

The Traumatized Identity of Women in War: A Comparative Reading of Kachachi's *The American Granddaughter* and Benedict's *Sand Queen*

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Abstract

The present study is a comparative feminist reading of two novels written by two different authors with rather similar backgrounds. Despite their differences, these two novels share many similarities regarding the Iraq War and trauma. *The American Daughter* (۲۰۰۸), written by Inaam Kachachi, portrays an identity crisis among Iraqi individuals who are compelled to depart their country as a result of the U.S. ۲۰۰۳ invasion. Helen Benedict's *Sand Queen* (۲۰۱۱), rather similarly, records the engagement of veterans and refugees in the war in Iraq. Through the point of view of marginal (ized) groups, the storyline addresses the interplay between war, trauma, alienation, racism, and sexism. No academic study has compared these two novels focusing on the issue of the Iraq War and trauma. The aim of this paper, hence, is to fill this gap in knowledge by comparing the two novels from a socialist feminist perspective. To reach this aim, Christine Delphy's and Nawal El Saadawi's socialist feminism approach is applied to the novels under study. Accordingly, similarities and differences between the protagonists' (Zeina Benham and Kate Brady) conditions are examined. In both novels, gender inequality is vital in pushing women to the edge of identity crisis as underpinned by traumatic experiences. This paper concludes that patriarchal norms and demands exercise an indelible influence on the identity of female personae in both case studies. Furthermore, it suggests that Zeina Benham and Kate Brady are double victims of war and patriarchy.

Keywords: Kachachi's *The American Granddaughter*, Benedict's *Sand Queen*, Socialist Feminism, War Trauma, Traumatized Identity

۱. Introduction

Sociologist feminism, war trauma, and traumatized identity are among significant tropes in contemporary literature. The experiences of women attending wars, which have been understudied in literary studies, are achieving a foothold in feminist scholarship. This article addresses a crucial question which is in what respects the female protagonists of the two novels are similar and different, by the representation of female characters in Kachachi's *The American Granddaughter* and Benedict's *Sand Queen*, and the authors' portrayal of war and trauma from a female perspective.

Both novels feature complex female characters who are exposed to the challenges of war and its aftermath (displacement, identity crisis, and trauma). It is important to note that the representation of female characters in *The American Granddaughter* and *Sand Queen* bears witness to the indispensable interplay between gender, identity, and trauma within the context of war. The portrayal of female characters in both novels showcases the challenges faced by women in war such as violence, displacement, loss, and the impact these experiences leave on their self-perception.

This paper, apart from this introduction, consists of five main parts which are followed by the concluding remarks section. The second section will introduce the novels' storylines and characters. The third section will elaborate on different layers of socialist feminism, particularly as theorized by Christine Delphy and Nawal El Saadawi. Socialist feminism provides a framework from which to analyze how gender norms and social expectations shape the experiences of women in war and post-war contexts. Moreover, it highlights the need to consider the role of social structures in perpetuating gender-based violence and inequality. The trauma of war and the way it influences the protagonists' identity are important factors in characterizing female characters in both novels. The impacts of war trauma on women's mental and physical health and their perception of self and identity are profound, the comprehension of which is facilitated by socialist feminism. The fourth section will examine the way Kachachi and Benedict portray traumatic experiences of war in *The American Granddaughter* and *Sand Queen*. This section sets the stage for the fifth section which will examine the traumatized identity of the main female characters in the two novels. The sixth section will discuss how the two novelists project their own experiences, challenges, and concerns onto the protagonists of *The American Granddaughter* and *Sand Queen*, before concluding how the five main sections pave the way for addressing the important question.

۲. An Introduction to *The American Granddaughter* and *Sand Queen*

The American Granddaughter, first published in ۲۰۰۸, depicts the American occupation of Iraq through the eyes of a young Iraqi-American woman Zeina Benham, who was born in Baghdad and grew up in Detroit, returns to Iraq as an interpreter for the U.S. Army in ۲۰۰۳. Written episodically, the novel follows a non-chronological plotline as it starts when Zeina is attempting to write down her experiences of the war. It should be noted that the novel has two narrators: one is the writer herself Inaam Kachachi who interrupts the narration in an attempt to turn her narrative into a patriotic story; the other narrator is Zeina. In the first chapters, Zeina describes her life in Detroit which undergoes a considerable shift when the government calls for Arab translators in invading Iraq. Lured by the promise of financial security, ninety-seven thousand dollars a year, she takes the money as "the price of [her] precious language, the price of [her] blood"—a justification that tempts her to apply for the job. This controversial decision pits her against the Arab immigrant community, her parents, her brother, and her boyfriend.

