



Virtual Bonds and Transformed Homes: Diaspora and ICT in Inaam  
Kachachi's the Dispersal

Asma AlTalafeeh<sup>1,\*</sup> & Yousef Abu Amrieh<sup>1</sup>

Received: 3<sup>rd</sup> Jan. 2024, Accepted: 21<sup>st</sup> Feb. 2024, Published: 1<sup>st</sup> Oct. 2024

DOI: [10.35552/0247.38.10.2269](https://doi.org/10.35552/0247.38.10.2269)

**ABSTRACT**

**Objective:** This research aims to explore the significant impact of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) on literary representations of diasporic experiences, particularly focusing on its role in connecting immigrants worldwide. **Methodology:** The study employs an analytical approach to examine the influence of ICT on diasporic literature. **Key Findings:** The findings reveal that ICT has played a crucial role in reshaping the concept and portrayal of diasporic experiences in literature. In Inaam Kachachi's novel *The Dispersal* (2023), Iskander's technological skills highlight ICT's potential to maintain family connections. He uses technology to preserve his family's history by creating a virtual graveyard, allowing for the sharing of cultural practices and traditions. **Conclusions:** The research concludes that ICT is a transformative tool that helps preserve cultural identities, enhance resilience, and strengthen the diasporic experience by facilitating communication and fostering a sense of belonging. **Recommendations:** The study recommends applying the same analytical approach to other novels within diasporic literature to further explore how technology influences diasporic experiences in literature.

**Keywords:** Information and Communication Technology (ICT); Arab Diasporic Literature; Technology Impact; Refugees; Homelands.

<sup>1</sup> Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Jordan, Jordan.  
\*Corresponding Author: [a.altalafeeh@ju.edu.jo](mailto:a.altalafeeh@ju.edu.jo)

الروابط الافتراضية والمنازل المتحولة: المهجر وتكنولوجيا المعلومات والاتصالات في  
رواية "طشاري" للروائية إنعام كجه جي  
أسماء الطلافح<sup>1\*</sup>، ويوسف أبو عامرية<sup>1</sup>

تاريخ التسليم: (2024/1/3)، تاريخ القبول: (2024/2/21)، تاريخ النشر: (2024/10/1)

### ملخص

**الهدف:** تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف التأثير العميق لتكنولوجيا المعلومات والاتصالات على التصوير الأدبي لتجارب المهجر، مع التركيز على دورها في ربط المهاجرين حول العالم. **المنهج:** تعتمد الدراسة على المنهج التحليلي لتحليل تأثير تكنولوجيا المعلومات والاتصالات على أدب المهجر. **أهم النتائج:** أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن تكنولوجيا المعلومات والاتصالات قد ساهمت بشكل كبير في تغيير مفهوم ووصف تجارب المهجر في الأدب. ففي رواية طشاري (2023) للروائية إنعام كجه جي، تُبرز مهارة اسكندر في التكنولوجيا قدرته على الحفاظ على الروابط الأسرية، وتقديم مفهوم جديد للحفاظ على تاريخ العائلة من خلال إنشاء مقبرة افتراضية تتيح تبادل الممارسات الثقافية. **الاستنتاجات:** تستنتج الدراسة أن تكنولوجيا المعلومات والاتصالات تُعد أداة تحويلية تساهم في الحفاظ على الهويات الثقافية، وتعزز من صمود الأفراد في تجربة المهجر من خلال تسهيل التواصل وتعزيز الشعور بالانتماء. **التوصيات:** توصي الدراسة بتطبيق نفس المنهج التحليلي على روايات أخرى من أدب المهجر، لزيادة فهم تأثير التكنولوجيا على تجارب المهاجرة في الأدب.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** تكنولوجيا المعلومات والاتصالات؛ الأدب العربي في المهجر؛ تأثير التكنولوجيا؛ اللاجئين؛ الأوطان.

1 قسم اللغة الإنجليزية وآدابها، كلية اللغات الأجنبية، الجامعة الأردنية، الأردن.  
\*الباحث المراسل: a.altalafeeh@ju.edu.jo

## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to investigate how Iraqi writer's Inaam Kachachi's novel *The Dispersal* highlights the role that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) plays in shaping one's diasporic experiences. The novel, originally published in Arabic as *Tashari* in 2013 and translated into English in 2023, depicts how Iskandar, a second-generation young immigrant, employs the internet and modern communication technologies to connect dispersed immigrants with their loved ones. In particular, this study will focus on the digital graveyard that Iskandar creates to virtually link himself and his great-aunt Wardiyah with their scattered family members worldwide. In this sense, Kachachi's novel offers its readers a new perspective on how digital platforms can serve as emotional and cultural bridges in contemporary diaspora narratives. Yet, Kachachi's novel is by no means a hymn to modern communication technologies; rather, the novel depicts the problematic and controversial entanglement of ICT with Kachachi's characters' diasporic experiences.

The term 'diaspora' has both spatial and biological connotations, originating from the Greek word for sowing, scattering, distribution, or dispersal. It implies movement of people from a center outward, dispersing from the place of origin into new territories (Knott, 2010, p. 79). James Clifford (1994) has suggested that it is a 'traveling term,' intertwining the concepts of 'root' and 'route' (p. 302). Academically, there has been a shift from a focus on 'old localizing strategies' of community, culture, nation, center, and continuity to strategies of movement, discontinuity, circulation, and contact zones (p. 303).

