

INTERCULTURALISM IN MIDDLE EASTERN LITERATURE: REPRESENTATION OF IDENTITY, CULTURAL CONFLICT, AND INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:
Conflict; cross-cultural;
intercultural;
literature;
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This study addresses the increasing need for cross-cultural understanding in the era of globalization, where interactions among diverse cultural groups have intensified. Focusing on Middle Eastern studies, this research examines literature as a cultural medium that facilitates intercultural dialogue. The study aims to analyze how literary works by Middle Eastern authors represent cultural interactions and mediate intercultural communication. This research employs a library research method with a qualitative content analysis approach, focusing on themes of identity, cultural representation, and intercultural conflict in selected Middle Eastern literary texts and related scholarly works. The analysis demonstrates that these literary works reflect complex encounters between tradition and modernity, as well as between local and global cultural influences, particularly in contexts shaped by migration and historical transformation. The findings indicate that Middle Eastern literature not only represents social realities but also promotes intercultural awareness by portraying characters engaged in identity negotiation and cultural tension. These narratives foster empathy and understanding across cultural boundaries. The study concludes that literature serves as an effective medium for strengthening intercultural discourse and offers a valuable contribution to multicultural education from the perspective of Middle Eastern literature.

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الكلمات المفتاحية:
الصراع؛ بين الثقافات؛
الأدب؛ عبر الثقافات؛
متعدد الثقافات.

تتناول هذه الدراسة الحاجة المتزايدة إلى الفهم العابر للثقافات في عصر العولمة، حيث أصبحت التفاعلات بين المجموعات الثقافية المتنوعة أكثر كثافة. وتتركز هذه الدراسة على دراسات الشرق الأوسط، حيث تبحث في الأدب بوصفه وسيطاً ثقافياً يساهم في تسهيل الحوار بين الثقافات. وتهدف الدراسة إلى تحليل كيفية تمثيل الأعمال الأدبية لكتاب من الشرق الأوسط للتفاعلات الثقافية، ودورها في التوسط في التواصل بين الثقافات. تعتمد هذه الدراسة على منهج البحث المكتبي باستخدام تحليل المحتوى ذي الطابع النوعي، مع التركيز على موضوعات الهوية، والتمثيل الثقافي، والصراع بين الثقافات في مجموعة مختارة من النصوص الأدبية في الشرق الأوسط، إلى جانب الدراسات العلمية ذات الصلة. وتظهر نتائج التحليل أن هذه الأعمال الأدبية تعكس تفاعلات معقدة بين التقليد والحداثة، وكذلك بين التأثيرات الثقافية المحلية والعالمية، خاصة في السياقات التي تشكلت بفعل الهجرة والتحويلات التاريخية. وتشير النتائج إلى أن الأدب في الشرق الأوسط لا يقتصر على تمثيل الواقع الاجتماعي والثقافي فحسب، بل يساهم أيضاً في تعزيز الوعي بين الثقافات من خلال تصوير شخصيات تخوض مفاوضات الهوية وتواجه توترات ثقافية.

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وتسهم هذه السرديات في تنمية التعاطف وتعزيز الفهم عبر الحدود الثقافية. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن الأدب يُعد وسيلة فعالة لتقوية الخطاب بين الثقافات، ويُقدم إسهامًا قيمًا في التعليم متعدد الثقافات من منظور أدب الشرق الأوسط.

INTRODUCTION

Literature is a form of cultural expression that possesses a unique ability to represent and communicate a wide range of human experiences. Through literature, various aspects of life can be portrayed from diverse perspectives, offering broader insight into the complexity of emotions, values, and ideas within society. Literary works not only tell stories but also serve as a medium to voice ideas, viewpoints, and deep reflections on human life and the surrounding culture. In an era of rapid globalization, literature plays a crucial role as an effective medium of intercultural dialogue. This is due to its capacity to connect readers with cultural perspectives they may not directly experience (Bhabha, 2021; Yu, 2026).

In this context, the concept of interculturalism becomes relevant, as it facilitates cultural exchange, interaction, and integration, encouraging greater understanding and tolerance across cultures. Intercultural literature refers not only to works that explicitly address intercultural themes but also to those produced by individuals or groups with diverse cultural backgrounds or who have experienced cultural encounters (Held, 2022). Literature, therefore, functions both as a reflection of multicultural realities and as a means through which individuals and societies explore and understand cultural identity and difference. Furthermore, intercultural literature also plays a role in challenging stereotypes and prejudices, fostering the emergence of inclusive discourse.