Zeina relates her arrival in Iraq and describes meeting her grandmother Rahma after several decades—an elderly woman who was left behind in Iraq when her children emigrated. Rahma welcomes her granddaughter back, just

before seeing Zeina “wearing American clothes and riding a tank” (Kachachi, ۲۰۰۸, p. ۱۲۵). When it dawns on her that Zeina collaborates with the U.S. army, Rahma chides and punishes her granddaughter in order to dissuade her. Rahma’s admonishment that echoes loudly in Zeina’s soul imbues her granddaughter’s once joyous spirit with confusion and doubt. This is one of the many challenges she faces in Iraq.

Zeina meets two sons of a close relative, i.e., Haydar and Muhaymen. Haydar does not consider Zeina a traitor as Muhaymen does. Zeina finds herself in love with Muhaymen who is a member of the Mahdi Army, the staunch enemy of America. The turning point of the novel happens when we come to know that Muhaymen is Zeina’s milk brother—a reason which is grave enough to end their relationship. While in Iraq, Zeina witnesses massive casualties among interpreters, soldiers, prisoners in the Abu Ghraib prison, and of course, civilians, which reminds her of her father’s torture in prison during the reign of Saddam. Such bitter experiences overwhelm her psyche and identity when she returns to Detroit, where she devotes her life to reviewing her grandmother’s memories.

Sand Queen, first published in ۲۰۱۱ and written based on actual events, revolves around three female characters: Helen Benedict as the writer herself; the nineteen-year-old Kate Brady (AKA Sand Queen) who joins the American army to bring honor to her family and democracy to the Middle East; and Naema Jassim, an Iraqi student at Baghdad Medical college who suffers from the death her father and brother at Bucca camp where Kate is a prison guardian. Kate and Naema form a relationship based on a deal: Kate helps Naema to find her father and brother, and in return, Naema works as a translator for her though challenges soon problematize this relationship.

Like other soldiers, Kate faces the daily threats of war, explosions, massacre, and kidnap. Yet, as a woman, she is subject to violence and assault by male soldiers like Sergeant Kormick and PFC Bonaparte. When she complains to SFC Henley, he asks for witnesses yet she ‘cannot convince Jimmy or DJ to attend. Yvette decides to help Kate, yet Lieutenant Sara Hopkins ignores her and assigns a suicidal mission to them in Baquba. Yvette’s death in the mission envelops Kate in sorrow and guilt, which are intensified by the immediacy of explosion, assassination, and assault. The ubiquity of these events, traumatize her psyche/identity. Kate falls in love with Sergeant Jimmy Donnell who tries to help her to return America. After returning to America, she is hospitalized in an asylum to get recovered from the trauma. In the end, she lives a mutual life with Donnell.

The American Granddaughter and *Sand Queen* provide nuanced depictions of the feminine experience of war and conflict. This reflects how gender, identity, and trauma both intersect and shape women’s experiences. Ultimately, the two selected novels shed light on the intricate realities of women’s lives in war and post-war contexts and emphasize the need for continued efforts to examine the impacts of war on women.

In *The American Granddaughter*, the ubiquitous interplay between gender, power dynamics, and justice can be comprehensively analyzed through the lens of socialist feminism. Through the protagonist’s journey, the novel delves into the complexities of women’s freedom, which is arguably determined by broad socioeconomic and political struggles. One of the central tenets of socialist feminism is the recognition that gender oppression is deeply

intertwined with class exploitation. Kachachi adeptly weaves this tenet within the very textuality of the story in terms of portraying the protagonist's struggles against not only patriarchal structures but also the bedrock of imperialism and capitalism. By building on these intertwined concepts, the novel highlights the preponderance of gender-based inequalities and discrimination.

