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Postcolonial Trauma and Embodiment in Iraqi War Theatre: A Study of Qassim Matroud's *Spears of Calamity*

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المستخلص

تتناول الدراسة تمثيل صدمة ما بعد الحرب في مسرحية قاسم مطرود رماح المحنة، من خلال مفاهيم التأخر في إدراك الصدمة، والذاكرة المتجسدة، وصدمة ما بعد الاستعمار. وتعتمد الدراسة على نظرية الصدمة، ولا سيما مفهوم كاثي كاروث للتأخر، وتمييز دومينيك لاكابرا بين إعادة تمثيل الصدمة وتجاوزها، فضلاً عن نظرية جينيفر سكورو النسوية لما بعد الاستعمار الخاصة بالتجسيد.

وتوضح الدراسة أن تجربة الصدمة في مسرح الحرب العراقي لا تظهر بوصفها حالة نفسية فحسب، بل باعتبارها شكلاً متجسداً من التذكر تشكّل بفعل العنف الاستعماري والتصدع التاريخي. كما تبحث الدراسة صدمة التأخر لدى الشخصيات النسوية بوصفها نتيجة للاستعمار، ومراحل الذاكرة الصدمية الناجمة عن أزمات الحرب وآثارها النفسية، وطرائق تجنب هذه الذاكرة ومسارات التعافي منها.



وأخيراً، تهدف الدراسة إلى بيان كيف يتحول جسد الشخصية النسوية إلى وسيلة للتعبير وسجل للعنف الناتج عن الحرب، من خلال تحليل نص أدبي معاصر يتمحور حول بطلنة تعاني صدمة الحرب.

ABSTRACT

The study examines the representation of post-war trauma in Qassim Matroude's play *Spears of Calamity* by the dramatically perceptions of belatedness, embodied memory, and post-colonial trauma. Depending on trauma theory, adopting Cathy Caruth's notion of belatedness and Dominick LaCapra's differentiation between acting out and working through, and Jennifer Scuro's postcolonial feminist theory of embodiment. The investigation clarifies how traumatic experience in Iraqi war theatre comes out that the play performs trauma not only as a psychological situation but as an embodied manner of recollection formed by postcolonial cruelty and historical fracture. Given its prevalence in the modern period of struggle, the current study examines the trauma of belatedness among female characters as a consequence of colonialism. Besides, the study scrutinizes the stages of traumatic memory caused by war crises and their psychological drawback that the female characters pass through, and the processes of avoiding traumatic memory and healing. Lastly, the study aims to explore how the female character's body becomes a medium of articulation and a record of brutality as a consequence of war. To fulfill these goals, the present study uses a contemporary literary text featuring a traumatized female protagonist who experiences war trauma.

1. Introduction

Trauma, as described by scholars like Cathy Caruth (1996), is an overpowering experience that breaks the conventional limits of comprehending usually opposing illustration and escaping easy understanding. Caruth's theory states that trauma is not only a pathological situation but also a historical testimonial, something that verbalize to a truth that was in other respects unbelievable (Caruth, 1996, p.11). Iraqi war literature, similar to the narratives arising from other struggle areas, displays this specific nature of trauma. It not merely delineates the incident but as well ruins with consequence – the shade of war that remain to disturb survivors long after the catastrophes have stopped moving downward and the guns have collapse silent. In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Caruth states clearly of the significance of a story as a method of describing trauma.





She declares: "Trauma seems to be much more than pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is the story of a wound that crises out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (p.4). She introduces: "This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language". (ibid.). Caruth stresses the structure of traumatic incidents and delayed experience. She highlights the essential role of literature which forms it simple for us to endure witness to incidents that cannot be completely identified and forces us to become conscious of what could continue unexpressed and unusual. Caruth states: "[T]he impacts of the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness, in its refusal to be simply located, in its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time. The belated event is a trauma which is 'absence' or missed encounter" (p.9).

The history of Iraqi theatre deliberates the nation's political, social, and cultural changes. The U.S. led invasion declared a crucial climax that converted dramatic notions, artistically, production situations, and the function of theatre in community. Whilst Iraqi drama before 2003 was primarily formed by state organization restriction, and nationalist discussion post – 2003 theatre turned progressively troubled with war trauma, limited cruelty, dislocation, identity, and collective recollection. Ahead of 2003, Iraqi theatre designed within a unified cultural system restricted the country. In spite of the political suppression, Iraqi playwrights triumphed in generating – developed dramatically works that utilized symbolism, myth, and figures of speech to condemn political power by implications.

According to Marvin Carlson (1993), theatre in tyrannical environment always depends on allegorical depiction to connect political evaluation while evading straight conflict (pp.11 – 18). One of the delineating features of Iraqi theatre during this era was to lean on historical and mythical narration. Dramatists commonly acquainted Mesopotamian history, Arabic myth, and traditional literature as allegorical methods for deliberating modern political actuality interests that might not be frankly vocalizing (pp.63 – 68). State assistance at the same time aided and confined dramatic articulation. The government dressed in theatre organizations like the national theatres, yet prescribed rigid theoretical authority creative formulation. As a consequence, numerous works highlighted patriotism, realistic cohesion and protest while eluding definite assessment of political leadership.

The 2003 U.S invasion basically modified Iraqi theatre by changing its institutional structure and its aesthetic preferences. The destruction of the earlier political organization with drawn several shapes of nation restriction allowing dramatists and directors to handle themes that had earlier been prohibited. At the same time, the invasion and its outcomes crafted unparalleled objections, involving universal brutality, factional struggle, urgent dislocation, economic insecurity and the collapse of cultural framework. Several theatres, studios study, documents were destroyed or embedded while countless creators migrated or were obliged to deferred their specialist activities. These situations remodeled Iraqi theatre into a ground preoccupied recording the actualities of war and its impacts.