With globalization resulting in more frequent intercultural contact, the study of literature and interculturalism have gained significant scholarly attention. Several studies suggest that cultural interactions within literary works often serve as mirrors for societies to evaluate how they perceive "the other" and how they understand "the self" within those interactions (Holliday, 2022). Literature enables an imaginative dialogue between different cultures, helping readers overcome ethnocentric tendencies and expand their awareness of other cultural perspectives.

The concept of interculturalism differs from multiculturalism. While multiculturalism emphasizes coexistence within cultural diversity, interculturalism focuses on interaction and mutual influence among cultures (Lee, 2020; Portera, 2021). In literature, interculturalism is evident in the depiction of characters from different cultural backgrounds or narratives that blend diverse cultural elements. Literary works that incorporate intercultural elements can challenge and enrich readers' perspectives, creating opportunities for deeper intercultural dialogue and understanding.

The importance of literature as an intercultural medium is increasingly evident in works by authors who live in multiethnic societies or come from diaspora communities. These writers often draw upon their personal experiences of cultural encounters to explore issues such as identity, alienation, and assimilation (Mukherjee, 2021; Cook, J., Holmes, H., & Meurs, 2026). Through such narratives, readers gain insight into how individuals experience cultural friction or fusion, and how these encounters shape both personal and collective identities.

The development of intercultural literature also reflects an ongoing effort to enrich world literature with broader cultural perspectives. Literary works from various cultural backgrounds are now more accessible, which allows for more intensive cultural exchange. With technological advancements and increased access to digital literature, works from across the globe can be enjoyed by a global audience. This, in turn, broadens readers'

intercultural understanding (Singh, 2022; Li, 2021).

Moreover, intercultural literature serves as a means to critique the hegemony of dominant cultures that often monopolize global discourse. Literature provides a platform for marginalized cultural voices to be heard, thus balancing the dominance of particular narratives in world literature. In this way, intercultural literature plays a significant role in advocating for social justice through more equitable and inclusive cultural representation (Kumar, 2020).

Furthermore, research shows that literature can be an effective tool in intercultural education. By engaging with literary texts that highlight various cultures, readers, especially students, can be encouraged to see the world from different perspectives. This is considered crucial in shaping a generation that is more open to differences and more tolerant of cultural diversity (Hurtado, 2021). Thus, literature functions not only as a form of entertainment or aesthetic experience but also as an educational instrument that fosters empathy and intercultural understanding.

Overall, intercultural literature acts as both a reflection and a catalyst of dynamic intercultural interactions. Through the depiction of conflict, compromise, and harmony among cultures, literature provides deeper insight into the complexities of cultural identity in the era of globalization. The influence and role of literature in this intercultural process position it as a vital component in ongoing intercultural dialogue, ultimately enriching our collective understanding of human diversity.

This rests on the assumption that literature is not merely a record of historical fact, but rather an imaginative and reflective portrayal of phenomena occurring in society (Hart, 2026). Since genetic structuralism emerged as a middle path between the rigidity of autonomous structuralism, which places literature in its own isolated world, literary works have come to be seen as a dialogical medium connecting humans, particularly authors, with others in a collective setting and specific behavioral context (Singh, 2022).

From this perspective, an author's inspiration can come from anywhere and at any time. Consequently, what is presented in a literary work may not always originate from the writer's personal experience, but can also be inspired by reading, other narratives, or external sources. It is therefore not surprising that in the process of poetic production, authors often engage in improvisation and innovation in order to make their work more accessible and engaging. Returning to the idea that literature is a model for discussing social phenomena, many literary works represent conflict through a variety of narrative models, serving as vessels for dialogic processes to emerge.

The variation of oppositional elements (such as characters or cultural spaces) serves as a starting point for discussing interculturalism. Interculturalism may be examined as an independent theoretical apparatus, entirely separate from literary works, in this case, the novel. However, it becomes especially compelling to explore the relationship between the two by reaffirming the assumption that literature is a social product of its time, capable of functioning as a problem-solving tool within contemporary societal structures.