Helen Benedict's *Sand Queen* as it provides insights into the interaction between gender, power, and socio-political structures can be critically examined through the conduit of socialist feminism. First and foremost, the novel narrates the experiences of female characters who serve in the military million miles away from home. It is rendered through the perspective of female soldiers and their challenges in a male-dominated military establishment, the female characters, Zeina and Kate Brady, break away from gender expectations and challenge social standards, although they are subject to various types of oppression such as sexism, lack of access to healthcare and education, and economic dependence. In terms of feminine solidarity and collective support, these fictional personae are concrete proponents of socialist feminism. Moreover, the novel remarks on women's agency and self-determination. The protagonist fights to express her independence and pave her own way despite coming frequently into contact with disruptive forces. Her self-assertion through the course of the novel exemplifies one of the fundamental tenets of socialist feminism' which places a strong emphasis on the necessity for women to actively participate in writing their own lives and confronting oppressive systems.

Sand Queen enumerates a series of challenges that militant women confront such as prejudice and harassment as coupled with the shadows of patriarchal standards. It examines how gender inequality is maintained and how it serves to reinforce other types of oppression including racism and imperialism. Each character traverses through a system that upholds traditional gender roles and maintains gender inequality, in *Sand Queen* we find Kate represents the marginalized character being a woman. Their destiny highlights the necessity of social and structural reforms to eliminate oppressive regimes of "truth" against women. Finally, the novel emphasizes the value of solidarity and collective resistance against oppressive systems.

In *The American Granddaughter* gender, ethnicity, and nationality are indispensably connected to each other. An acute analysis of identity and belonging can be achieved by considering the protagonist's experiences as an American woman with Iraqi origin. The author, particularly in chapters ۲۲-۲۵, showcases specific difficulties underprivileged groups experience, particularly those that determine women's identity/life. *The American Granddaughter*, as it highlights the intertwined interplay between socioeconomic justice and gender equality, is an ideal case study concerning socialist feminism. The novel urges collective activity to challenge the status quo and build a more egalitarian society, for instance when Yevette helps Kate with her complaint against the officers who try to rape her. For Zeina in *The American Granddaughter*, she needs to feel that her grandmother is on her side when she returns to Iraq.

Sand Queen, as it will be discussed, postulates the possibility of empowerment and resistance. The female characters show autonomy and the capacity to oppose repressive systems. They create connections and supportive systems, demonstrating the transforming power of solidarity and group effort. The book also invites one to think critically about how war affects women's lives, particularly within a capitalist and patriarchal system. The importance of a feminist reading that considers the larger social, economic, and political settings in which women's experiences are placed is highlighted by these experiences. Accordingly, it can be suggested that the book highlights the necessity for collective effort, social change, and female solidarity by posing significant ideas concerning the interactions between gender, capitalism, and militarism.

۳. An Introduction to Socialist Feminism

Socialist feminism, which achieved theoretical prominence during the ۱۹۷۰s, builds on critical insights gleaned from sociology and feminism to analyze gender as a social construct and its interplay with race, class, and sexuality (Lorber & Moore, ۲۰۰۲, p. ۳۷۴). It pinpoints that gender inequality is not merely a result of individual actions but also rooted in social structures and institutions that perpetuate patriarchy. Socialist feminism holds that gender operates at different levels in society, including micro-level interactions, meso-level institutions, and macro-level social structures. It acknowledges that gender inequality is not limited to individual experiences: it is institutionalized and embedded in social structures and cultural norms (Risman, ۲۰۰۴, p. ۴۲).

Socialist feminism asserts that gender is not an independent category but is inevitably connected to structures of power. It pays particular attention to how gender is overshadowed by race, class, sexuality, and other social categories. Socialist feminism also delves into analyzing how gender is embedded in institutions and cultural practices (Rudrappa, ۲۰۱۵, p. ۶۰). It addresses how gender norms and expectations are perpetuated through institutions, such as the family, educational system, and workplace.

Another influential figure in socialist feminism is Nawal El Saadawi (۱۹۳۱-۲۰۲۱), an Egyptian feminist writer and activist. El Saadawi has been a vocal critic of the intersection between capitalism and patriarchy in preserving women's oppression. She firmly believes that gender equality can only be achieved through the abolishment of oppressive institutions, including capitalism and religious fundamentalism (Shahriar & Yusefi, ۲۰۱۹, pp. ۹۵-۱۰۶). El Saadawi's work discusses the various forms of violence and discrimination faced by women in different cultural contexts, calling for collective action and solidarity across class and gender lines. In fact, she argues that women's oppression cannot be overcome without addressing the broader structures of power that prolong inequality.