Starting from the 1960s and 1970s, the definition of the term 'diaspora' was broadened to include other groups who had gone through significant displacement from their homelands due to traumatic events. Examples of such groups include the Armenians, the Irish, and, in due course, the Palestinians (Knott & McLoughlin, 2010, p. 9). Starting from the mid-1990s, the growing use of the term diaspora and its sometimes-unclear application were subjected to criticism, leading scholars to call for a more conceptual and analytically valuable usage of the term (p. 22). In

other words, the phrase was frequently employed in a broad and ambiguous manner in a way, as some scholars point out, limited the term's utility as an analytical tool for comprehending the realities of dispersed groups. The term needed to be used more precisely and theoretically to enable a greater comprehension of the intricate social, cultural, and political forces that define diasporic societies. As a result, experts posed different arguments regarding the application of the term diaspora.

In a discussion on cultural identity and diaspora, Stuart Hall (1990) states that “[w]e all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific. What we say is always ‘in context’, positioned” (p. 392). Hall's statement can be seen as setting clear-cut boundaries between what Gabriel Sheffer (1986) calls the triadic network of ethnic diasporas, their host countries, and homelands (p. 1). Sheffer defines diaspora as a modern phenomenon where ethnic groups, who are of migrant origins and are minorities, reside and act in hosting countries while they maintain strong material and sentimental links with their homelands (p. 3). He also emphasizes the solidarity of each diasporic group which is based on ethnic and religious grounds affecting their cultural, political, and economic relations with their homelands (pp. 9-10). According to Mishra (2006), diasporic groups are divided into two types; one that is voluntary and is attracted to the hostland, while the other is involuntary and expelled from its homeland (p. 27).

Similarly, in *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, Robin Cohen (1997) highlights the sense of solidarity and unity that bonds people in diaspora. For Cohen, to feel a sense of solidarity with co-ethnic members even if they were in other hosting countries is one of the features that diasporas exhibit. Other features include idealization of homeland, having a collective memory and a set of myths about it, and a plan to return to it in the future (p. 180). In “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return,” William Safran (1991) emphasizes a number of characteristics for a diasporic community. Among the characteristics is their need to keep personal and vicarious relationships with their homeland, which will define their ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity. Similar to Cohen, Safran emphasizes minorities' collective

memory, myths, and visions towards their homelands. He also adds that the minorities consider their 'ancestral homeland' as their real home; the ideal place where their children and future descendants should return eventually, whenever it is possible (pp. 83-84).

The geographical distinction between the homeland and the hostland is highlighted in Walker Connor's "The Impact of Homelands Upon Diasporas". In this article, Connor simply defines diaspora as "that segment of a people living outside the homeland" (p. 16). He refers to the hostland as the state that holds the political, regulatory powers over that 'geographical territory'. Connor also valorizes the homeland's emotional nature which can be reverential because of the genealogical terms that are often used to refer to it like 'mother/fatherland' (p. 16).

Despite the many definitions of diaspora, they mostly meet at several characteristics like being 'displaced' from a homeland and 'placed' in a hostland, community, or culture. The global communication revolution has significantly impacted various human experiences and contemporary perspectives. Notably, the way individuals perceive themselves has been affected both within their home country and in the diaspora. This impact is particularly evident among displaced, exiled, and dislocated people, who have felt the effects of these social, cultural, and political changes since their presence outside of their home countries.

### **Literature Review**

Over the past few years, the landscape of literary texts has undergone a significant transformation, largely influenced by the global communication revolution. The themes in contemporary literature have increasingly begun to mirror the complexities and challenges brought about by this digital revolution. Writers are exploring topics such as the impact of social media on human relationships, the invasion of privacy in a surveillance state, and the cultural shifts driven by the internet. The current study will analyze Inaam Kachahi's 2023 novel *The Dispersal* that is written within diasporic contexts in order to gain insight into the impact that these technological developments have had on individuals' understanding and experience of diaspora.

Kachachi is an Iraqi author and journalist, born in 1952 in Baghdad. She studied journalism at Baghdad University and worked in Iraqi media before pursuing a PhD at the Sorbonne in Paris. She authored a biography, *Lorna*, and a French book on Iraqi women's wartime literature. She directed a documentary on Naziha Al Dulaimi, the first female minister in an Arab country. Her novels include *Heart Springs* (2005) and *The American Granddaughter* (2008). Since its publication in Arabic in 2014 under the title of *Tashari*, the novel has attracted the attention of Arab researchers and reviewers. For example, Aseel K. Alrikabi (2018) discusses the impact of diaspora and the US occupation of Iraq on the Iraqi people, particularly the Iraqi Christian community, as portrayed in the novel *The Dispersal (Tashari)*. The study clarifies the internal and foreign policies that caused Iraqi people to become dispersed. It explores sectarianism's impact, the difficulties experienced by the scattered Iraqi families looking for a new home, and longing for the past (*arabicfiction*). The study comes to the conclusion that regardless of their religious affiliation, the invasion and ensuing events have caused Iraqi families to disperse in quest of safety and stability. The current study aims to shed light on how these technologies have transformed the ways in which diaspora is experienced, understood, and represented in contemporary Arab diasporic literature.