Moreover, one of the most important features of post – 2003 Iraqi theatre is its concentration on trauma, memory, and death. In preference to praising national accomplishments or collective heroism. Modern dramatist progressively concentrated on the experiences of common citizens who existences had been damaged by war, threat and dislocation. Dramatic narrations started to investigate psychological pain, shattered identity, sadness, and the lasting impacts of cruelty on individuals and families. This change portrays a movement from nation – focused philosophy theatre to human – centered theatre that authorizes personal witnessing and sentimental experience.

As well, the artistic language of Iraqi theatre sustained important alternation after 2003. Several creations embraced simple theatre plan, allegorical objects shattered dialogue, silence, and non – linear theatrical frameworks to depict the dislocation of memory and the insecurity of post – war life. Vacant charis, deserted houses, collapsed walls, doors, shadow developed into repeated dramatic symbols that illustrated absence, dislocation, and psychological atomization. These cultured procedures harmonized lightly to trauma studies, in which disordered narrative mirrors the hardship of depicting traumatic experiences.

Furthermore, post – 2003 Iraqi theatre gradually featured women, privately disrupted individuals, victims of narrow – minded brutality, and other oppressed groups. Dramatists like Ali Abdual Nabi Al- Zaidi, Qassim Matroud and Jawad Al-Assadi portray characters conflicting to rebuild their identities in the aftermath of struggle. Their dramas show how theatre serves not only as artistic statement but as a form of cultural recollection and social witnessing, conserving experiences that might differently stay invisible. Besides, their plays concentrate on civilian influenced by cruelty and dislocation stressing fragmented identities and disrupted memories, and look for recovery.



The story of trauma is the history of the unforgettable of the unrecognized and irreversible failure and sadness. This study investigates to investigate the female characters by searching the outcomes of trauma on the female body and psyche. Preferably trauma studies are employed primarily as a framework for character analysis. This study aims to examine an Iraqi play *Spears of Calamity* by Qassim Matroudi, in which war trauma ensues, in the light of modern trauma theories. The essential concern of the study is to raise questions about the issues between trauma experience, memory and embodiment and its depiction as well as the role of theatre in the face of excessive events.

2. Statement of the Problem

Literary studies have paid more attention to traditional methods as psychoanalyses, Historicism, post colonialism and political issues. The combination between trauma theory and postcolonial feminist theory of embodiment is a recent method which has not received attention yet. Besides, the effects of traumatic war experiences have a great impact on the victims especially women, disallowing them from moving forward in their daily lives. Their troubled past keeps recurring of functioning as normal. Moreover, post-colonial trauma deserves special attention, considering the serious and everlasting consequences of war's crises traumatic memories and embodiment. Talking this into consideration, the current study is based on the following questions, in what way does postcolonial trauma affect the female character in the selected texts, show symptoms of traumatized individual, who repent many Iraqi civilians going trauma of war in their country. Therefore, this study will focus on the trauma experienced and embodied by the female character's in the selected texts, listed each- type of trauma and find out if the female characters were healed from their trauma as portrayed by Ali Abdul Nabi Al-Zaidi.

3. The Objectives of the Study

The present study intends to fill the gap through delving into illustrate level of analysis by adopting the following objectives:

- 1-To investigate the female character's trauma as a consequences of colonialism in the selected text using Cathy Caruth's concept of belatedness.
- 2-To explore the stages of traumatic memory caused by war crises and their psychological drawbacks that the female characters pass through, and the process of avoiding traumatic memory and healing by applying Dominick La Capra's concepts of acting out and working through.

3-To examine how the female character's body becomes both a medium of expression and a record of violence resulting from war drawing on Jennifer Scuro's concept of embodied trauma.

4. Questions of The Study

The objectives can be achieved through answering the following questions:

1-In what way does post – colonial trauma affects the female character?

2-How does the female character suffers from traumatic memory? Are there stages, effects, and processes of avoiding traumatic memory and healing for the female character's traumatic memory as a result of colonialism?

3-How does the female character's body become both a medium of expression and a record of violence as a result of war?

5. Theoretical Framework

It can be observed from the modern considerations and research that enormous groups of people during war periods are traumatized, whether being victims of these wars or victimizers. Thus, the current study intends to present postcolonial trauma where the civilians (female characters) are presented as victims of war. Thus, the present study will employ suitable theoretical frames that is applicable to investigative such phenomenon that is Cathy Caruth's Trauma Theory of Belatedness in her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996) as well as Dominick La Capra's concepts of acting-out and working through an in his book *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001) and Jennifer Scuro Postcolonial Feminist Theory of Embodiment in her book *The Pregnancy ≠ Childbearing Project: A Phenomenology of Miscarriage* (2017). Symptoms of postcolonial traumatic stress disorders, like depression, anger, a sense of loss, violence, recurring thoughts of the event, fragmentation, flashbacks, and mentally distancing from the trauma events, are going to be examined in the selected texts.

Cathy Caruth (1996), in her foundational work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, emphasizes that trauma is not fully experienced in the moment of its occurrence but returns belatedly (p. 4). This idea of belatedness is central in the theatrical analysis, where characters process trauma not through linear narrative but through fragmented, delayed expressions - dialogue rupture, bodily tension, and silence.