According to Malti-Douglas, El Saadawi emphasizes the connection between capitalism and patriarchy, highlighting how both systems work in tandem to exploit and oppress women. She argues that capitalism's focus on profit and accumulation often breeds inequality and reinforces gender hierarchies. By connecting economic exploitation to gendered oppression, she unveils how capitalism perpetuates and benefits from women's subordination within society (۱۹۹۵, pp. ۵-۹). In addition to capitalism, El Saadawi also criticizes religious fundamentalism and its impact

on women's lives. She underscores how patriarchal interpretations of religious texts are used to enforce gender roles and suppress women's rights. By challenging religious institutions and advocating for a separation between religion and state, El Saadawi seeks to dismantle the structures that prolong gender inequality within religious contexts.

El Saadawi's work also revolves around the various forms of violence and discrimination faced by women, including female genital mutilation, domestic violence, and sexual exploitation. She argues that these forms of violence are deeply rooted in patriarchal systems, and any attempt to achieve gender equality must confront and challenge these systems directly. Furthermore, El Saadawi emphasizes the importance of collective action and solidarity across class and gender lines. She highlights the need for women to come together and join forces with other marginalized groups to challenge systemic oppression and work toward liberation. She believes that women's liberation is intimately connected to broader struggles for social justice and freedom.

In order to provide a comprehensive analysis of *The American Granddaughter* and the characterization of the protagonist in a patriarchal society, this part draws on socialist feminism as developed by Nawal El Saadawi. As an influential Egyptian feminist and activist, El Saadawi provides a critical understanding of the interplay between gender, power, and oppression. She frequently focuses on women's struggles and oppressions vis-a-vis patriarchal standards. In *The American Granddaughter*, these issues are investigated about the protagonist's journey and the difficulties she encounters when attending a war as an American woman.

One prominent socialist feminist theorist is Christine Delphy (born ۱۹۴۱). Delphy, a French sociologist and feminist activist, emphasizes the concept of gender as a social construct and claims that women's oppression is rooted in the capitalist system. She (۱۹۸۰, pp. ۷۹-۱۰۵) proposed the theory of "materialist feminism", which focuses on the economic and material aspects of women's oppression. According to Delphy, women's unpaid domestic labor, such as housework, child-rearing, and emotional labor, serves as a crucial but undervalued contribution to the capitalist system. These tasks, traditionally assigned to women, are essential for the maintenance and reproduction of the labor force. However, because they are not considered productive or remunerated labor, they are often seen as marginal and invisible.

Delphy sees the family as an institution that disseminates gender inequalities and serves the interests of capitalism. Furthermore, Delphy criticizes mainstream feminist views that refer to women as a homogeneous group, arguing that this overlooks the intersecting factors of class, race, and sexuality that shape women's experiences. She emphasizes the importance of an intersectional approach that recognizes the diverse contexts and struggles of women across social hierarchies. Delphy's analysis exposes the often invisible and undervalued labor that women perform both within and outside the home, illuminating the systemic exploitation and subordination that women face under capitalism (۱۹۸۰, pp. ۲۳-۴۰).

In order to analyze the interplay between the dynamics of gender, structures of power, and various forms of oppression as portrayed in *Sand Queen*, it is vital to refer to another socialist feminist, namely Christine Delphy.

Delphy, a well-known French sociologist feminist, and thinker, delves into the relationship between gender and patriarchy, expounding how the latter influences the former. Delphy considers patriarchy as a discourse of power that underpins social interactions, institutions, and people's lives at different levels of society. In *Sand Queen*, the author examines military women's experiences and sheds light on how patriarchal norms affect the roles, expectations, and power dynamics with which they deal.

The gender-based division of labor and how women's labor, whether paid or unpaid, form the two important aspects of Delphy's feminism. Female characters within the story experience prejudice, have little opportunity for development and struggle with gender norms in a military context. The compelling social norms and power struggles that Delphy criticizes are reflected in these experiences. Delphy's feminist theory also frequently highlights the significance of interrelationships, recognizing the connections between gender and race, class, and nationality. Likewise, in *Sand Queen* women soldiers' experiences of war are influenced by their ethnic origin, race, and cultural background, and of course their gender.