In "Literary Representations of the Aesthetics of Exile: Inaam Kachachi", Falih Al-Zamili (2022) discusses the persistent impact of the term 'exile' in depicting the profound disconnect individuals face from familial security, language, and native culture. Focusing on two novels by Inaam Kachachi, *The American Granddaughter* and *Tashari*, the paper analyses the role of diaspora writers' fictional works in shaping an aesthetic approach within the literature of exile. Through a close examination of the narratives, the paper uncovers the tensions between the writer's personal experience of exile and her objective portrayal of the existing situation in Iraq. This duality is expressed through the plight of two female characters, Zeina and Wardiyya, revealing the nuanced relationship between Kachachi's subjective perspective and her more detached exploration of the complexities inherent in the theme of exile.

In recent years, ICT has been featured in many diasporic texts. The role of these technologies varies significantly, playing major roles in the lives of characters in some novels, while being less prominent in others. One novel that employed ICT in the context of diaspora is Omar Robert Hamilton's 2017 novel *The City Always Wins*. Hamilton's novel is considered a semi-autobiographical novel about the Egyptian Revolution. The novel's protagonist Khalil is an American born Palestinian-Egyptian who co-founds Chaos. The novel's mass group of revolutionaries, Chaos, use social media platforms like Twitter and Youtube to turn the masses against Mubarak's regime. In real life, Hamilton co-founded Mosireen, which is a group of citizen journalists that collected footage to use and archive from the revolution. The characters in the novel consider themselves living in an 'information war' with Chaos' office being the "cerebral cortex" at its center. Other novels that use ICT within the framework of diaspora include Zeyn Joukhadar's *The Map of Salt and Stars* (2018), Leila Aboulela's *Bird Summons* (2019), Hala Alyan's *The Arsonists' City* (2021), Rabih Alameddine's *The Wrong End of the Telescope* (2021), Layla AlAmmar's *Silence is a Sense* (2021), and Omar Sayfo's *Allah's Spacious Earth* (2023).

## **Objectives**

This study analyzes how the novel *The Dispersal* by Inaam Kachachi depicts the role of ICT in shaping the lives of diasporic communities. It pays particular attention to how Iskandar, a main character, uses digital platforms to maintain contact with his dispersed relatives. It also investigates the digital graveyard that Iskandar creates, and how it acts as a virtual bond between him, his great-aunt Wardiyah, and their global family network.

Moreover, the study examines how the novel offers a distinctive view on the use of digital platforms as tools for emotional and cultural connection in contemporary diaspora literature. It explores the challenges and dilemmas that ICT poses to the characters' diasporic identities, and how the novel addresses the intricacies of using modern communication technologies.

## Research Questions

This study investigates how the novel *The Dispersal* by Inaam Kachachi uses ICT to portray the lives of diasporic communities, especially Iskandar and his great-aunt Wardiyah. It is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does the novel depict the diasporic experiences of Iskandar and Wardiyah through their use of ICT?
2. How does the digital graveyard, which Iskandar creates in the novel, serve as a virtual link for dispersed immigrants and foster their emotional and cultural ties through ICT?
3. How does the novel critique the complex and problematic relationship between ICT and the characters' diasporic experiences?
4. How do the characters in the novel navigate their cultural identity and sense of belonging through their engagement with digital platforms and modern communication technologies?

## Methodology

This study analyzes how the novel *The Dispersal* by Inaam Kachachi uses ICT to portray the lives of diasporic communities. The study used the official English translation of the novel by Inam Jaber, published in 2023, as the main source of textual analysis. The study conducted a detailed investigation of how Iskandar, a key character, uses digital platforms to communicate with his dispersed relatives. It also focused on the digital graveyard that Iskandar creates in the novel, and how it acts as a virtual bond between him, his great-aunt Wardiyah, and their global family network. The study adopted a comprehensive and in-depth methodology to analyze Kachachi's novel, aiming to explore how the novel depicts the role of ICT in shaping modern diasporic experiences.



## Discussion

### *Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the Diasporic Context*

Over the past few decades, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has been rapidly developing and has had a profound impact on many aspects of society, including the literary world. As a result, there is a growing need to examine how Arab diasporic novelists and characters deal with and refer to ICT in the fictional world that these novels depict. This study aims to comprehensively analyze the impact of ICT on the relationship that first and second-generation refugees have with their homeland, focusing on the context of Iraq as portrayed in Kachachi's novel *The Dispersal* (2023). By examining how ICT influences Arab diasporic literature, this research will contribute to our understanding of the contemporary literary landscape and shed light on the ways technology shapes the connections between dispersed communities and their cultural roots.

Kachachi's novel *The Dispersal* innovatively employs the internet and modern communication technologies as crucial tools to connect dispersed immigrants with their loved ones. This study will focus on the digital graveyard created by Iskandar, a second-generation young immigrant, to virtually link himself and his great-aunt Wardiyah with their scattered family members worldwide. Kachachi's novel offers a unique perspective on how digital platforms can serve as emotional and cultural bridges in contemporary diaspora narratives. In this sense, Iskander and Wardiyah's family becomes a (web)site over which memories and communication technologies converge. Seen from this perspective, one may argue that Kachachi's novel is an ingenious narrative that portrays how an individual's diasporic identity entwines with rapidly advancing technological innovations.

ICT peaked after the global communication revolution, which was also called 'the third great wave' to affect human history. In *Future Shock: The Third Wave*, Alvin Toffler (1980) identifies three waves of change: the Agricultural Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and the current Third

Wave, which is characterized by the rise of information technology and the knowledge economy (18). He argues that society is experiencing a ‘future shock’ as a result of these changes and that it is necessary to adapt to them in order to survive (17). It is challenging to provide a universal definition for ICT due to the existence of diverse applications and treatments of the term in various contexts. The definitions within each application can differ across the world, but the main definition of ICT revolves around the devices and infrastructures that enable the transfer of information through digital means (Zuppo, 2012, 13).