Dominick La Capra (2001), in *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, distinguishes between acting out, a compulsive repetition of trauma, and working through, a process of gradual integration and understanding of





the traumatic event. This distinction provides the analytical lens for tracking the psychological development of characters, particularly their transitions from paralysis to confrontation within the dramatic arc.

Jennifer Scuro (2017), in *The Pregnancy ≠ Childbearing Project: A Phenomenology of Miscarriage*, contributes the concept of embodiment as a form of knowing through the body. Scuro argues that trauma and memory are lived and expressed through the physical, not merely through language. This idea is especially pertinent to the theatrical space, where characters, movements, gestures, and silence reflect their psychological states.

This study explores that the civilian especially the female characters are traumatized by the US invasion 2003, At the same time, it argues that genocide and the brutal orders of the leaders are causes of trauma. This study keeps focusing on trauma, which often in turn finishes with the actual end of the lives of the civilians. The acts are investigated according to Cathy Caruth's Trauma Theory of belatedness. The genocides and psychological consequences are revealed and analyzed by tracking the female character who is suffering a psychological and physical problems. The woman conceals repressed anger as a result of the past sexual attack, while the man shows rejection and indirect defend of his role in the violence, reproducing complex dynamic of remorse and inhibition. Her trauma is severely manifested through silenced repression, compulsive repetition of violence, and symbolic and embodied colonization because of the genocide. The woman starts suffering the traumatic symptoms, not at the exact time of killing the victims but later on when he returns to kill her since, "the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belated, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it" (Caruth, 1996, p.4).

6.Literature Review

A study by **Mashi and Gali** (2015) investigates despair and its consequences in Matroud's drama. The time limit of the study is between 1996 – 2007. The study examines despair in psychology. The study problem revolves around what is despair and its manifestations in the dramatic texts of Matroud's? The study clarifies how the topic of despair is considered one of the central themes that occupies a significant place in the life of the Iraqi individual, who suffers from despair in his daily existence. The results reached by the researcher, the most important of which are the multiplicity of despair cases such as death manifested through suicide, environmental factors, economic despair, mental illness, and the despair experienced by the individual leads to self. Alienation

exemplified by the character. The study concludes that despair has become one of the recurring terms in Iraqi theatrical texts, reflecting the psychological and social crises experienced by individual (Mashi & Gail, 2015).

A study by Rabiekhazaad examines Matroud's theatrical characters, read in the architecture of the composition of the characters. The study clarifies how Matroud's experience in writing the play is a creative achievement in the experiences of Iraqi theatre and new lightling, adding to the light spots that excite those interested and engaged in Arab theatre in general and Iraqi in particular. Matroud is fired in all his plays, including the selected plays chosen for this study were the dominant element in the structure of the text. (Mahoud, 2020).

Alyaa (2016) in her study entitled *Iraq in contemporary Drama: A Study of selected plays of and about Iraq, 1990 – 2003*. The study covers important political and social transformation that influenced Iraq and the region of the Middle East. The study has four objectives, the first is to donate instances of modern Iraqi theatre practice during this period; the second, is to display what may be viewed as a hidden truth about modern Iraqi life during this crucial time that will offer in addition to the depiction of the nation and its people expressed through the media, the third, is to bring together the Iraqi and the western cultural responses to modern situations in the nation, and lastly, is to discover the practicable relationship and methods of connections between modern Iraqi and the western dramatic and theatrical productions. (Al-Shammari, 2016).

Chelab Mithal (2017) in his thematic study, which supplies various antiwar dramatic responses to US. Iraq war, the study investigates how modern war drama especially is depicted as a response to the deep agony brought by war that has unfortunately, become an ultimate language of communication in the modern period. This study displays the US – Iraq war – themed plays enabled the world to witness the truth, trauma, and aggression of this war, whose shock still affects the life of the military and the civilians as well. This study concludes that US – Iraq war unconfined inner dark tendency of brutality that may kill high moral values. (Chelab, 2017).

Al-Azraki (2011) displays how Iraqi dramatists would find themselves drawn to reflect the trauma of these decades in their plays, a succession of revolutions and coups of etat, each bloodier than the last, ended in the pitiless dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, showing in cruel subjugation, torment, a destructive war with Iran, the invasion of Kuwait, Saddam's defect in the invasion of 2003, and the damage and destruction that has followed. The aim of this study is to examine and evaluate the procedures



in which the inherent political cruelty of modern periods in Iraq has been depicted in drama, both by Iraqi dramatists writing in Arabic, and by English – language dramatists, chiefly in the UK and the US, where the subjects surrounding the reason and management of the 2003 invasion have created severe political dispute. The study reveals that English language and Arabic Iraqi drama have until now achieved merely to restricted increase in portraying a correct and through depiction of the political violence in Iraq. (Al-Azraki, 2011).

Hadeel Abdelhameed (2016) in her study concentrates on sentimental lives of, and relationship between female characters in two plays about Iraqi wars. These plays display life in Iraq in times of war. The study clarifies that it is important that Iraqi women are portrayed in drama and theatre, during those times of war when extreme sentimental conflict and trauma dominate, in the role of storytellers. The study concludes that the Iraqi women need not harmonize to stereotypical roles. They be a cause of aspiration, cultural preservation, and wisdom, but they can oppose these anticipations at the same time when they speak about hopeful and anxiety of war and its sentimental conflict. (Abdelhameed, 2016).

The previous studies focused on the play's dramatic strategies, artistic methods, cultural, political issues; psychological agonies and historical connotations philosophical point of views. Hence few studies interpret the selected text from psychoanalytical perspective.