El Saadawi's branch of feminism includes a critique of the expectations that society imposes on women. She critiques conventional gender roles in favor of agency and autonomy. In a parallel manner, the protagonist of *Sand Queen* struggles with social and cultural expectations, which exemplifies the chasm between her ideals and the demands imposed on her as a woman. According to El Saadawi, there is a direct link between prejudice, power struggle, and oppression. In *The American Granddaughter*, the protagonist's life and experiences are influenced by her cultural legacy as well as her gender, which brings to the fore the complexity of her identity and the many ways in which she is oppressed.

ξ. War Trauma in *The American Granddaughter* and *Sand Queen*

The trauma of war can have severe and long-lasting impacts on the affected individuals and communities, both in terms of physical/ mental health and interpersonal relationships. According to Hoge et al. (۲۰۰۴, p. ۱۵), war trauma may entail a wide range of negative consequences, including depression, anxiety, and suicide to mention a few. While some can recover from trauma, others may develop chronic mental health conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Galatzer-Levy and Bryant argue that war trauma is often more complex than other forms of trauma, and accordingly, more challenging in terms of treatment (۲۰۱۳, p. ۶۵۳).

There are, despite presumable challenges, effective treatments for war trauma. Stein et al. suggest that a combination of pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy is often effective in treating PTSD when it is focused on evidence-based practices such as cognitive-behavioral therapy and exposure therapy. However, it is important to recognize that cultural and social contexts of war trauma can also impact effective treatment (۲۰۱۶, p. ۳).

War, it is generally assumed, drastically affects women/children in particular ways. This assumption finds a particular articulation in *The American Granddaughter* as it primarily deals with (gendered) violence. The main

character and other female characters are exposed to violent sexual assault, which leaves physical and psychological wounds that rarely heal. By indicating the patriarchal mechanisms that support and amplify the resultant trauma, Kachachi delves into the close relationship between gender and violence. Displacement and loss, as the significant consequences of war, are major components of trauma. The storyline of the novel focuses on Zeina's struggle with the destruction of her homeland, the loss of family and family relationships, and challenges in adapting to a new context. What is more noteworthy is that the novel considerably highlights the gendered aspects of displacement and the tenacity of women in the face of such events.

In *Sand Queen*, Kate Brady, and other female characters are prone to achieving solidarity and reassurance by forming relationships with other women, which demonstrates the powerful effect of unity in the face of adversity. Power, as formed through gender relations, within military and broader organizations considerably determines how female characters experience war trauma. The war trauma that Kate Brady and other female characters undergo is arguably influenced not just by their gender but also by their social class, ethnicity, and cultural origins. Taking into consideration such interconnected facets of identity would help to illuminate the complicated and multifaceted nature of war trauma.

Both selected novels explore the impact of trauma and violence on female characters. Zeina, the heroine of *The American Granddaughter*, is subject to serious traumas throughout her life. As a witness to the horrors of war and what it does to individuals are among Zeina's most significant traumatic experiences. She is affected by this fundamentally tragic incident, as it shadows her interpersonal relationships as well as her emotional health. Zeina is also traumatized by her experiences as an interpreter. The violence she experiences not only shapes her worldview but also her self-perception. The author also narrates the tragic events that Iraqi women and their families went through throughout the Iraq-Iran War and the Gulf War. As a result of the violence and unrest brought about by the mentioned wars, Zeina and her family are forced to leave Iraq. Hence, Zeina suffers from the pain of war and expatriation, the loss of her homeland, and her fragmented identity throughout the novel. In one of the most poignant parts of the novel, Zeina sees her old home in Baghdad in utter ruin: "She had often imagined that her family's house had been hit by a missile. But when she saw the reality, her legs gave way beneath her. The roof and walls had been ripped apart, and the house lay in ruins, with rubble and dust everywhere" (Kachachi, ۲۰۰۸, p. ۸۰).

