqi colonized is overlooked. This study examines a theoretical concept central to postcolonial theory, Lacan's o/Otherness which relates to a colonized Iraqi subject formation as portrayed in *The American Granddaughter* by Inaam Kachachi. This study aims to emphasize the aftermath effects of US colonization and to put together how the postcolonial Iraqi author is thinking about the problems of the colonized Iraqis. The reader will be introduced to the narrative that establishes the Iraqi postcolonial subjectivity. Concentrating on the internal and external conflicts of the protagonist garners a deeper understanding of the o/Otherness in the Iraqi case through analyzing the development of the protagonist's growth and change.

Index Terms—The American Granddaughter, o/Other, postcolonialism, democracy

I. INTRODUCTION

This study is organized around the emerging Iraqi subjects' formation after the US invasion. 2003 was a turning moment in Iraqi history, ushering in an era of American colonization. This incident resulted in Iraq's instability and devastation, and it was a catalysis for creative writers in general, particularly for Iraqi novelists. As with the country, the role of novels as a vehicle for expressing the new reality created by the 2003 invasion has evolved substantially in terms of technique, focus, and narration. Identity formation, cultural change, perpetual violence, murder, and corruption are the main concerns of Iraqi postcolonial literature (Hamedawi, 2017; Al-Rabaa, 2019).

The purpose of this study is to focus on revolutionizing the thinking of a specific context that relates to the Iraqi subjectivity that is formed after 2003 and the impact of the US discourse as depicted in *The American Granddaughter* by the author Inaam Kachachi, in terms of o/Otherness.

The American Granddaughter is a war novel that portrays the first scenes of the US troops approaching Iraq through the eyes of an Iraqi girl who was born in Iraq and raised in America and now returns to Iraq as an interpreter for the US army, she must reconcile her contradictory identities and loyalties. What follows is a critique of the protagonist (Zeina) internal and external conflict as she battles between American ideals and the reality she is surrounded by. She witnesses the consequences of the war.

The American Granddaughter was originally written in Arabic in 2008. It was nominated for the 2009 International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF) shortlist. Since being shortlisted for (IPAF), it has been translated into other languages including, an English edition through the Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation in 2010 and the second edition published by Interlink Books in 2020 which will be the primary source of our data collection in this article.

Kachachi's first literary production was the novel *Sawaqi al-Quloob* (Streams of Hearts) in 2005, followed in 2008 by writing the selected novel for this article *Al-Hafeeda al-Amreekiya* (The American Granddaughter). Kachachi rose to prominence as one of the Arab world's most inventive and important writers of fiction. She wrote many other novels, including *Tashari* (2013) and *Annabitha* (the outcast) 2017 where both have also been shortlisted for the 2014 and 2019 (IPAF) respectively (<https://www.arabicfiction.org/en/inaam-kachachi>).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

As a key concept in the postcolonial theory *Otherness* categorizes the world into mutually excluding opposites. If the Self (colonizer) is ordered, rational, masculine, and good, then the Other (colonized) is chaotic, irrational, feminine, and evil. This construction of the other is a process of demonization, which in itself expresses the "ambivalence at the very heart of authority" (Ashcroft et al., 2002, p.3). According to Said (1978) Orientalists' knowledge about the East was

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adopted through their biased perspective. He adds that there is no objectivity regarding the study of the Orient, but a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar and the strange in other words the transcendence and superiority of Europe, the West, and us to the Orient, the East, and them. European colonialist thought created the othering of vast numbers of people. They constructed the non-European as backward and inferior, depending upon what JanMohamed (1985) calls the "Manichean allegory", in which an implacable discursive opposition between races is produced. These oppositions are decisive for creating stereotypical images of non-Europeans and structuring a European self (JanMohamed, 1985). The original goal of postcolonial theory was to address the reading and production of literature produced in nations that have been or are now under colonial rule. Whether seen from the colonizer's or colonized's perspective, postcolonialism is about people and their feelings of powerlessness and displacement. Thus, the idea of *Otherness* is central to postcolonial thought (Al-Saidi, 2014).