ICT is a comprehensive term encompassing both the internet-based domain and the mobile domain, operating seamlessly through wireless networks. It constitutes a vast array of technologies that have become integral to modern life, ranging from cutting-edge innovations like artificial intelligence and robotics to more traditional means of communication, such as landline telephones, radio, and television broadcasting, which continue to play significant roles in contemporary society (Pratt, 2019, 3). In Kachachi’s novel, both internet-based and mobile domains play crucial roles in connecting characters across distances. The phone becomes a vital link for Hind, who resides in Canada, to maintain contact with her mother Wardiyah in Paris. Hind’s sense of detachment from her mother is significantly bridged through their regular phone interactions: “Dear Mom, I haven’t heard enough of your voice on the phone today. I wish the line had been open between us all day long to talk with you about my life here” (Kachachi, 50).

At its core, ICT comprises a dynamic mix of components, reflecting the rapid advancements in technology over time. Some components, like computers and telephones, have been in existence for decades, forming the bedrock of our interconnected world and acting as pivotal tools for communication and data processing (5). On the other hand, recent technological breakthroughs have introduced new elements to the ICT landscape, including smartphones, digital televisions, and robots, which have reshaped the way we interact, learn, and conduct various activities in our daily lives.

The ever-evolving nature of ICT has revolutionized various industries and transformed how individuals access information, connect with others, and conduct business. This constant innovation continues to drive progress, opening doors to endless possibilities for enhancing efficiency, communication, and connectivity across global networks. As the boundaries of ICT continue to expand, it remains crucial for individuals and organizations to embrace these transformative technologies, adapt to their fast-paced nature, and harness their potential to foster positive change and advancement in today's increasingly digitalized world.

In the past, geographical dispersion and the lack of communication technologies have led to feelings of alienation, isolation, and estrangement among diasporic communities. However, with the rise of communication technologies, such as social media and video conferencing, people in different locations can now easily connect with each other, share information and experiences, and maintain a sense of community and belonging. One of the questions that this study aims to answer is: have the ongoing advancements in communication technologies between people in different places eclipsed the dispersion that traditionally cut people off their homelands and engendered their displacement and dislocation? By examining Arab diasporic novels that portray the quotidian experiences of displaced Arab characters, this research seeks to establish a link between communication technologies and the concept of diaspora.

The current study aims to understand how characters in Kachachi's novel maintain relationships with their homeland by using various ICT tools, such as mobiles, social media platforms, and innovative online websites. It emphasizes how their use and the effects of ICT tools have significantly influenced the development of a character's identity. The study will provide a new perspective on how diaspora communities have adapted to these technological changes and how these adaptations have shaped their identities and sense of belonging in the digital age.

By analyzing the literary representation of diaspora and ICT, this study hopes to contribute to a better understanding of the complex ways in which technology has influenced the experience of diaspora and the construction

of diasporic identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The research also sheds light on the confusion experienced by second-generation immigrants in developing a sense of belonging to a place they have either never visited or know little about, except through their family's stories. It examines how ICT has broken the barriers of collecting the information needed to form such a connection.

Hence, the current study will observe whether first- or second-generation migrants' relationships with their homeland are/were affected by the development in ICT which blurred the boundaries between home and diaspora. In this context, Yu Shi (2005) argues that the construction of virtual communities generates the collective imagination shared by people living in diaspora regardless of their geographical location (56). This collective imagination, or diasporic memory, Shi maintains, brings together scattered individuals into one virtual community embedded with the homeland's history and culture (57).

In "Reshaping Geography: Palestinian Community Networks in Europe and the New Media," Sari Hanafi (2005) studies the possibilities and limitations of one of those virtual communities under the name of 'Palestinian Scientists and Technologists Aboard' or (PALESTA). Hanafi states that the reason why such communities were created is the difficulty of returning physically to the homeland in the current time. He also clarifies that the internet does not offer an 'end of geography', but a 'reshaping' of it (583). The PALESTA virtual community does not only connect Palestinians in diaspora with each other, it connects them with others who live in Palestine too. According to Hanafi, the idea of the homeland, specifically in the context of Palestine, has been transformed by the emergence of virtual communities. This transformation involves expanding the concept beyond just political affiliation to include economic, technological, and scientific development. In other words, being a Palestinian is not only about physical presence within the homeland, but also about being a part of the diaspora and contributing to the development of Palestine through digital means. Hanafi's argument emphasizes that the virtual community has opened up new opportunities for individuals to connect with their homeland and support its progress in

the online realm, demonstrating that physical location is no longer the only way to contribute to the development of one's home country (592).

In "Syrian Refugees and the Digital Passage to Europe: Smartphone Infrastructures and Affordances," Gillespie et al. (2018) examine the role played by social media and technological devices in refugees' journey to Europe. They argue that despite the benefits of such technologies in maintaining ties between the refugees themselves and their homelands, they suffer from a number of limitations, including lacking a stable internet connection, online surveillance, unstable infrastructure in the homeland (6), and smartphone affordance (7) among others.