In a harrowing scene within the novel, American forces torture and mistreat Iraqi prisoners. Zeina witnesses one of the convicts while receiving cruel treatment, which reinforces her trauma. The ubiquity of brutal treatment of Iraqi prisoners in the novel can be considered as one of the causes of trauma, harmful particularly to children and women. The book contains a striking indictment of the devastation and carnage caused by war and the toll it takes on human lives through Zeina's experience: "I thought about my father at Saadoun Security Complex, and imagined Private Lynndie England [...] tying him by his neck with a dog leash and dragging him naked behind her. The gorge rose in my throat and my nose" (Kachachi, ۲۰۰۸, p. ۱۰۴). Another exemplary passage shows Zeina's struggles with depression and anxiety, which reinforces her trauma: "There was no friendliness in those eyes or joy. Their irises

seemed to be made of the same substance of sadness. What did this country hold for me in the days to come, besides the bones of my ancestors?" (Kachachi, ۲۰۰۸, p. ۷۸). These passages, regarding Christine Delphy and Nawal El Saadawi's ideas, demonstrate the long-lasting effects that traumatic events can have on a person, especially when they occur during times of war. In *Sand Queen*, Kate is likewise deeply affected by the violence she gets involved in. The novel explores the psychological toll that war leaves on soldiers and civilians alike: "I kick out hard as I can, struggle and struggle, but huge hands are gripping my neck, pressing into my trachea, the fingers squeezing so deep I can't move, can't breathe. All I can do is taste my own spit and blood" (Benedict, ۲۰۱۱, p. ۶۲). Kate is pushed to the verge of trauma by the imminent danger of violence and displacement as an American soldier. She also experiences PTSD and guilt as she inadvertently murders several civilians: "I look in the mirror. Pale skin, empty eyes. Half robot, half human being, the two sides fighting to the death. I have no idea which one will win" (Benedict, ۲۰۱۱, p. ۲۱۹). Kate is entangled in an intricate web of conflicts. As she stands at a fork on the road to Camp Bucca, she wonders whether she is e a woman or a soldier, both or neither. She, while entangled in a series of profound concerns, is on the cusp of self-discovery in her search for identity :

But Kormick always gives me the job of talking to these people. He's got the idea that the sight of a female soldier will win hearts and minds. We've just pulverized their towns, locked up their men, and killed their kids, and one GI Jane with sand up her ass is supposed to make it ok? (Benedict, ۲۰۱۱, p. ۱۲).

Naema, the Iraqi translator, symbolizes ordinary Iraqi citizens caught up in the chaos of the war. The devastation of her childhood village and the constant threat of loss and suffering, among other problems, subject Naema to trauma. The following passage is an eloquent witness to this line of argument: "The soldiers tore in, first one, then another, then a third. [...] They pushed me aside as if I were nothing but air and rushed at my father. With a blow to his head, they knocked him to the ground" (Benedict, ۲۰۱۱, p. ۸۰).

The narrative emphasizes the universality of pain and suffering across cultures by examining Kate's and Naema's tragic experiences. Both characters, despite different upbringings, experience rather similar psychological and emotional crises, hinting at the borderless effects of war on its victims. It particularly records the challenges faced by women within the military such as discrimination, harassment, and the demand to abide by gender norms. It implies that Kate and Naema's experiences differ from those of their male counterparts: "But why are you a soldier? Why, as a woman, did you choose such a path? Soldiers take life. Women give life" (Benedict, ۲۰۱۱, p. ۸۰). The arguments presented in this part sets the ground to examine the traumatized identity of the two protagonists in the next section.

◦. Traumatized Identity in *The American Granddaughter* and *Sand Queen*

Several studies have demonstrated the role of culture in shaping traumatized identity. For instance, Ceciu argued that such traumas get integrated into to self through a series of negotiations and emotional repercussions in collectivist cultures, they lead to a process of rebuilding self and identity (۲۰۱۶, p. ۶۳). Additionally, other factors such as race, gender, and sexuality may directly shape and reshape one's experience of trauma (Nash et al., ۲۰۱۵, pp. ۲۶-۳۱).

In *The American Granddaughter*, Zeina struggles with her hybrid origin as an Iraqi-American person, which pushes her to the very edge of an identity crisis. Such a dual cultural background leads to alienation which underpins her identity crisis which gets more and more pressing due to internal and external conflicts. Although Zeina struggles to strike a balance between her Iraqi and American roots, one finds her trapped between the two ends of the spectrum which produces a strong sense of alienation and estrangement: "We will bring her up from scratch, this ignorant girl. Right, Haydar, my dear? We won't leave her to her ill manners" (Kachachi, ۲۰۰۸, p. ۵۱).