The combination of trauma theory and postcolonial feminist theory of embodiment is a recent process that has not received attention yet. Moreover, the effects of traumatic war experiences have a great impact on the victims, particularly women, disallowing them from moving forward in their daily lives. Their troubles past keeps recurring in their functioning as normal. As well, post – colonial trauma deserves special attention, considering the serious and everlasting impacts of war upheavals, traumatic memory, and embodiment. Therefore, this study will clarify the traumatic experiences of the female character in Iraqi after 2003 invasion on Iraq, employing trauma theory and embodiment theory.

7. Methodology

The present study is qualitative in nature that intends to explain and get an understanding of the phenomena of which victims' traumas (female characters) at war are, as well as the way by which they can be recovered from memories, and how trauma is embodied physically, not only psychologically. Such a study relies on textual analysis, in addition to our illustration of the texts, which is carried out primarily by advancing and elaborating our clarification in light of trauma theory. It moves towards

testing and explaining how the characters, plot structures, setting, and other elements depict and emphasize traumatic memories of female characters resulting from post-colonial crises in the selected text, using a suitable framework to clarify the work.

Equally, the study applies Matroud's *Spears of Calamity* as recent Iraqi text that argues with wartime subjects like genocide and trauma as a result of Colonialism in light of Cathy Caruth's trauma; theory, concept of belatedness (1996), LaCapra's concepts of acting out and working through, and Jennifer Scuro's concept of embodiment.

This study also intends to emphasize the new issue of trauma of civilians (female character) as well as memory, and to examine the causes behind such traumatic memory, such as the awful perspective of war colonialism. Furthermore, the study goes around belatedness, the traumatic memory and embodied trauma of wartime and the responding to postcolonial trauma (war crises), melancholia as a form of acting out and mourning as a form of working through to reveal the way trauma works by identifying the symptoms and negative drawbacks of the mode the females are recovered from traumatic memory and how they embody trauma physically through the body.

8. Analysis and Discussion

Qassim Matroud (1961-2012) was a prominent Iraqi playwright and director who left a significant mark on Iraqi and Arab theatre, particularly during his exile in the Netherlands. He earned a degree in Theatre Arts from the University of Baghdad in 1998. In the Netherlands, he studied at the Hilversum Academy, specializing in television production and direction. He left Iraq in 1998 for the Netherlands, where he obtained Dutch citizenship and founded a website called Masrahion (Theatre People) to support theatrical arts.

Matroud wrote plays rich in symbolism and social criticism, including: *Rituals of Sauvagey and The Soul Has Other Windows*, address themes of oppression and freedom using folk imagery and satire, *Buildozers Do Not know Sorrow*, a critique of oppressive regimes, later translated into Dutch, *Citizen* which staged in Kuwait, exploring existential questions about identity and fate, *Elegt of Dawn*, won the award for *Best Scenography* at a theater festival in Oman, and other works include *Liberation Square* (a monodrama), *forest Delusions* and *Autumn of Loneliness*.

Concerning contributions to criticism and festivals, he participated in Arab and international festivals, such as the University Theatre festival in Baghdad, the Second Monodrama festival, the Omani Theatre festival,



where he was honored by the Omani Ministry of Culture, and founded the Theatre Critics Association and the Iraqi Cultural Parliament in the Netherlands.

Besides, Matroude authored over a dozen plays, which were published and performed in various theatres inside and outside Iraq. He also directed several of his own plays between 1979 and 1989. Matroude dedicated his dramatic works to addressing themes of human suffering among the Iraqi people, particularly as a result of the US war on Iraq and the resulting fragility and insecurity across various domains of life (Hameed, trans., 2019, p. 16).

In an interview, Matroude, a well-known Iraqi dramatist and reviewer, stated:

I am against theatre that addresses the audience directly. If we, who claim to be cultured and educated, preach violence, we will open the way to the owners of political shops and religious movements to make use of this justification. (Matroude, 2010, Personal Interview)

He added: "the violence in the Iraqi drama tries to generate an impact on the emotional side of the audience which in turn creates a bridge for the audience's later thinking" (Matroude, 2010, Personal Interview). In a century, direct discussion can be examined through three points of view. It might point to the straight discourse of revised natural matters captivated from reality, as in literary and chronological drama, and put into a dramatic pattern. It may as well propose tackling the audience through direct utterance. Furthermore, direct speech can be explained in connection to the function of art, particularly when interacting with political drama.

Thus, Iraqi playwrights try to explore the catastrophe of the circumstances to show the discrimination of the invasion and of the human agony in Iraq. The brutality displayed in Iraqi plays, although eventually too violent and overstated, often intends to inspire the audience either psychologically or logically, or, as Qassim Matroude states it: "the violence in the Iraqi drama tries to generate an impact on the emotional side of the audience, which in turn creates a bridge for the audience's later thinking" (Matroude, 2010, Personal Interview).

In *Spears of Calamity*, Matroude adopts a more overt approach, emphasizing the civilian toll of the U.S. military intervention. The playwright deliberately foregrounds the devastation wrought by the bombing, particularly through the lens of a domestic tragedy:

A woman and her children become victims of an airstrike that obliterates their home. The attack occurs in the aftermath of a modest birthday

celebration for a young child, an occasion marked by innocence and familial intimacy, with all attendees having completed their schoolwork and retired for the night. (Hameed, trans., 2019, p.18)

The choice of this event deliberately demonstrates the harshness and barbarism of the attack. The aftermath is a horrifying scene. The dead bodies of children lie scattered on the rubble along with their torn books. Thus, it symbolizes the killing of life and potential. This grim depiction serves as a powerful repudiation of the uselessness and inhumanity of the war, with only the ghosts of the soldiers left to witness it.