Loomba (2005) opines that two overlapping contexts must be considered to discuss colonialism and its aftermath. The first one is the history of decolonization itself and intellectuals' role in decolonizing the minds. The second context is the revolution in thinking on issues such as; "language and how it articulates experience, how ideologies work, how human subjectivities are formed, and what we might mean by culture" (p. 23). Chifane and Chifane (2018) claimed that as a result of the twofold O/other's deception, Africans had failed miserably. The postcolonial issue of the O/other helps readers get over the maze of culturally particular rituals and spot a behavioral pattern that all colonized people have in common by drawing on Lacan's tripartite orders of worlds. The tragic results of the act of misrepresentation, which are brought on by the colonized Nigerian people's rigid adherence to one kind of Symbolic Order and their refusal to acknowledge the existence of the Real, which transcends all human ideologies, are the result of the dual construction of the O/other. As Vijayasekaran and Alan (2022) refer to the importance of the analysis of the fiction written by the colonized writers "to highlight the potential problems that the aboriginal people are going to face in the future" (p. 1664). Yahya et al. (2022) referred to one of the byproducts of conventional colonization in establishing human communities, later known as the Diaspora. Hitherto, those communities have issues with their identity in terms of belonging. In a way to awaken the consciousness of the colonized who may be "devoid of power and self-determination; and they could not cope with the dominant postcolonial hegemony" (Farhan et al., 2022, p.910).

The most difficult battle faced by postcolonial scholars, urges Marzec (2011), is a general neglect of the role that fictions play in the construction of reality. He blames policymakers and the general public for not paying attention to literary scholarship in the academy today. The idea that literary works, or at least excellent literature, has anything to do with politics has long been rejected by humanist literary studies because the former is either too subjective, private, and personal, or else too universal and transcendent to be thus polluted (Loomba, 2005). Accordingly, literary criticism did not deal with the relationship between colonialism and literature until recently. Today, the situation seems to be rapidly reversing itself, with many, "if not a majority of, analysts of colonial discourse coming from a training in, or professional affiliation with, literary studies" (Loomba, 2005, p.63).

From the description stated above, it may be suggested that most of the previous studies have established stereotypical images of the colonizer /colonized relationships in terms of self/other in different parts of colonies around the world, particularly in Africa, India, and the Caribbean. In the present article, the American/Iraqi relationship will be highlighted as a new place and case by utilizing Lacan's *o/Other* that is subsumed in the postcolonial analysis. As such, this study is an attempt to fill this gap and add more knowledge to the domain of postcolonial studies.

III. THE POSTCOLONIAL SUBSUMPTION OF LACAN'S *o/OTHER*

Postcolonialism, like many schools of criticism, uses a variety of approaches to textual analysis. Researchers who engage in postcolonial theory move beyond the bounds of traditional literary studies and investigate social, political, and economic concerns of the colonized and the colonizer (Bressler, 2011). No matter which methodology a postcolonial researcher may choose, it matters greatly whether or not the researcher has been a colonial subject. The existence of others is crucial in defining what is normal and in locating one's place in the world. Ashcroft et.al (2007) define the term other as "anyone who is separate from one's self" (p.154). The other had a significant role in the development of self-awareness and identity conceptions in existential philosophy. Sartre used it most famously in *Being and Nothingness* to explain the relationships between the Self and the Other. The term other in the postcolonial theory as it is currently used has its roots in the Freudian and post-Freudian analyses of the creation of subjectivity, most notably in the work of Jacques Lacan's cultural and psychoanalysis (Ashcroft et al., 2007).

A. Lacan's *o/Other*

In the mid of 20th century, Lacan drew segregation between the little 'other' and the big 'Other'. The segregation swirls central throughout the rest of his work. Thereafter, in Lacanian algebra, the little other is designated a (lower case italicized, for French *autre*), and the big *Other* is designated A (upper case, for French *Autre*). Lacan contends that an awareness of this segregation is substantial to analytic practice. Any analyst should be scrupulously saturated with the difference between a and A so that he can situate himself in the place of *other*, and not of the *Other*.