In chapter ۵, the novel critiques how cultural and social expectations may underpin identity dilemmas. While grown up in a Western context, the protagonist struggles with pressures to uphold traditional Iraqi conventions and values. Her sense of self is further complicated by these conflictual confluences. The ubiquity of the difficulties faced by those who live a hybrid life underlines the significant negative effects that such conflicts can have on one's sense of self.

Zeina's upbringing as an American person grown up in a family with deep Iraqi cultural roots is the main cause of her identity crisis. She struggles to develop a stable sense of belonging, although she frequently feels torn between two sociocultural identities: "I have always felt a deep sense of displacement as if I belonged neither here nor there. My parents brought me up to be Iraqi, but I was born and raised in America" (Kachachi, ۲۰۰۸, p. ۱۰). Visiting Iraq after several decades, Zeina faces cultural shock and alienation: "I hadn't given much thought to how Iraqis would receive us. [...] Why, then, were the black eyes looking out from behind the abayas overflowing with all that rejection? There was no friendliness in those eyes, or joy" (Kachachi, ۲۰۰۸, p. ۳۳). She witnesses cultural shock as she visits strange surroundings in her home country. The war and different forms of brutality that she witnesses considerably shape her sense of self. The loss of identity, it should be mentioned, is not limited to Zeina, other members of her family also struggle with this problem. For instance, her uncle Ali a former prosperous businessman in Iraq works as a taxicab in America.

Zeina's displacement and alienation while in Iraq exacerbate her loss of identity. She does not know where she fits in and accordingly feels alienated from both cultures: "I looked around the room and saw strangers, aunts, and uncles who used to hold me when I was a baby and now regarded me with suspicion. I was like a foreigner among my own flesh and blood. I had never felt so alone" (Kachachi, ۲۰۰۸, p. ۱۱۰).

In *Sand Queen*, the identity crisis is recorded from the perspective of Kate Brady, the American female soldier serving in Iraq. In order to fit in within a muscular domain such as the military, Kate feels compelled to internalize patriarchal values which are diametrically opposed to her own feminine identity. When Kate is made to take part in a cruel interrogation of an Iraqi prisoner, she begins to doubt her own morality and sense of self a sense of guilt which is a sign of trauma to recall: "Each time somebody sighs in his rack, a critter runs across our plywood floor with its scratchy little feet, or a prisoner cries out in the distance, adrenaline jolts through me" (Benedict, ۲۰۱۱, p. ۲۰۹). The author examines the complex and destructive repercussions of war on people, especially on women, and how the

resultant traumatic experiences can harm a person's sense of identity. Kate Brady, the American soldier serving in Iraq, is a conduit through which the novel's central theme of identity loss is presented as she travels to a collectivist culture (Iraq) from an individualistic culture (America). Throughout the novel, Kate attempts to reconcile her feminine identity with her occupation as a soldier.

In *Sand Queen*, the loss of identity is portrayed as a difficult and ongoing struggle for troops like Kate who must deal with the upheaval of war while seeking to retain a well-defined sense of self. The book enumerates the severe psychological impact of war trauma on female characters. As the story unfolds, Kate's loss of identity exacerbates by tragic events she sees such as a fellow soldier's death and a vicious attack on her convoy. She feels estranged from herself and everyone around her because of these experiences: "I don't want to be here anymore. I don't want to be part of this. I don't even know what this is" (Benedict, ۲۰۱۱, p. ۲۵۶).

The horrific events that the female characters in *Sand Queen* see shatter their sense of identity, particularly when accompanied by sociopolitical forces. Their identity is defined by the positions they occupy as soldiers, interpreters, and citizens, all of which are behind their traumatic experiences. The gendered components of war trauma are linked to the novel's theme of identity loss. Each female character lives or works in a context filled with an aura of sexism, prejudice, and gendered expectations. Drawing on textual examples, this paper argues that contextual factors potentially exacerbate the already terrible consequences of trauma, which probably ends in the loss of identity.

Traumatic incidents as experienced by characters in *Sand Queen* do not happen in a vacuum: they are profoundly embedded in political and power structures (army as an organization). The stable and self-contained identity of the characters is eroded as a result of the pressures exercised by political structures which propagate disenchantment, disintegration, and purposelessness (or worthlessness as Kira et al. (۲۰۱۹) put it). Accordingly, the novel examines the interplay of gender, politics, and war which form indelible impacts on women's identity.