Matroud is more direct in that he accentuates the costs of the US war as experienced by civilians in their homes. The playwright focuses on how the US bombing has fully ruined a house where there is a woman and her little children. All have been targeted after they have finished a little birthday party for a small child, and have all gone to bed after completing their school assignments. Choosing this occasion is meant to highlight the horror of the experience and its inhumanity as well. The celebration site has changed into debris, with the little children's corpses lying among the school books. This is a frank denunciation of the pointlessness of the war's consequences, which only the soldiers' ghosts seem to have enjoyed. (Hameed, trans., 2019, p.18).

The play is one of the greatest affected portrayals of the psychological consequences of war in modern Iraqi theatre. Via the shattered awareness of its main female character, Matroud probes how trauma disturbs recollection, language, and identity. The woman's (unnamed) experience with the disfigured bodies of her sons changes into a metaphor for both individual and public fragmentation. Her speech, postures, and communication with the dramatic space shape a covered representation of post-war trauma, one that agrees with Cathy Caruth's (1996) notion of belatedness, the concept that trauma is encountered too delayed for prompt understanding, and Dominick La Capra's (2001) distinction between acting out and working through as aspects of trauma reaction.

Taken together, the play transcribes the invisible procedures of trauma into a three-dimensional poetics of space. The disconnected stage, changing light, and shattered conversation produce a composition of confusion that reflects the fragmented mortality of a traumatized mind. The Woman's vibration between hopelessness and recollection illustrated the movement from acting out to working through, from repetition to expression. By combining setting, lighting, and language into one striking sequence, Matroud portrays not only the experience of war but also the human conflict of telling it after it has fragmented all forms of narration. The play's visible structure, therefore, becomes a moral action of



recollection; an endeavor to recapture the image of the self from the white curtain of amnesia.

In the play Matroud, the character of the Ghost emerges as a symbolic and central figure who combines the impact of war and destruction on the females' consciousness. Through his silent documentation of tragedy using photography and written memory, the Ghost does not merely witness devastation but actively reproduces the concept of acting out, as proposed by Dominick La Capra, where traumatic events are relived without resolution or healing.

Matroud presents a dramatic representation of the post – colonial Arab and Iraqi individual, still haunted by the psychological and social effects of colonialism. The female character embodies a post-colonial traumatized subject who compulsively re-enacts her crises through repetitive circular motion and a loss of meaning. The tension between the desire to forget and the compulsive drive to remember the traumatic event. Cathy Caruth describes this as belatedness – trauma that does not reveal at the moment of occurrence but returns later in symptomatic repetition (Caruth, 1996, p.11). The female character suffers from the impact of colonial wound: "silence screams within me, the spear in my side speaks more than I do (Hameed, trans., 2019, p.65). The spear here symbolizes the colonial wound, unhealed and integrated into the body and psyche.

This uprooting – the loss of tree, wall, and wind represents the destruction of symbolic structures of belonging, aligning with Edward Said's notion of cultural displacement (Said, 1993, p.277). Moreover, the forest in the play is merely a setting but a symbolic space of disorientation and meaninglessness. Characters do not progress but circle, repeat, and relive their trauma. This reflects La Capra's concept of acting out – compulsive repetition of trauma (LaCapra, 2001, p.21). Besides, the stage space becomes an extension of the character's traumatic memory; the spears are not mere props but internalized wounds as The Woman declares, "In every corner a spear, and every shadow chases me like a dagger" (Hameed, trans., 2019, p.68).

Despite the symbolic and psychological conflict moments, the play proposes the possibility of working through the Woman cries out, "Where are you, my husband? Come and share me weeping this misery, this loss, this frailty" (Hameed, trans., 2019, p.67). This cry may be interpreted as the beginning of self-awareness and the desire for healing. Initial steps in Lacapra's concepts of working through the trauma rather than merely reenacting it.

Likewise, the language of the play is fragmented, repetitive, and disjointed, reflecting the effects of colonialism on expression. This coincides with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's concept of colonial damage to language, which becomes an instrument of fear rather than clarity (Thiong'o, 1986, p.17). "At time of silence---silence, she wanders among the debris as if she were mad. Suddenly, she remembers---wherever she moves, ---"(Hameed, trans, 2019, p. 60). This repetition dramatizes the breakdown of communication and the echo of trauma in a confused voice. Thus, in *Spears of Calamity*, Qassim Matroude transforms the theatrical space into a site of therapy for the post-colonial subject. His wounded, fragmented characters surrounded by ashes of memory, searching for transcendence. By using symbolic language, silence, repetition, and spatial metaphor, Matroude proposes an effective dramatization, and traumatic realities that gain deep critical examination.

At the beginning of the play, Matroude writes an introduction which serves as the "Prelude" to the play, the world is introduced as shattered and saturated with violence, bodies fragmented, skulls displayed on spears, and severed heads televised in fruit boxes (Hameed, trans., 2019, p. 57). This disturbing visual introduction can be analyzed through the trauma theories of Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, and Jennifer Scuro.

For Caruth, trauma is not merely in the original event, but in the failure to process it when it happens, causing it to return painfully later. The text reads. These shocking images are not just scenes of violence, but representations of trauma that resurface through media. The repetition of dismembered bodies and public display aligns with Caruth's idea of belated trauma, an event so overwhelming that it cannot be fully known until it returns via symptoms or representations (Caruth, 1996, p.4).