According to Lacan's perspective, Evans (2006) referred to the definitions of each term *o/Other*. The *other* with a small 'o' is an ego projection of the *other*, who is not the *other* at all. He is both the counterpart and the specular image at the same time. As a result, Lacan's Imaginary Order is completely engraved with the small *other*. The big *Other*, on

the other hand, cannot be absorbed by identification, it denotes profound alterity, an *otherness* that exceeds the fictitious otherness of the imagination. Lacan compares this radical alterity to language and the law; as a result, the enormous Other is written in the Symbolic Order. Insofar as it is customized for each subject, the big Other is metaphorical. Thus, the *Other* is a different subject in his radical difference and incomparable uniqueness and the Symbolic Order that serves as a bridge between the *other and Other*.

B. The Postcolonial o/Other

Lacan's *o/Other* was subsumed and assimilated within the postcolonial theory and became a key concept that enriches the analysis of the colonized subjectivity formulation. Ashcroft et al. (2007) interpreted Lacan's the *other* -with a small 'o' into, (i) The colonized *others* who are stigmatized by colonial discourse and can be distinguished from the center by their differences (ii) Most importantly, the colonized become the focus of colonial ego's anticipated mastery, and (iii) as if the *other* resembles the child who discovers himself/herself when he/she looks in the mirror and realizes himself/herself as a separate being. When the child, who is an uncoordinated tangle of limbs and emotions, sees his/her reflection in the mirror, that image must resemble the child sufficiently to be recognized while still being distinct enough to support the child's expectation of an anticipated mastery. This imaginary sense of mastery will serve as the colonized ego's foundation.

On the flip side, the big *Other*, is compared to the imperial discourse, imperial center, or the empire itself, in different ways (Ashcroft et al., 2007). According to the postcolonial perspective, the *Other* is characterized by certain hallmarks, as such (i) The *Other* offers concepts through which the colonized subject develops a feeling of himself/herself as an in some way dependent *other*. (ii) the *Other* becomes the conceptual framework in which the colonized subject may come to see the world through the absolute pole of the address represented by the *Other*, and (iii) the *Other* makes colonized subjects interpellate by the ideology of the maternal or parental and nurturing function of the colonizing power, concurring with descriptions such as 'Mother or Father England' and 'Home'.

IV. O/OTHERNESS IN THE IRAQI CASE

Undoubtedly, the *other* is a key concept in any conventional colonial discourse to dominate and reshape the colonized subjects. The US mindset does not differ much from those who occupied and colonized other countries throughout history, using certain colonial discourses. The objective circumstances and the nature of colonization remain of paramount importance to those colonial forces. The main common factor in the colonial mindset is how the colonizers impose their hegemony and reconstruct the colonized subjects to the extent that secures the permanence of control.

The American Granddaughter (2020) delineates the relationship that occurred between the American discourse being a colonial power and its impact on the Iraqi subject formation after 2003. Kachachi's fiction tackled the notion of Iraqi *otherness* from the colonized perspectives who were highly affected by the repercussions of the US invasion and its aftermath. Concentrating on the internal and external conflicts of the protagonist garners a deeper understanding of the *o/otherness* in the Iraqi case through narrating the development of the protagonist's growth and change. Kachachi presented her protagonist Zeina at age of thirty. She was raised by an educated Iraqi parent. Her life was cleft into two parts, 15 years in Iraq and the rest in the US. Kachachi portrayed sequences of events before Zeina's family reluctantly emigrated from Iraq and lived in America before 2003. Kachachi intentionally referred to Zeina's father as a TV presenter who was arrested and tortured for an unworthy reason, "his crime being that he'd protested about the news bulletins being too long" (p.69) as a symbol of the free speech restrictions and how he or any other Iraqi could be treated if he/she objects or tries to raise his/her voice criticizing the policy of the Baath party regime. That was a sufficient perception of the regime's dictatorship and its arbitrariness towards citizens and the restriction of their freedoms. It was ruled by a one-party system without political pluralism or guaranteeing freedoms.