In the past five years, various studies have highlighted the importance of literature and intercultural education in fostering cross-cultural awareness. For instance, Kumar (2024) demonstrates that exposure to multicultural literature significantly enhances empathy and intercultural competence among university students in higher education contexts. Similarly, Nguyen et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of integrating cultural knowledge into digital dialogues to promote more inclusive intercultural communication. In a comparative study, David-Izvernar et al. (2025) found that multiethnic school environments that incorporate intercultural values through learning media, including literature, significantly improve students' intercultural communication skills. Additionally, research by Ertay and Gilanlioglu (2024) developed and validated an instrument to assess intercultural

communication competence, underlining the crucial role of cultural and narrative literacy in shaping tolerant attitudes. In the context of Middle Eastern studies, particularly Arabic literature, research by Ouyang (2022) shows that contemporary Arabic literary texts function as a medium for representing power relations, identity, and complex intercultural interactions. Through narratives of migration, diaspora, and encounters between local values and global influences, Arabic literary works not only reflect social realities but also create spaces for intercultural dialogue within societies undergoing continuous transformation.

Based on this review, a clear research gap exists in understanding literature's role as a medium for intercultural dialogue, particularly through content analysis approaches that examine cultural representation and identity conflicts within literary texts. Therefore, this study aims to explore the forms of cultural interaction present in literary texts and to identify how literature contributes to building intercultural empathy and understanding. The results of this research are expected to offer both theoretical and practical contributions to the development of multicultural education and intercultural discourse, particularly through advancing the study of interculturalism in literature within social and academic contexts.

This study employs a library research method as the primary approach to examine the relationship between literature and interculturalism. This method emphasizes the collection, classification, and critical analysis of various relevant written sources, enabling the researcher to understand literary phenomena both conceptually and contextually. In literary studies, library research functions not only as a data collection technique but also as a means of interpreting the meanings of texts, ideas, and discourses that develop within literary works (Friedman, 2021). Through this approach, the study aims to explore how literature functions as a medium for intercultural dialogue that bridges differences in values, identities, and human experiences. Furthermore, this method is used to identify various theoretical approaches in intercultural literary studies, including perspectives that emphasize power relations, cultural representation, and the dynamics of identity within literary texts (Miller, 2021).

Data collection in this study was conducted through a systematic library research approach by reviewing relevant academic sources, including books, scholarly journal articles, and research reports published since 2020 to ensure the currency of data in literary and intercultural studies; all sources were obtained from reputable academic databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and ProQuest, thereby ensuring the validity and credibility of the information, and in literary research, the accuracy and authority of sources are crucial as they directly influence the quality of interpretation and depth of analysis. The material objects in this study focus on three contemporary Middle Eastern literary works, namely *An Unlasting Home* (2022) by Al-Naqīb, *Maqām Kurd* (2024) by Ḥasan, and *Mask of the Sky Color* (2024) by Khandaqji, which were selected based on their strong relevance to intercultural issues in the Middle Eastern context, particularly in representing cultural identity, experiences of migration and diaspora, the negotiation between local and global values, and the dynamics of power relations within societies undergoing social and political transformation; the collected data were then classified into several thematic categories, including identity conflict, intercultural interaction, migration, diaspora, and the representation of "the other" in literary texts, with the aim of identifying recurring patterns of meaning, symbols, and narrative structures across the selected works, and subsequently analyzed using qualitative content analysis to explore how literary texts represent intercultural dialogue in complex, multilayered, and contextually grounded ways within the social realities of contemporary Middle Eastern societies (Osei, 2022).

Through this analytical process, the researcher identified key ideas and major findings from previous studies and organized them into relevant thematic categories. The analysis

also examines how different types of literary works, both fiction and non-fiction, contribute to the formation of dynamic intercultural discourse. Themes such as identity conflict, cultural hybridity, migration, and the representation of “the other” become central in understanding the role of literature as a dialogical space (Andresw, 2021). Thus, the method enables a more systematic and in-depth examination of meaning structures within texts, while also revealing literature’s function as a medium of social reflection and cross-cultural communication. In this context, literature is not only viewed as an aesthetic product but also as a cultural practice that plays a strategic role in fostering understanding and tolerance in multicultural societies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Literature as a medium for intercultural dialogue in the Middle Eastern context

In intercultural studies, literature is no longer understood merely as a reflection of social reality, but rather as a dialogic space in which diverse identities, values, and cultural experiences interact dynamically. Literary texts offer readers the possibility of entering culturally different worlds, thereby opening opportunities for the development of cross-cultural understanding. This idea aligns with the concept of dialogism proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin, who positions literary works as arenas for the encounter of multiple voices, or heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981; Aldoory, 2024). Within this framework, every narrative does not stand alone, but always interacts with other discourses circulating within society (Dentith, 2020). Thus, literature enables complex exchanges of meaning, where differences are not erased but negotiated through language and representation. This approach reinforces the view that meaning in literature is open-ended and continuously shaped through interactions among text, context, and reader.