Moreover, LaCapra distinguishes between acting out and working through. The prelude presents trauma obsessively, without signs of resolution or understanding: "This is the world today..." (Hameed, trans., 2019, p. 57). The presentation of ongoing pain without contextual resolution reflects what LaCapra calls a pathological repetition, where traumatic content is reenacted rather than transformed. This opening warns that the play will continuously confront the audience with horror without offering closure (LaCapra, 2001).

Also, Scuro emphasizes how bodies, especially marginalized ones, become sites of structural violence. In this prelude, the fragmented bodies are not just symbols but literal sites of colonial brutality: "...skulls hung on spears... heads thrown into fruit boxes..." (Hameed, trans., 2019, p. 57). These bodies, displayed as public spectacle, reflect Scuro's notion that under colonial and systemic domination, the body becomes a conduit



of pain and political messaging. The grotesque commodification of death mirrors the colonial urge to possess and display power through bodily destruction (Scuro, 2017).

The Woman appears in the opening scene, lost in darkness, unable to see or hear, asking, "What happened?" – "I can't see or hear anything." (Hameed, trans., 2019, p. 58). This represents what Caruth calls latency, the delayed understanding of trauma. The trauma is not processed at the moment it occurs, but returns later in the form of sudden memories or emotional outbursts. Her belated realization "It seems the blast has this time chosen my house" (Hameed, trans., 2019, p.58). echoes Caruth's notion of trauma's temporal disjunction.

Likewise, LaCapra emphasizes that trauma is often compulsively repeated until it is worked through. The Woman's hysterical cry "My house!! My sleeping children?" (Hameed, trans., 2019, p. 58) is a repetition of the trauma, showing her inability to move beyond the past. However, the entrance of the soldier's ghost and her movement across the stage signal the beginning of transformation, a theatrical re-enactment that may allow for eventual understanding or change.

Furthermore, Matroud depicts how the Woman experiences trauma both physically and mentally. The Woman's screams, movements and emotional collapse show how the body is marked by trauma, especially in a colonial structure. According to Scuro, the female body embodies collective memory and structural violence in the context of postcolonialism.

The idea of latency in trauma theory occurs in the play when the Woman gradually becomes aware of the tragedy. After the explosion, she recalls ordinary occurrences, like her son's speech and memory of his engagement, but they turn excruciating after the explosion. According to her statements: "He opens his mouth now without words: the explosion silenced him and destroyed your dreams and mine" (Hameed, trans., 2019, p. 62). The impact of traumatic events is not fully understood at the moment of the event. Yet memories are reshaped later by these effects.

In addition, the Woman remains preoccupied with her son and attempts to impose an interpretive order on that chaos surrounding her. She imagines the faces of the girls who once wished to marry him. In other words, she tries to reconstruct time and mend what is irreparable: "She wanders around the debris, and imagines girls' faces with whom she argues in madness or truth" (Hameed, trans., 2019, p. 62). The repeated attempts to resurrect the past evoke LaCapra's notion of returning to the traumatic event in order to be transformed or freed from it, even if this is impossible.

Moreover, the Woman, in this scene, is rendered a fragmented body bearing the weight of collective trauma. In the final scene, "The Woman arrived at the place the Ghost photographed; she sat on her knees as if she were on a prayer scene." (Hameed, trans., 2019, p. 62). The act of kneeling among the debris of the school, the notebooks, the child's severed hands links the Woman to the earth and destruction. This act pulls the female body, during times of occupation, away from resistance and agency, forcing it into a situation of trauma and suffering, and documentation (through the Ghost's eye).

It is evident that Matroude represents the Woman as a mother suffering from postcolonial hysteria and heavy frustration. Another scene of the play allows the Woman to embody trauma, which manifests as deep maternal guilt and helplessness. According to Cathy Caruth's theory of trauma and belatedness, the woman's sudden gush of guilt: "I didn't let him sleep until he should finish his homework" (Hameed, trans., 2019, p. 63) is a flashback of responsibility which erupts only after the traumatic loss. For Caruth, trauma returns belatedly, outside of full consciousness. She pleads God not to judge her son. She calls her son, "only a bird of Paradise" and a schoolchild. This repetitive pleading "Forgive him, Oh God!" (Hameed, trans., 2019, p. 63). Here, the concept of acting out, as developed by Dominick LaCapra, is evident as he states that the subject experiences their pain repeatedly in a loop, without ever resolving it. The speech and body posture of the woman's grief are stuck, showing her inability to move away from the moment.

In addition, Jennifer Scuro's theory of embodiment under systems of violence like colonial and patriarchal systems can be seen in how the Woman's gestures are described as "as if in a military stature". Therefore, this indicates a performance of strength while the individual is collapsing within. Thus, this showcases a womanhood made possible by colonial structuring and the doing of mourning. The intersection of her personal pain with these larger systems reinforces Scuro's view that trauma is experienced through the body as a political and historical site. The repeated whispering of the word "died" in a low, nearly inaudible voice underscores a silencing of grief, a theme in both Scuro's and Caruth's works, where trauma exceeds the limits of language.

In final scene of the play, the Woman's suffers from the loss of her daughter hysterically (She carries something heavy and tries to make a hole, but she fails. She places her head on the kitchen wall and tries to listen. Throughout this scene, the Ghost moves from one place to another with his camera that depicts many things arbitrarily:

- My little daughter, do you hear me?



I'm your mom; are you injured like me?