On the same note, Matthew Brunwasser (2015) highlights the essentiality of modern technology for refugees, using their personal experiences and statements. In his article for *The New York Times*, Brunwasser cites one of the Syrian refugees' as saying that the reason why he buys a new SIM card and activates the internet whenever he arrives in a new country is to "download the map to locate [him]self" (2). He says that his smartphone is the only reason he was able to arrive at his current destination, and that he gets stressed-out whenever the battery gets low. Brunwasser argues that smartphones and other technologies have become crucial to refugees because they allow them to stay in contact with loved ones, communicate information about routes, border control activities, transportation, accommodations, and prices, as well as share information about arrests, making these technologies essential for refugees on the move (3).

In "Five Questions for Digital Migration Studies: Learning from Digital Connectivity and Forced Migration In(to) Europe," Koen Leurs and Kevin Smets (2018) explore the influence of digital technologies on the refugee crisis in Europe. They introduce 'digital migration' as a new field of study that emerged after the refugee crisis in Europe (1). The researchers argue that in the European 'refugee crisis,' various state actors have mobilized and conceptualized digital technologies in different ways. Some view them as a tool for comprehending contemporary migration, while others see them as a means of managing mobility, or as a weapon

against it. Still, others see digital technologies as a medium for aesthetically documenting the crisis, or as a tool for revealing the agency of those affected by it (3). They also call for further studies in various disciplines on digital migration which aims to relate between migration and digital media (12).

As the above survey shows, there is an increasing interest in exploring the influence of ICT on the lives and daily experiences of dislocated people. Similarly, recent literary representations of people's experiences in diaspora vividly depict the increasing impact that modern communication technologies have on their lives. Kachachi's *The Dispersal* portrays the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in diaspora narratives. These technologies are explicitly used by various characters to bridge the emotional gap created by physical separation. This is particularly evident in the relationship between the mother, Wardiyah, and her children, who each live in different countries.

### ***Inaam Kachachi's the Dispersal***

Kachachi's novel *The Dispersal* delves into the lives of Iraqi exiles, exploring their feelings of dislocation, sorrow, and longing. The novel serves as an emotionally charged examination of homelessness and displacement amidst political unrest and violence. Technology plays a significant role in connecting the characters living in diaspora, with Iskander, a second-generation immigrant of Iraqi origin living in France, embodying its central role. Initially distant from his Iraqi roots, Iskander forms a deep connection with his great aunt, Wardiyah, who mourns the inability to be buried beside her loved ones in Iraq. Utilizing his technological skills, Iskander gathers family information from his mother and aunt, creating an online cemetery where dispersed family members can be buried together.

Iraq's political instability has been a major factor in the displacement and migration of millions of Iraqis since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion and the subsequent rise of sectarian violence and the Islamic State. Many Iraqis have sought refuge in neighboring countries, such as Jordan, Syria, Turkey, and Iran, as well as in Europe, North America, and Australia

(Kadhun, 2021, 1). These diasporic Iraqi communities have faced various challenges and opportunities in their host countries, such as integration, acculturation, marginalization, educational advancement, employment, and political participation. Some members of the Iraqi diaspora have also tried to contribute to the development and reconstruction of their country of origin, through remittances, humanitarian aid, advocacy, and skills transfer. However, their efforts have been hindered by the lack of security, institutional support, and trust in the Iraqi government, as well as by the insider/outsider dynamics and the ethno-sectarian system that dominate Iraq's politics (Ajide & Alimi, 2019, 1657).

Over the past two decades, Iraqi novelists have portrayed how unrelenting sectarian violence has caused unprecedented waves of exodus to the four corners of the world. For instance, Iraqi novelist Sinan Antoon represents in his novels *The Corpse Washer* (2013) and *The Baghdad Eucharist* (2017) how Iraq has become a battlefield for warring armed factions, and consequently, millions of Iraqi became refugees and asylum seekers. In particular, *The Corpse Washer* "recounts the story of a traumatized Iraqi man, Jawad, who [...] tries to escape this profession [corpse washing] to be an artist" (Sadouni & Abu Amrieh, 2022, 680). In fact, Antoon's Jawad attempts in vain to escape the madness of the civil war to join his uncle in Europe, hoping to pursue his career as an artist (Zaarour, Mukattash and Abu Amrieh, 2023, 19). However, as his endeavors fail, he ends up working as a corpse washer as Iraq delves deeper into sectarian violence. Unlucky as he is, Jawad represents a segment of society who hopes to flee Iraq and start a new life in diaspora.

*The Dispersal* masterfully weaves this narrative, published in English in 2022 and in Arabic in 2013 as *Tashari*, drawing readers into the intricate lives of Wardiyah's family members and friends, all intricately linked to her. The novel's events unfold in two timelines, the present-day where Wardiyah resides in Paris and her children are scattered across the globe in Canada, Denmark, and Dubai. Simultaneously, the narrative offers a series of flashbacks, spanning from the 1950s in Baghdad to later periods, providing invaluable context to the characters' lives and experiences. Through this interplay of past and present, *The Dispersal* powerfully

captures the complexities of displacement, the enduring strength of family bonds, and the profound influence of life lived across borders.

In the early part of the novel, the narrator vividly portrays Wardiyah's intense feelings of being torn apart and scattered across different places. She and her children are immigrants and refugees, living in different parts of the world: "It was as if a butcher had picked up his knife and decided to gouge out her insides and toss them away. He threw her liver to North America, flung her lungs toward the Caribbean, leaving her arteries to float on Gulf waters" (p. 13). This powerful imagery symbolizes the emotional and physical fragmentation that Wardiyah experiences due to displacement and diaspora. Her children are depicted as emblematic of her internals, representing the deep emotional connections and ties that have been scattered and separated across various locations worldwide. The metaphor effectively captures the profound impact of diaspora on her sense of selfhood and the dispersion of her familial bonds across distant lands. The descriptive language and precise details highlight the character's anguish and the significant toll of being uprooted from her homeland. This realisation forms in Wardiyah's mind a diasporic consciousness which "is constituted negatively by experiences of discrimination and exclusion" (Clifford, 1994, p. 311).