In the context of globalization, the intensity of intercultural interactions has increased significantly, making literature an effective medium for bridging such differences. Literary narratives are capable of presenting the experience of “the other” imaginatively, allowing readers to understand perspectives that were previously unfamiliar. This is relevant to the development of intercultural studies, which emphasize the importance of empathy and cross-cultural awareness in a global society. Recent studies show that literary works, particularly those addressing themes of migration and diaspora, play a crucial role in shaping understandings of identity as fluid and contextual (Anis et al., 2023). Literature not only represents the physical movement of individuals across regions but also depicts the psychological and cultural transformations that occur in the process. In this sense, literature functions as a reflective medium that helps readers grasp the complexity of intercultural relations in an increasingly interconnected world.

This perspective is further enriched by the concept of the *third space* introduced by Bhabha, which refers to a hybrid space where cultural identities are negotiated and redefined. Within this space, the boundaries between cultures become blurred, allowing for the emergence of new forms of identity that do not fully belong to any single culture (Bhabha, 2021; Assa, 2024). In the Middle Eastern context, this phenomenon often appears in literary works that explore migration, diaspora, and identity conflicts resulting from the encounter between local traditions and global influences. Literature becomes a medium that not only records these changes but also critiques the power relations shaping cultural representation. Furthermore, recent studies indicate that contemporary Middle Eastern literature plays a significant role in constructing intercultural discourse by presenting narratives that challenge stereotypes and open more inclusive spaces for dialogue (Shalabi, A., & Abu Amrieh, 2024; Jackson, 2022). Therefore, literature can be understood as a cultural practice that not only reflects reality but also contributes to shaping how societies understand difference and cultural diversity.

Contemporary Middle Eastern literature functions not only as a representation of social reality but also as a space for intercultural dialogue where various identities and experiences interact dynamically. Within the framework of interculturalism, literary texts can be read as arenas where cultural meanings are negotiated through narrative, character, and conflict. This is clearly evident in *An Unlasting Home* (2022) by Al-Naqīb, which employs a layered narrative structure to depict both the disconnection and interconnectedness of identity in a diasporic context. Narratively, the novel does not follow a linear plot but moves through fragments of memory across generations. For example, the depiction of a family's movement from Kuwait to the West shows how "home" is no longer understood as a fixed geographical location but as an emotional and cultural construct that continuously evolves. Moreover, in one narrative episode, the characters experience fragmented identities as they navigate life between two distinct cultural worlds. This situation reflects Bhabha's concept of hybridity, where identity is not fixed but constantly negotiated through social and cultural interaction (Bhabha, 2021). The use of memory as a narrative device also suggests that cultural identity is shaped not only by direct experience but by collective memory transmitted across generations. This fragmentation serves as a narrative strategy to demonstrate that intercultural identity is formed through memory, loss, and the reconstruction of meaning. Thus, intercultural dialogue emerges through the intersection of past and present, as well as between the culture of origin and the new cultural environment.

Meanwhile, *Maqām Kurd* (2024) by Ḥasan offers a more complex perspective on ethnic identity and diaspora. The novel highlights the experiences of Kurdish communities living under conditions of marginalization and transnational displacement, such as between Syria and Europe. From a narrative analysis perspective, the protagonist frequently occupies a liminal position, belonging neither fully to the culture of origin nor to the new one. This condition generates identity tension that becomes central to the intercultural dialogue within the text. Through the depiction of the character's journey in European spaces, the narrative reveals tension between the need to adapt to new social norms and the desire to preserve Kurdish identity. The novel employs strong internal focalization, allowing readers to enter the character's consciousness and emotionally experience their inner conflicts. This technique strengthens literature's function as a dialogic medium, as readers engage not only conceptually but also emotionally with cultural difference. Within intercultural theory, this phenomenon can be understood as a form of dynamic cultural negotiation, in which individuals do not merely absorb other cultural influences but actively reshape their identities (Ouyang, 2022). Thus, the work not only represents diasporic reality but also opens space for readers to understand the complexity of "being the other."