The 9/11 event was a turning point and the real beginning of the formation of Zeina's character in terms of identity and belonging. When the US administration decided to invade Afghanistan and then Iraq, regarding Iraq, the US media adopted a discourse that eased its mission. Democratizing Iraq was the main discourse the US administration stuck to it. Zeina was driven by the US media, so she hailed the decision of the US administration to free Iraq from the dictatorship of Saddam's regime and establish a democratic ruling system, therefore she decided to apply for a translating job with the American army as part of her patriotism, "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.10). Furthermore, Zeina supposed undoubtedly that the alternative for her home country's people in Iraq would be better than Saddam's regime. She desired that the experience of the American democracy would be practiced in Iraq, so the Iraqi would have a better life. Her people would reach the point that they would not believe their eyes in terms of the promising justice, freedom, dignity, and rights, "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" (p. 10).

Zeina was exemplified by the author as a case representing Iraqis who desired to be free from the dictatorship and oppression of Saddam's regime, so she hailed the discourse of democracy to be alternative. And this was only achieved through the occupation of Iraq by the United States. Iraqis whom Zeina represents in this novel in the early stages

welcomed the American project but they entered into an internal psychological conflict. This conflict was summed up in that people wanted to get rid of the injustice and oppression, but they have to accept being occupied by a power that claims to provide them with the causes of justice and ends up the oppression. Democracy in this sense was not the choice of the indigenous people, but rather the choice of the colonizer, who sees it as the best for the colonized people. This conflict was experienced by most Iraqis before 2003, especially those who were directly affected by Saddam's regime, such as executions, displacement, exile, or even the stifling of freedom of expression. Kachachi's *The American Granddaughter* portrayed the condition of those people by presenting the character of the heroine who went through these situations. The occupation became de facto, Zina referred to this in a sense of sarcasm, "... the war started without me. I heard on the news that the president had secured the support of Congress. Who cared about the United Nations? What nations anyway, and what bullshit?" (p. 15). The acceleration of events cast a shadow over Zeina's way of thinking because she was sure that the alternative to Saddam's dictatorial regime would be better, but officially her original country was occupied. Zina had a sense of a psychological inner conflict for the first time. That kind of conflict was related to identifying her identity, loyalty, and belonging. Zeina started looking at herself as the *other*,

Why couldn't I sit still for five minutes? I told the other who was also me that there were terrified children and innocent civilians dying in Baghdad. I told her those children could be the children of your classmate from school, and the dead civilians could be the sons of your uncles or the daughters of your aunts (p.15).

From a postcolonial perspective, Kachachi focused on the post-invasion phase to visualize the condition of the Iraqi people whom Zeina represents while they were being occupied. The moment of the real conflict between wishes and desires to get rid of injustice and oppression under Saddam's rule, and between accepting the reality that was led by the war, which leaves traces of killing and injustice as well. To absorb the shock of the occupied country and the consequences of this war, the US leaders had to work on a discourse that would help them in facilitating their mission, and the discourse was democracy. Iraqi Zeina became a colonized *other* who was marginalized by the US discourse of democracy, identified by the colonized difference from the center, where they were ruled by the dictatorship of Saddam's regime. That construed why Zeina uttered a hyperbolic expression to describe the state of astonishment that will afflict the Iraqis, "They won't believe their eyes" (p. 10).