Oh, my God! If she were injured, nurse her wounds; and if you want her to be by Your side like her two brothers, let me see her only one time. I think that is justice!

Isn't it? To see her before she reaches you?

She's my daughter.

(She cries hysterically) I'm a mother.

Oh, my God; I am a mother!

(She tries to get well-composed as if to defy)

- It's a non-such treachery,

Not for me only, but for all humanity. I haven't heard or seen in the Holy Books or the civic Laws that a mother's sentence would be like mine.

(She weeps as though she comes into full realization that it's the very truth. She collapses.)

Where are you, my husband? Come and share me weeping, this misery, this loss, this frailty (A moment) (Hameed, trans., 2019, p.67).

Based on Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, the Woman's overwhelming pain is marked by belatedness. Her delayed comprehension becomes visible as she first speaks to her daughter in denial and only later collapses under the weight of realization.

Moreover, Dominick LaCapra's idea of repetition and transformation is also evident. The Woman repetitively calls out for her daughter and others ("Where are you?"), signaling compulsive reenactment. However, her moment of "getting composed" and then collapsing can be seen as the point where trauma shifts from pure acting-out to a moment of possible working-through (LaCapra, 2001, p. 142).

Scuro's theory of embodiment contributes to understanding this mother's sufferings, as they manifest physically the collapsing, the banging, the weeping, as a literal rendering of loss and injustice. Her statement that "a mother's sentence would be like mine" embodies the systemic, institutional erasure of maternal roles in wartime narratives (Scuro, 2017, p. 88).

The play reveals the retention of historical trauma and the continuity of violence over time through a symbolic, dramatic structure. In the final scene, the "Ghost of the Soldier" is symbolic of the memory of violence through the ages as opposed to only those of today. When the ghost reveals the Mongol soldier's cap and then the modern military uniform, we see a transformation, which illustrates a circular historical vision of war and devastation. The same tragedy plays out repeatedly in different shapes, but the wound remains the same.

The increasing sounds of bullets and footsteps become louder in the final scene of the play. The Woman shouts to her husband: "Listen my husband! Keep away from the house: danger is around!" (Hameed, trans., 2019, p. 68). A maternal sound indicating fear and alarm. Concurrently, the Ghost appears on the screen, removing his head covering and revealing a Mongol soldier's cap on his head. He stands before a mirror and sheds his black dress, revealing an advanced armed military uniform. In this image, Matroud indicates that despite the antiquity of arms and ammunition, the violence emanating from them is still a contemporary problem. As Cathy Caruth states of belatedness, the term transhistorical trauma indicates that something beyond the original trauma is not able to accommodate it at the time of its original occurrence. The moment marked by the Woman's peak moment of visual recognition ushers in a psychological shift from acting out to working through, as defined by LaCapra.

The evidence shows that in the textuality of the theatre, the female character appears, at a certain moment, as the witness of an unbearable tragedy, trapped between the trauma and the present danger. In this context, existential torment, along with physical and emotional dispossession, caused by colonialism and violence are depicted. According to Caruth, trauma is not only something that befalls us but also refers to what we are simply not able to comprehend at that moment, which returns to us later in repetitive and unexpected ways, "I know, my husband, that your misfortune is huge; but I breathed death with them: this is more than injustice!" (Hameed, trans., 2019, p. 68). The woman, here, does not speak of a direct tragedy, but of the experience of 'death' that she suffered back then after which she did not process this consciously but is now. This forced return of what was not understood is what Caruth describes as "the belated return of an unassimilated event". For LaCapra, trauma victims do not just repeat the event, but they also relive it to transform it. In the interaction, the Woman cries: "Listen my husband! Keep away from the house: danger is around!" (Hameed, trans., 2019, p. 68). Her recurring warning indicates her return to the heart of trauma, not simply to undergo a repetition of the experience but also to direct the phenomenon, which expresses change.

Moreover, Scuro points out how pain and suffering are made flesh, particularly in colonial and systemic violence contexts. The Woman here cries: "I'm bleeding" (2019, p. 68). The phrase is not metaphorical, but trauma has become a bleeding body. In the play, we witness the Woman's embodied suffering. She does not just talk about the pain, but enacts it on



stage. In fact, Scuro calls the Woman 'the embodied subject of suffering' resulting from structural violence. In the final scene, the Woman's tragedy and the Woman's fate climax. She faces the Ghost of the Soldier, a figure embodying colonial power, and she is killed. The scene lends itself to analysis using Cathy Caruth's delayed trauma, LaCapra's repetition and transformation, and Jennifer Scuro's theory of suffering embodied through colonialism. The Woman's death is more than simply physical rather it is what Caruth defines as "belated trauma." The traumatic event does not only occur once, it comes back. Likewise, this event is return as embodied in the form of the ghost who comes to haunt her: "(the Woman trembles in fear after she sees the Soldier's Ghost that threatens her with his arm.)" (Hameed, trans., 2019, p. 69). The returning ghost is not just an agent of violence but a manifestation of an unresolved past. Her fear arises from an encounter with something that she never really encountered. This provides an illustration for Caruth's understanding of trauma as the return of an unassimilated experience (Caruth, 1996). This moment repeats the trauma again without any resolution or catharsis: "(Before she completes her last sentence, he shoots her and she falls down on the ground... then he advances toward the audience with the gun end at them)" (Hameed, trans., 2019, p. 69).