۶. Kachachi and Benedict as Fictional Characters

From the very outset, one can observe that Kachachi characterizes Zeina in an antagonistic way. The author begins the novel with an inauthentic hadith as a cautionary statement to warn readers to be mindful of the potential risks and temptations associated with individuals who possess outward beauty but ugly inward personalities: "Beware the beautiful woman of dubious descent" (Kachachi, ۲۰۰۸, p. ii). It also serves to prioritize virtue and spirituality over shallow attractiveness in the hope of safeguarding one's faith and well-being. Zeina is one of the targets of this tale, which consistently challenges, opposes, and even undermines her action and motivations.

Through a series of meaningful and connotative words, the author levels a critique against the protagonist, portraying her as flawed, unreliable, or even a traitor: "The impostor wants to kill me off so she can win for herself the admiration of idiotic critics, TV politicians, and dinosaur nationalists" (Kachachi, ۲۰۰۸, p. ۲۴).

In *The American Granddaughter*, there is a writer who embarks on a journey driven by a fervent desire to unravel the intricate layers of the protagonist's identity. This writer, adept at weaving tales of heroes and villains, delves deep into the darker aspects of the protagonist's persona. The writer's primary objective is to shed light on the dark side of the character: "Did she still hate me and take Rahma's side, stereotyping me as the traitor and her as the epitome of authenticity?" (Kachachi, ۲۰۰۸, p. ۷۰). In *Sand Queen*, Benedict wholeheartedly takes sides with Kate.

Benedict immerses herself in Kate's thoughts, emotions, and experiences, carefully crafting a multidimensional persona characterized by strengths, vulnerabilities, and aspirations: "She doesn't want all those eyes on her, all those loser eyes. She doesn't want to hear those women's sadsack loser stories, either" (Benedict, ۲۰۱۱, p. ۸۲). It is observable that Benedict grants Kate due agency, through which the author is able to breathe life into Kate's story, empowering her to navigate the challenges and triumphs that lie ahead: "She's a Halloween skeleton dangling off a porch, only wrapped in a sack. Separated from her skin. Bones and flesh but no soul" (Benedict, ۲۰۱۱, p. ۱۹۱).

V. Concluding Remarks

This article attempted to apply socialist feminism theory to the two case studies to address in what respects Zeina and Kate are similar or different, which is an answer to the crucial question that was mentioned earlier. Both characters, it was observed, grapple with the effects of war on their identities as women and citizens of different countries. While both novels depict the struggles of female characters to assert their agency in a male-dominated context, they diverge in their portrayals of the characters' experiences of trauma and recovery.

Where Kachachi's novel highlights the challenges faced by Iraqi women in a post-war society marked by political instability and sectarian violence, Benedict's novel explores the complex power dynamics at play in the U.S. military's occupation of Iraq. By examining these novels through a feminist perspective, one possibly gains a deeper understanding of the gendered implications of war and its aftermath, and the potential for female characters to challenge dominant power structures and assert their own agency. These similarities and differences will help the reader to examine the protagonists' trauma.

In *Sand Queen*, war and political unrest traumatize female characters but in *The American Granddaughter*, Zeina' is overwhelmed with the secrets of her family. In both novels, also, trauma is depicted as the main cause of identity crisis. Zeina, characterized as a hybrid character, is arrested between reconciling her American and Iraqi cultural backgrounds, though with little success whereby she loses her well-defined identity.

She also feels displaced and alienated as a result of tragic experiences such as the immigration of her father and the Iraq War, to mention a few examples. In contrast, Kate's and Naema's identity crisis is considerably caused by violent events. As women living in an exotic context where patriarchy predominates and colors their autonomy, they witness additional difficulties. The identity crisis in the novel becomes more prominent when they strive to coordinate their ambitions with social expectations and norms.

It was discussed that both novels feature complex and multi-layered female protagonists who suffer from trauma, which underpins their identity crisis. With regard to their experience of and reaction to trauma, it can be inferred that identity crisis is a severe though rare phenomenon.

The writers seem to imply that the human soul is strong enough to bypass adversity. Benedict' delineates how war overwhelms a given society with traumatic experiences, Kachachi portrays the struggle of a fictional persona to reclaim her identity. Finally, both works offer insightful perspectives on how contextual circumstances determine one's mode of conduct and attitude.

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