Furthermore, *Mask of the Sky Color* (2024) by Khandaqji presents a more explicitly political dimension of intercultural dialogue, particularly in the context of colonialism and the Palestinian conflict. The novel illustrates how power relations influence the formation of cultural identity and the ways individuals perceive "the other." In several narrative moments, characters experience alienation due to the dominance of more powerful cultural narratives, giving rise to forms of resistance against such hegemony. This analysis can be linked to the theory of Edward Said on *Orientalism*, which explains how cultural representations are often shaped by unequal power relations. In this novel, intercultural dialogue occurs not only through direct interactions between characters but also through symbolic conflicts between dominant narratives and alternative narratives seeking to preserve local identity. For instance, the metaphor of the "sky", which should be universal but instead becomes a symbol of constrained freedom, illustrates how individual identity is limited by political and cultural conditions. In several scenes, characters interact with dominant cultural representations that attempt to define their identities, creating tension between self-definition and externally imposed definitions. This narrative demonstrates that intercultural dialogue is not always harmonious but often unfolds through tension and

power negotiation. Thus, literature functions as a critical space that exposes the dynamics between domination and resistance in intercultural relations.

These three works demonstrate that intercultural dialogue in Middle Eastern literature occurs not only through interactions between characters but also through narrative structure, symbolism, and perspective. *An Unlasting Home* emphasizes dialogue through memory and diaspora, *Maqām Kurd* through identity conflict and migration, and *Mask of the Sky Color* through power relations and cultural resistance. Through rich narrative structures, characters, and symbolism, these works enable readers to understand cross-cultural experiences more deeply and empathetically. In this context, literature functions not merely as a reflection of social reality but also as an agent of transformation that fosters intercultural awareness. Therefore, Middle Eastern literature can be viewed as a dialogic space that not only connects diverse cultural perspectives but also enriches our understanding of the complexity of human identity in an increasingly interconnected world.

Representation of identity, culture, and intercultural conflict in literary works

The representation of identity and culture in contemporary Middle Eastern literature underscores that identity is not a fixed essence but a fluid construct shaped by intersecting social, historical, and cultural forces. From the standpoint of cultural studies, identity is better understood as an ongoing process rather than a stable condition, continually reconfigured through individuals' interactions with their social worlds. This perspective is closely associated with the work of Hall (2020), who conceptualizes identity as a process of becoming, one that is never complete but always in formation, subject to negotiation, reinterpretation, and transformation. In this sense, identity emerges not from a singular origin but from multiple points of reference, including memory, history, language, and power. Consequently, literary texts become crucial sites for examining how identities are constructed, contested, and reimagined, particularly in regions marked by political upheaval, migration, and cultural hybridity. Through narrative strategies, symbolism, and characterization, literature reveals the layered and often contradictory nature of identity formation, emphasizing its openness and instability.

Within the framework of interculturalism, literature functions as a dynamic medium through which these evolving identities are articulated and explored. It not only reflects specific cultural experiences but also illuminates the processes through which identities are reshaped in encounters with difference, whether through migration, diaspora, or global interconnectedness (Assa, 2024; Oshiesh, 2026). In such contexts, literary narratives often foreground the tension between continuity and change, as individuals negotiate belonging across multiple cultural spaces. The interaction between self and "other" becomes a central theme, highlighting how identity is forged through dialogue, conflict, and adaptation. Moreover, literature provides a unique imaginative space that allows readers to engage with unfamiliar cultural perspectives, fostering a deeper awareness of diversity and complexity. By representing the fluidity of identity and the dynamics of intercultural exchange, contemporary Middle Eastern literature not only documents lived realities but also critically interrogates the conditions under which identities are produced and understood in an increasingly globalized world.

In *An Unlasting Home* by Al-Naqīb (2022), cultural identity is represented through diasporic experience and collective memory, both of which shape the consciousness of its characters. The novel suggests that identity is no longer tied to a fixed geographical space, but instead emerges from the interplay between memory, family ties, and cross-cultural encounters. Narratively, identity conflict is expressed through the tension between the desire to preserve cultural roots and the need to adapt to new environments. For instance, the characters frequently experience cultural disorientation when confronted with values

that differ from those of their origins, leading to both a sense of alienation and an ongoing search for self-understanding. This phenomenon illustrates the hybrid and plural nature of diasporic identity, as emphasized in recent studies on migration literature that highlight the importance of transnational experiences in shaping intercultural identities (Anis et al., 2023; Chakraborty, 2020).