Being a colonial power, the US adopted the discourse of democracy that crucially made the Iraqi people become the focus of anticipated mastery by its colonial 'ego'. To impose its colonial domination, the United States came up with the discourse of democracy to oppose autocracy. The US discourse saw the self (democracy) as ordered, rational, and good, then the other (autocracy) as chaotic, irrational, and evil. The US occupiers in *The American Granddaughter* created a representation of autocracy based on a colonial discourse, using binary oppositions to categorize human belief into one term or another not both. Hence, autocratic Iraq is the opposite or the *other* with a small 'o' to democratic America. This type of superiority was one of the most important features of colonial discourse which look down on the inferiority of the colonized. Iraqi Zeina was a colonized *other* who was marginalized by the US colonial discourse adopted by the (American) Zeina to identify Iraqi Zeina's difference from the center which is represented by American democracy. Iraqi Zeina crucially became the focus of anticipated mastery by the American Zeina's ego. Iraqi Zeina was the *other* – with the small 'o'- resembles the American Zeina, like the child discovers when it looks in the mirror and becomes aware of itself as a separate being. Iraqi Zeina was an uncoordinated mass of limbs and feelings sees her image in the mirror, that image must bear sufficient resemblance to herself to be recognized, but she must also be separate enough to ground her hope for an anticipated mastery.

For Lacan, Zeina entered the looking-glass or mirror stage. In this stage, she saw herself in a mirror while metaphorically seeing herself in her American image. Observing this mirror image permitted her to perceive images that have discrete boundaries, allowing her to become aware of herself as an independent being who is separate from her mother (America). This mirror image of herself as a whole and complete being is ideal, an illusion because unlike the actual mirror image, she was not in full control of herself, "Why couldn't I sit still for five minutes?" (p.15).

On the other hand, the relationship between the US colonizer and the colonized Zeina was determined by the discourse of democracy. The big *Other*, in this sense, is compared to the US discourse of democracy. Zeina gained a sense of her identity as somehow dependent on *other* because she desired to get rid of the oppression she and her family faced during Saddam's regime. Democracy became the absolute pole of address, the ideological framework in which Zeina came to understand the world, as she expressed her framed attitude, "They won't believe their eyes ... when they sup from the milk of democracy and taste of the life I lead here" (p. 10). Her subject was interpellated by the ideology of the maternal and nurturing function of the colonizing power, concurring with descriptions such as 'father America and 'Home'.

According to Lacan, the big *Other* might be either the father or the mother, whose *Otherness* places the subject in the Symbolic order and whose detachment from the subject places her as the initial target of desire. In the symbolic order, the father dominates this phase. For Zeina, the American discourse of democracy and freeing Iraq from the dictatorship represented the location of a father. Zeina started leaned the actual language of the US discourse that mastered her. It was the language that shaped her identity as a separate being and mold her psyche. In the symbolic order, Zeina learned that her father (the US discourse) came to represent cultural norms and laws.

Remarkably, the American choice of such a discourse of democracy in Iraq was for two objective reasons. The first one was the historical preference of the US policy for being known as the superpower of neocolonialism. What sets the

US occupation apart from other lands, Osterhammel (1995/1997) believes that "the United States is a case of imperialism without a strong colonial empire." (p.22). Young (2016) opines that the development of US imperialism put the United States in its category. Its type of imperialism can be accurately motivated by economic issues, which subsequently it "preferred forms of indirect rule and influence to direct colonial control" (p.42). The second reason was the nature of the colonized country itself. The US colonizers could not deliver a discourse related to issues such as religion, race, and culture like the Britishers did previously in African countries. Iraqi people, by nature, are not black and the majority of them follow monotheistic religions such as Islam and Christianity. Constructing a discourse related to these issues would be impracticable, therefore, the colonizers resorted to a better discourse for control and domination which related mostly to politics. This colonial attitude was asserted by president Georg W Bush when he tried to call for the US allies to take part in the Iraq war, "Gog and Magog are at work in the Middle East. Biblical prophecies are being fulfilled. This confrontation is willed by God, who wants to use this conflict to erase His people's enemies before a new age begins." (Volker, 2016).