Moreover, the Woman cannot transform the trauma; rather, the scene re-enacts it and projects it onto the spectator. The dramatization illustrates what LaCapra warns against: a failure to work through trauma. On the other hand, Scuro points out that within a colonized context, the body itself is a site of structural violence. The colonial power brings down the Woman's body: "he shoots her and she falls... then he advances toward the audience..." (Hameed, trans., 2019, p. 69). Her death does not symbolize suffering; it literally embodies suffering. The theatrical space becomes a battlefield as the armed ghost soldier advances toward the audience. This supports Scuro's claim that the colonized body becomes a "medium of systemic pain" (Scuro, 2017, p. 52).

It is evident that the main source of the Woman's trauma is her wartime experiences. Her recollections of violence, grief, and suffering plague her; these are signs of post – traumatic stress disorder. The Woman's trauma is complex; it includes the atrocities she saw and experienced during the war. Every part of the Woman's experience is affected by the trauma of war; as a result, she struggles with bothersome thoughts, nightmares, and emotional numbness. It also hinders her capacity to build deep relationships with people and, in the wake of the dispute, rediscover serenity or a sense of purpose. In the end, the Woman's trauma becomes a major motif in the narrative, shaping her personality and driving the

drama forward as she grapples with its enduring effects. The Woman's trauma also has an impact on her sense of self and purpose. She struggles to make sense of morality and the purpose of her own life, trying to make sense of the differences between the Woman she was before the war and the woman she has become since. Her experience leaves her feeling lost, alone in a world where conflict has permanently altered everything. She is looking for a sense of purpose. Thus, trauma evolved to refer to a broad range of situations and events that defied conventional forms of communication, despite being medicalized in the perception of the Iraqi civilians. One could not learn about an event or situation through reading or listening if they had not experienced it first-hand. It went beyond interpreting meaning.

Trauma theorist and comparative literature expert Caruth maintained that traumatic memories did not change the course of events; rather, they provide infrequent windows into reality that the official narrative hid. "If PTSD must be understood as a pathological symptom, then it is not so much a symptom of history." She wrote back in 1995, "we may say what those who have experienced trauma have an impossible past" (Genis, 2021, p. 2).

Conclusion

By merging trauma theory with postcolonial criticism, it becomes clear that the woman in Matroud's play embodies a complex journey from psychological events (acting out) to the possibility of transformation through the conscious embodiment of experience (working through). For Caruth, the delayed return of pain is a key to understanding the Woman's narrative, while LaCapra stresses that overcoming trauma requires moving from reliving the past to reframing it (Caruth, 1996; LaCapra, 2001).

At the level of performance, Matroud employs theatrical space as both a therapeutic and symbolic medium, in which stage objects shift from signs of constraint to signals of emancipation – echoing Scuro's concept of embodiment as a resistant act that enables the survivors to rewrite her narrative (Scuro, 2014, p. 62). Thus, the Woman is not merely a victim of postcolonial violence but a dramatic agent undergoing a gradual transformation, making the stage a space for reclaiming memory and identity in the face of the deep scars of war.

Moreover, the study has investigated the depiction of war trauma in Qassim Matroud's *Spears of Calamity* as an essential instance of post – 2003 Iraqi theatre. Via the theoretical structures of Cathy Caruth's notion of belatedness, Dominick La Capra's ideas of acting out and working



through, and Jennifer Scuro's theory of embodiment of trauma, the study has manifested how the play remodels the experience of war from a historical incident into a current psychological, bodily, and cultural situation. Alternatively, introducing trauma as a finished incident, Matroud represents it as a persistent power that uninterrupted remodels personal and collaborative individuality in the aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq.

The evaluation shows that the traumatic experience of the female character portrayed in the play unfolds through delayed and shattered forms of recollection, corroborating Caruth's argument that trauma is not fully experienced at the moment of its occurrence but returns belatedly through repetition, habituated depictions, and intrusive memories. The characters stay captured within the sequential displacement of trauma, incapable of creating an obvious division between brutality and present reality. Therefore, the past regularly occupies the present, converting recollection into a progressive place of pain and imbalance.

In addition, LaCapra's idea of acting is obvious in the characters' obsessive return to settings of cruelty, failure, terror, and death. Their recurring languages, collapsed narrative, and sentimental disability echo an incapability to separate themselves from their traumatic memories. Nevertheless, the play also offers moments that propose the chance of working through trauma. Via actions of witnessing retention, and struggle with effective experiences, the characters try to settle their connection with the past. Though full healing is not fulfilled, these moments signify an attempt to change, surpassing limitless recurrence concerning a larger perception of psychological distress and its outcomes. From Scuro's perspective on embodiment theory, the study has shown that trauma is inscribed not only in memory but also in the body. Sounds of gunfire, physical pain, postures of panic, and images of injured bodies altered psychological agony into visible, dramatic marks. The body turns into a living store of brutality by which chronic trauma is transferred and recalled. In this regard, Matroud's theoretical method stresses the connection between bodily experience and psychological agony, and emphasizes the profound consequences of war for both individual and collective survival.

Finally, *Spears of Calamity* illustrates how Iraqi drama serves as an effective means of preserving collective memory and producing testimony to the destructive impacts of war and occupation. By mixing individual pain and collective experience, Matroud establishes a theoretical portrayal of trauma that surpasses personal narratives and mirrors the comprehensive truths of the post-invasion Iraqi community.



They work not merely to record the wounds left by oppression but also to question speechlessness and failing to remember, thereby contributing to a continuous process of collective memory. Thus, *Spears of Calamity* resides as a significant dramatic text for understanding the complicated embodiment of war trauma in modern Iraqi theatre and for investigating how theatrical action may participate in the psychological and embodied consequences of struggle.

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