Similarly, *Maqām Kurd* by Ḥasan (2024) presents a representation of identity closely tied to issues of ethnicity and marginalization. The novel portrays the experiences of Kurdish communities living under political and social pressure, where their cultural identities are often negotiated under unequal conditions. Intercultural conflict in this work emerges through interactions between minority groups and dominant cultures, frequently resulting in tension and resistance. From a narrative standpoint, the protagonist is depicted as experiencing an internal struggle between maintaining their ethnic identity and conforming to dominant cultural norms. This reflects intercultural dynamics that involve not only cultural differences but also power relations that shape how identity is represented and understood (Mansri, 2024). Therefore, the novel suggests that intercultural conflict operates not only externally but also within the psychological realm of the individual.

Furthermore, *Mask of the Sky Color* by Khandaqji (2024) offers a powerful portrayal of intercultural conflict deeply embedded in political and colonial contexts. The novel illustrates how Palestinian cultural identity is formed within conditions of prolonged conflict, where the interaction between local culture and external forces generates complex tensions. The representation of “the other” in this work extends beyond mere cultural difference, encompassing identity constructions shaped by dominant narratives and power structures. In several narrative episodes, characters are shown striving to preserve their identities while facing pressure to conform to unjust social systems. This analysis aligns with postcolonial perspectives that emphasize how cultural representation often becomes a site of contestation between dominant and subordinate groups (Shalabi, A., & Abu Amrieh, 2024).

Taken together, these three works demonstrate that representations of identity, culture, and intercultural conflict in Middle Eastern literature are inseparable from their broader social and political contexts. Identity emerges as a fluid construct, culture as a dynamic space of interaction, and conflict as an inevitable outcome of encounters between differing values and interests. Through complex narrative strategies, literature not only portrays intercultural realities but also invites readers to critically engage with how identities are formed, maintained, and contested across different contexts. In this way, literature functions not merely as a representational medium, but also as a critical and reflective space for examining the dynamics of intercultural relations in contemporary society.

The role of literature in building intercultural awareness and empathy

Literature plays a strategic role in fostering intercultural awareness and empathy due to its unique capacity to present human experience in ways that are profound, reflective, and imaginative. Within the framework of interculturalism, literary texts enable readers to move beyond the limits of their own cultural backgrounds and engage with perspectives shaped by different histories, values, and social conditions. This engagement is not merely cognitive but also affective, as readers are invited to inhabit the emotional worlds of others through narrative. Such a process aligns with the ideas of David Carr (2021), who argues that literature cultivates what she terms *narrative imagination*, the ability to empathetically envision the lives of others and to understand their struggles, choices, and moral dilemmas. Through this imaginative participation, literature becomes a space where ethical reflection and cultural understanding intersect, allowing readers to question their assumptions and

develop a more nuanced awareness of difference. Consequently, literary works do not merely serve aesthetic purposes but also function as ethical instruments that contribute to the formation of more empathetic and culturally sensitive individuals.

In the context of globalization, this role becomes increasingly significant as interactions among people from diverse cultural backgrounds intensify. Literature provides a mediated space in which such encounters can be explored thoughtfully, without the immediate pressures of real-world conflict or misunderstanding (Carr, 2021). By presenting complex characters and culturally situated narratives, literary texts highlight the tensions, negotiations, and adaptations that accompany intercultural contact. This, in turn, encourages readers to recognize both the uniqueness and the interconnectedness of human experiences across cultural boundaries. Moreover, literature can challenge dominant stereotypes and reductive representations by offering alternative viewpoints that foreground marginalized voices. In doing so, it contributes not only to individual empathy but also to broader intercultural dialogue. As contemporary scholarship suggests, the cultivation of such empathetic understanding is essential in a globalized world, where the ability to navigate cultural diversity has become a key component of social cohesion and mutual respect (Zhang, Ying Shan Doris & Noels, 2024).