V. DEMONIZING THE COLONIZED OTHER

Based on the stereotypical images of the *otherness* that sees the world as divided into mutually excluding opposites, if the self (Colonizer) is ordered, rational, masculine, and good, then the other (Colonized) is chaotic, irrational, feminine, and evil. The colonized, in this sense, were demonized to reconstruct his/her identity in a way to keep the colonial domination. Kachachi portrayed the legacy of the US occupation of Iraqis being colonized *other*. The Iraqis represented by Zeina in the selected novel were under the perspective of imperialist logic. Demonizing the colonized others in the Iraqi case resulted in the distortion of the national identity through their inability to belong to anything even their names.

The author recounted several occasions on which Zeina appeared to be demonized. From the moment the American occupation of Iraq began, the conflict of belonging and identity commenced with Zina. She demonized herself being a traitor because she hailed the decision of occupation, "Despite my enthusiasm for the war, I experienced a strange kind of pain that was hard to define. Was I a hypocrite, a two-faced American? A dormant Iraqi" (p. 15). Zeina's reunion with her passionately nationalistic, anti-American maternal grandmother, Rahma, caused her to reassess her split loyalties and possessions. Rahma demonized her granddaughter and considered her a stepdaughter of the occupation. Additionally, Rahma wanted to bring Zeina up from scratch, "We will bring her up from scratch, this ignorant girl... We won't leave her to her ill manners." (p. 64).

Furthermore, and being a postcolonial fiction, the author demonized Zeina through the title of the novel. The title of a literary work is quite important, which is why authors should choose it carefully. A novel's title is significant because it encapsulates the spirit of the work. To capture the attention of the reader, the title must be appealing. The first impression of a novel is its title. Titles of novels resemble the appearance of a person, where people establish an initial impression based on his/her look, clothing, and body language. It is done with a title in stories. The importance of titles cannot be overstated. A title may arouse sentiments of interest and expectation, or it may arouse feelings of indifference. Often, whether or not someone will read a narrative depends on its title. The title of Kachachi's *The American Granddaughter* helped to structure the reader's understanding of the content. Though Zeina was born and raised by her Iraqi parents, she was referred to be an American granddaughter by the author. Choosing such a title has a clear indication of the upcoming US project for Iraq after the occupation. Adding this new nationality to this character distorted her original national identity in a way to shed the light on those *other* who are demonized by the colonizers' ventures.

Zeina's attitude engendered by the status quo was revealed in her opinions of the existing reality referred to above. All these spiritual and physical pressures that Zina received for being a demon because she was the colonized *other* led to deform her identity as well as to her inability to belong to anything even her name. Zeina lamented her belief in the US rhetoric of democracy at the novel's conclusion "I was naive to have imagined democracy to be like candy floss, colorful sugar wrapped around thin sticks that we could go around distributing to the kids." (p.164). Eventually, she got sucked into a vortex of the namelessness or the identitilessness that gave rise to rootless of her own, when she returned to Detroit couldn't belong to anything anymore, not even to her name "I couldn't belong to anything anymore, not even to my own name" (p.178). Belonging to one's name is the first sign of belonging to his/her identity. The personality theorist Gordon Allport (1961) contends that one's name is "The focal point upon which self-identity is organized over the course of an individual's life" (p.61).

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper encompasses a broad study of Inaam Kachachi's *The American Granddaughter* in which the ultimate objective was to tackle the Iraqi subject formation being colonized after the US invasion in 2003. The study conducts an examination of the theoretical concept central to postcolonial theory, Lacan's *o/Otherness*. Throughout the analysis of Zeina's character in the novel, we find that she has no choice but to be demonized because of her rudimentary advocacy of the US discourse of democracy. As a result, the colonized Zeina has a vortex of the namelessness or the identitilessness that gave rise to rootless of the Iraqi *other* colonized. This study also specified why the United States

chose this kind of discourse. The legacies of colonialism are thus varied and multiple even as they share some important features. As a postcolonial study, shedding light on the Iraqi colonized subject formation is part of the wider context. Having a nuanced understanding of US colonialism and its aftermath further studies could unveil other issues related to language, ideology, and culture in the Iraqi context.

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