However, a few pages later, the presence of communication technologies lightens the burden of diaspora and plays a significant role as a means of bridging the physical distance between loved ones:

It was 7 a.m. the next day in Paris. She had slept a little. Her thirst for tea aroused her. She would make herself a mug of tea and sit by the phone because she might not hear it ringing if she stayed away. What misleading ears they were! It was still early, but Yasameen might give her a call from Dubai to ask how she was. (p. 15)

Wardiyah's eagerness to be near the phone indicates the anticipation and importance of potential communication with her distant daughter Yasmeen, even with the existence of different time zones. Here, communication technologies have become an essential tool in easing the



challenges of diaspora, allowing individuals like Wardiyah to connect with their loved ones across vast distances and time zones.

Wardiyah's arrival in France from Iraq is a truly significant moment for her, captured on TV with cameras rolling as she and other "survivors" step onto the new land that has granted them humanitarian asylum. It is heartwarming to see the refugees bring along a picture of the murdered Bishop, which acts as their symbolic "passport" to France, highlighting the immense hardships and tragedies they endured in their homeland. It is worth noting that France has been a vocal supporter of the rights and protection of Iraqi Christians, condemning the attacks and persecution they faced by extremist forces. It also received nearly 500 Iraqi Christian refugees in 2008 (france24). France has a special visa programme for Iraqi Christians, which allows them to apply for asylum directly at the French embassy in Erbil, the capital of Kurdistan. This programme is faster and easier than the regular asylum process, which requires refugees to reach French territory first (christianpost).

In the midst of all the chaos, the camera focuses on Wardiyah, an elderly woman in a wheelchair, which tugs at the heartstrings even more. These emotional images highlight how powerful information technologies can be in conveying the struggles and tragedies faced by displaced individuals. They serve as a stark reminder of the challenges and hardships that the diaspora community has endured throughout their journey.

The same scene serves as a reminder of how communication technologies, such as the phone, have transformed the diaspora experience. Through immediate and constant communication, families can support each other, share their joys and sorrows, and bridge the physical gaps between them. Wardiyah's niece who lives in France talks on the phone to Wardiyah's daughter who lives in Canada, sharing overwhelmed emotions through this virtual connection:

"She has arrived. Don't worry. I am at the airport." "How is she?"

“She is being pushed on a wheelchair, but she is beaming.” After that, I didn’t hear what my cousin said because her sobbing flew from Toronto over the ocean and landed in my ear. (p. 22)

It highlights the positive impact of technology on the human experience, especially in the context of diaspora, where distances can be emotionally challenging. The phone, in this case, serves as a lifeline that not only connects the family but also amplifies the significance of their journey and the importance of staying connected to their roots and loved ones despite being dispersed across the globe.

In a scene where Wardiyah was talking with her niece on the phone and her niece was asking her about how she finds living in France, Wardiyah answers with “*Iskhamu zeqnabout*,” an expression that conveys her distress and despair. Her niece tries to change the subject, aware that telephone calls were monitored in their country. However, Wardiyah continues talking as if she had not heard her (p. 34). The use of “our” in this context signifies that France has become their new home, a place of safety and asylum where they are now residing.

The mention of monitored phone calls raises questions about the impact of technology on the lives of refugees and immigrants in their host countries. While advancements in technology have facilitated communication and connections across borders, they have also provided tools for governments to increase surveillance and control. In the context of host countries like France, where immigrants and refugees seek safety and freedom, the advancement of technology can present both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, technology enables them to stay connected with their loved ones back in their home countries, fostering a sense of belonging and support. On the other hand, it may also perpetuate feelings of unease and caution, knowing that their communications could still be subject to scrutiny. This may refer to the UN’s collaboration with Microsoft in 2004 to launch biometric identification technologies for refugees, named Project Profile and proGRESS, across 30 countries. These systems captured photos and basic biographical details to streamline and harmonize the identification process

across various agencies. Additionally, they addressed the challenges associated with safeguarding refugees' crucial documents. Aid workers employed these technologies for dependable identity verification using fingerprint, iris, and facial scans (Waid, 2021, p. 4).

However, the significant role of ICT in *The Dispersal* is portrayed through the concept of the digital graveyard created by Iskandar, who happens to be Wardiyah's great-nephew. Iskandar was born and raised in France and has only known Iraq through the stories recounted by his family members and the information he gathers from TV and social media. Iskander, who has a name that is "shared by half of the men in the family" (p. 82), forms a close bond with his great aunt, Wardiyah, which in turn connects him deeply with his ancestors' homeland. The first scenes of Iskander show that his connection to Iraq is distant and limited to only one visit during his childhood. Iskander's exposure to Iraq was brief and hazy; the memory of his relatives and surroundings in Baghdad remains faint, with images of houses, gardens, and various family members fading with time (p. 38).