In *An Unlasting Home* by al-Naqīb (2022), intercultural empathy is cultivated through a narrative that foregrounds diasporic experience and family memory. The novel's fragmented structure allows readers to encounter the characters' lives from multiple perspectives, fostering an emotional closeness to themes of loss, displacement, and the search for identity. For example, the portrayal of characters living between two cultures illustrates how individuals must continually renegotiate the meaning of "home" under unstable conditions. This narrative does more than depict the social realities of diaspora; it also invites readers to engage with the emotional complexity that accompanies such experiences. Recent studies suggest that emotional engagement in reading literary texts can enhance empathy and broaden understanding of cross-cultural experiences (Denham, 2024; Herb, A., & Betts, 2022). In this regard, the novel functions as an effective medium for developing intercultural awareness through deeply immersive storytelling.

Similarly, *Maqām Kurd* by Ḥasan (2024) reinforces literature's role in fostering empathy through its representation of marginalization and the diasporic experiences of the Kurdish people. The narrative invites readers to understand the lived realities of a minority group often positioned at the margins of social and political structures. Through the use of internal perspective, readers gain access to the protagonist's inner struggles as they navigate the tension between preserving cultural identity and adapting to a new environment. This experience creates an empathetic space in which the complexity of identity formed under conditions of uncertainty can be more fully understood. Research in literary and intercultural studies indicates that representing minority experiences in literature can enhance social awareness and reduce stereotypes toward "the other" (Arias et al., 2023). Thus, the novel serves not only as a cultural representation but also as a tool for fostering solidarity and cross-cultural understanding.

Furthermore, *Mask of the Sky Color* by Khandaqji (2024) introduces a dimension of empathy closely tied to conflict and social injustice. The novel portrays the lives of individuals within the context of the Palestinian struggle, where identity and freedom are often constrained by structures of power. Through an intense and symbolic narrative, readers are encouraged to engage with experiences of suffering, loss, and resistance. For instance, the depiction of characters' alienation within highly pressured social spaces generates a strong emotional resonance, allowing readers to perceive the impact of conflict on a more personal level. In this context, literature operates not merely as a vehicle for conveying information but as a medium for cultivating deep emotional engagement (Seitova, D., & Kovacs, 2024). Recent research further indicates that literary works

addressing conflict and injustice can enhance empathy and foster critical awareness of global social conditions.

Overall, these three works demonstrate that literature plays a significant role in fostering intercultural awareness and empathy by representing complex and diverse human experiences. By presenting narratives that enable readers to understand the perspectives of “others,” literature contributes to the development of more open and tolerant attitudes toward cultural difference. In this sense, literature functions not only as a reflection of social reality but also as a transformative force that encourages the emergence of more inclusive and empathetic societies. Therefore, integrating literature into intercultural studies holds considerable potential for strengthening intercultural dialogue and enhancing cross-cultural understanding in an increasingly interconnected world.

CONCLUSION

The discussion demonstrates that contemporary Middle Eastern literature plays a significant role as a medium of intercultural dialogue, capable of bridging differences in perspective within a global society. Through complex and multilayered narratives, literary works create dialogic spaces where diverse cultural experiences intersect, enabling exchanges of meaning and cross-cultural understanding. In this sense, literature does not merely represent social reality; it also serves as a reflective arena in which intercultural interactions can be explored more deeply, both at the level of individual experience and within broader societal dynamics. The representation of identity, culture, and intercultural conflict in these works reveals that identity is inherently dynamic and continuously shaped through processes of negotiation. Texts such as *An Unlasting Home* by Al-Naqīb, *Maqām Kurd* by Maha Ḥasan, and *Mask of the Sky Color* by Basim Khandaqji illustrate how experiences of diaspora, marginalization, and socio-political conflict give rise to hybrid and plural identities. Through these representations, literature exposes the tensions between local and global values while also highlighting how power relations shape the construction of cultural identity in societies undergoing continuous transformation.

Moreover, literature plays a crucial role in cultivating intercultural awareness and empathy by fostering readers’ emotional engagement with characters and narrative developments. By presenting the perspective of “the other,” literary texts encourage readers to adopt more open, reflective, and tolerant attitudes toward cultural diversity. In line with the research objectives outlined in the abstract, these findings affirm that Middle Eastern literature not only reflects social realities but also functions as an effective medium for mediating intercultural communication and strengthening intercultural discourse. Therefore, literature makes an important contribution to the development of multicultural education and to the promotion of cross-cultural understanding in an increasingly globalized world.

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