As Iskander matures, his exposure to constant news coverage about his ancestors' country, Iraq, on television not only captures his attention but serves as a pivotal catalyst in illustrating the profound interplay between diasporic identity and the rapidly advancing technological landscape. Images of tanks, helmets, and corpses floating in the Gulf capture his attention, and he becomes more attentive to the news, sensing a personal connection to the unfolding events in his homeland. Iskander's rekindled emotional ties to his ancestral country, Iraq, despite physical distance, underscore the profound impact of information technology exposure (p. 39). The narrative further emphasizes Iskander's exceptional technological prowess, highlighting his role as a symbol of diasporic identity seamlessly intertwining with rapidly advancing innovations. His impressive technological skills garner the attention of his teachers at school, granting him authority over his friends. Iskander's passion for all things tech extends beyond the classroom, as he later on creates the Iraqi digital graveyard to bury people next to their loved ones despite distance:

He went into his room and sat in front of his computer, a dejected gray piece of metal with shining screen. It was his friend, companion, teacher, and secret keeper. He had become so excellent at using it that he was now an authority among his friends. Even the school principal turned to him when her computer was out of order. He felt proud when he set it right for her in a minute. She thanked him wholeheartedly and overlooked the complaint of the history teacher about his recurrent absences. (p. 41).

The idea of the digital graveyard takes shape as Wardiyah repeatedly expresses her reluctance to be buried outside her homeland, Iraq. In response to inquiries about her feelings towards Paris, she hesitates, saying, “I like it, but I don’t wish to die here and get buried in Paris” (p. 88). These emotional words foreshadow the emotional depth of her attachment to her country of origin, where her roots and memories reside. The concept of the digital graveyard emerges as a result of her desire to be laid to rest in the land that holds her ancestors, traditions, and cherished moments.

In this scene when Iskander creates the digital graveyard, he takes on the role of a technological bridge between the diaspora experience of Wardiyah in Paris and the virtual world without borders. Iskander’s display of the digital graveyard on the computer illustrates the evolving role of technology in connecting people to their past, heritage, and loved ones despite geographical distances. In this scene, technology as a turning point in the diaspora experience is highlighted through Iskander’s innovative website and the emotional impact it has on Wardiyah: “The boy turned around and looked into her eyes. He begged her not to cry and pointed the cursor to the heart of the picture” (p. 106).

Through technology, Iskander uncovers intriguing details about his aunts, uncles, and ancestors, unravelling the stories and legacies that have shaped his family’s past:

The virtual graveyard threw Iskander into the heart of the family history, and it was about to distract him even from Kulthoum. Up until now, he had not known anyone from the family other than his father and mother. But now he fell into the trap of genealogy and became expert in

the knowledge of deceased: aunts, uncles, and ancestors. He discovered interesting details about them while sculpting their graves and writing suitable expressions on their tombstones. (p. 109).

The virtual graveyard project, intended to symbolically reunite his scattered family, deeply immersed Iskandar in his ancestral roots. This exploration of genealogy transformed him from someone largely ignorant of his family's history into an expert on his deceased relatives. He began to uncover the stories of aunts, uncles, and ancestors, perhaps learning about their lives, struggles, and the impact of conflict on their fates. In creating digital memorials for each family member, Iskandar was not just placing names on virtual tombstones; he was piecing together the fragments of a family torn apart by war and displacement. This project consumed Iskandar to such an extent that it began to overshadow other aspects of his life, including his relationship with Kulthoum, his girlfriend who is battling cancer. The irony is that as he delves into the past, honoring those who have passed, he risks neglecting the living and the immediate concerns of his present life.

By the end of the novel, Wardiyah experiences a significant shift in her perception of the digital graveyard. Initially intrigued by the idea and finding comfort in its ability to bring her deceased loved ones closer, she now begins to recognize its limitations. The virtuality of the digital graveyard proves to be inadequate compared to the permanence and tangible reality of the physical world. Wardiyah's understanding of the shortcomings of the digital realm emerges as she reflects on the drawbacks of technology. She realizes that the screen is solid and cold, susceptible to power outages and viruses, endangering the saved files and memories it holds. The digital world is transient and uncertain, unable to provide the enduring stability she seeks in her quest for connection to her deceased family members (p. 252).

## **Conclusion**

Kachachi's *The Dispersal* delves into the intricate relationship between technology and the diaspora, offering a captivating exploration of how virtuality intertwines with reality. Iskander's brilliant creation of the

digital graveyard stands as a symbol of technology's capacity to bridge distances and honor ancestral ties, while simultaneously prompting contemplation about its limitations and potential drawbacks. Through the contrasting viewpoints of Iskander and Wardiyah, the novel provides a nuanced portrayal of technology's dual nature in the diaspora context.

Iskander's technical expertise exemplifies technology's potential to connect individuals to their cultural roots, allowing them to revisit cherished memories and create a virtual sanctuary for departed loved ones. His website becomes a testament to digital innovation's power in preserving cultural heritage and fostering a sense of belonging amidst displacement. It demonstrates how technology can offer solace, serving as a conduit for coping with nostalgia and forging connections to the past.

In contrast, Wardiyah's evolving perspective on the digital graveyard introduces a counterbalance, as she grapples with the limitations of virtuality and the profound need for tangible human connections. Her realization that virtual representations cannot replace the enduring authenticity of the physical world underscores the importance of cherishing real-life experiences and embracing tangible bonds.

Ultimately, Kachachi's *the Dispersal* conveys a profound message about technology's role in shaping one's diasporic experiences. It showcases its potential to connect, preserve, and bridge gaps between the past and present. At the same time, it serves as a poignant reminder of the irreplaceable value of human connections, the significance of physical touch, and the lasting power of tangible experiences. The novel encourages us to navigate the digital landscape with discernment, utilizing technology to enrich our lives while holding fast to the essence of our humanity and the meaningful relationships that anchor us in reality.

**\*Author contribution:** Both authors contributed equally to this study. Both authors also contributed to drafting and revising the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

**\*Funding:** This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

**\*Acknowledgments:** The authors wish to thank The University of Jordan for their continuous support; and An-Najah National University for publishing this paper ([www.najah.edu](http://www.najah.edu)).

## References

- Ajide, K. B., & Alimi, O. Y. (2019). Political instability and migrants' remittances into sub-Saharan Africa region. *GeoJournal*, 84(6), 1657–1675
- Alrikabi, L. A. K. (2018). A study of Inam Kachachi's novel Tashari as diaspora literature. *Journal of Human Sciences*, 2(25).
- Al-Talafeeh, A. & Abu Amrieh, Y. *The Impact of Information and Communication Technologies on Arab Diasporic Novels: the Changing Perception of Diaspora*. (Unpublished Doctoral dissertation). The University of Jordan, Amman.
- Al-Zamili, F. M. J. (2022). Literary Representations of the Aesthetics of Exile: Inaam Kachachi". *Journals education for girls*, 31(4).
- Brunwasser, M., 2022. *A 21st-Century Migrant's Essentials: Food, Shelter, Smartphone (Published 2015)*. [online] Nytimes.com. Available at: <<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/26/world/europe/a-21st-century-migrants-checklist-water-shelter-smartphone.html>> [Accessed 2 February 2023].
- Cohen, Robin (1997) *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. London: University College London Press.
- Clifford, J. (1994) 'Diasporas', *Cultural Anthropology*, 9(3): 302–38.

- Connor, W. (1986). The impact of homelands upon diasporas. *Modern diasporas in international politics*, 16-46.
- France to Receive Nearly 500 Iraqi Christian Refugees. <https://www.christianpost.com/news/france-to-receive-nearly-500-iraqi-christian-refugees.html>.
- France offers asylum to Iraqi Christians. <https://www.france24.com/en/20140728-france-iraq-support-christians-mosul-notre-dame-paris-rally-asylum>.
- Gillespie, M., Osseiran, S., & Cheesman, M. (2018). Syrian refugees and the digital passage to Europe: Smartphone infrastructures and affordances. *Social media+ society*, 4(1), 2056305118764440.
- Hall, Stuart (1990) ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’, in J. Rutherford (ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, pp. 222–37.
- Hanafi, S. (2005). Reshaping geography: Palestinian community networks in Europe and the new media. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 31(3), 581-598. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691830500058703>
- *Inaam Kachachi* | International Prize for Arabic Fiction. <https://www.arabicfiction.org/en/inaam-kachachi>
- Kachachi, I. (2023). *The dispersal* (I. Jaber, Trans.). Northampton, MA: Interlink Publishing Group, Inc.
- Kadhum, O. (2021). *Iraqi diaspora mobilization and the future development of Iraq* [Issue brief]. <https://www.bakerinstitute.org/media/files/files/0f7a6d9c/bi-brief-032321-cme-iraq.pdf>
- Knott, Stephen and John McLoughlin. *Diasporas: Concepts, Intersections, Identities*. Zed Books, 2010.



- Leurs, K., & Smets, K. (2018). Five questions for digital migration studies: Learning from digital connectivity and forced migration in (to) Europe. *Social media+ Society*, 4(1), 2056305118764425.
- Mishra, S. (2006). *Diaspora criticism*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Pratt, M.K. (2019) *What is ICT (Information and Communications Technology)?* CIO. TechTarget. Available at: <https://www.techtarget.com/searchcio/definition/ICT-information-and-communications-technology-or-technologies> (Accessed: January 28, 2023).
- Sadouni, B., & Abu Amrieh, Y. (2022). The Stories Trees Tell: Jad El Hage's *the Myrtle Tree* and Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer*. *Jordan Journal of Modern Languages and Literatures*, 14(3), 671-690. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47012/jjml.14.3.13>
- Safran, W. (1991). Diasporas in modern societies: Myths of homeland and return. *Diaspora: A journal of transnational studies*, 1(1), 83-99.
- Sheffer, Gabriel (ed.) (1986) *Modern Diasporas in International Politics*. London and Sydney: Croom Helm.
- Shi, Y. (2005). Identity construction of the Chinese diaspora, ethnic media use, community formation, and the possibility of social activism. *Continuum*, 19(1), 55-72.
- Toffler, A. (1980). *Future shock: The third wave*. Bantam Books.
- Waid, L. (2021, May 24). Tracing the Untraceable: New Technologies that Monitor Displaced Persons and the History of Population Control. *Harvard International Review*. <https://hir.harvard.edu/new-technologies-that-monitor-displaced-persons/>
- Zuppo, C. M. (2012). Defining ICT in a Boundaryless World: The Development of a Working Hierarchy. *International Journal of Managing Information Technology (IJMIT)*, 4(3), 13-22. doi: 10.5121/ijmit.2012.4302

- Zaarour, M., Mukattash, E., & Abu Amrieh, Y. (2023). Coming of Age in the Arab Diasporic Künstlerroman: Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer* (2013) and Nada Awar Jarrar's *An Unsafe Haven* (2016). *World Journal of English Language*, 13(2), 1-16. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v13n2p16>.