Empowering Iraqi Woman's Voice and Revolt in Muhsin Al-Ramli's "I Killed Her Because I Loved Her"

تمكين صوت المرأة العراقية وثورتها في قصة " قتلتها لأنّي أحبّها " للكاتب العراقي محسن الرملي

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Abstract:

This paper investigates the representation of Iraqi woman in Muhsin Al-Ramli's "I Killed Her Because I Loved Her". Through its focus on one Iraqi family, a mother and her three daughters, Al-Ramli's story sheds light on the drastic impact of wars and US invasion of Iraq in 2003 on the Iraqi woman. Moreover, it conveys how the Iraqi woman has become a site of conflict between armed 'nationalist' groups and the invading US troops. Drawing on the works of Iraqi scholars, namely, Nadje Al-Ali, this paper examines the role of Iraqi woman before, under, and after the Baath's regime. Further, it explores the technique of narration in the story to argue that, by making the mother and her three daughters the focus of the story, Al-Ramli uses the male characters as a medium for empowering female voices. By employing Elizabeth Grosz's notion of the female body as a site of resistance, this paper considers the two daughters' tragic death, which is described as an act of crucifixion, as a sign of revolt and recalcitrance. As such, the story succinctly articulates how the borders of contact between the invaders and the armed groups are no longer confined to the ordinary frontlines between the two sides, but incorporates the female body as well. Relying on the premises of leading figures in trauma studies such as Freud and Cathy Caruth, this paper argues that the US invasion has unleashed traumatic events where Iraqi women, such as the female characters in the story, are its main targets.

Keywords: Al-Ramli, Empowerment, Female Body, Narration, Trauma, US Invasion.

الملخّص:

تستعرض هذه الدراسة تمثيل المرأة العراقية في قصة" قتلتها لأني أحبها" للكاتب محسن الرملي من خلال تركيزها على عائلة عراقية، أم و بناتها الثلاث، و تسليط الضوء على التأثير المزري للحروب والغزو الأميركي للعراق منذ ٢٠٠٣

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على المرأة العراقية. وتبين هذه الدراسة كيف أصبحت المرأة العراقية ساحة صراع بين القوات الأميركية المحتلة والجماعات المسلحة. اضافة لذلك، تستقصي هذه الدراسة، من خلال الاعتماد على باحثين عراقيين مثل نادية العلي، دور المرأة العراقية قبل، وأثناء، وبعد نظام البعث. كما أنها تستكشف أسلوب السرد في هذه القصة لتؤكد بأن محسن الرملي، ومن خلال جعله هذه العائلة المحور الرئيسي لأحداث قصته، قد استخدم الشخصيات الذكورية، والتي روت ما حدث للأم وبناتها الثلاث، وسيلة لتمكين صوتهن. ومن خلال استخدام مفهوم الجسد الأنثوي كموقع مقاومة للباحثة اليزابيث جروز، تشدد الدراسة على أنّ النهاية المأساوية لاثنتين من بنات العائلة، والتي وصفت بأنها عملية صلب، ما هي إلّا رمزًا لمقاومة المرأة العراقية في هذه القصة وتمردها. وبذلك تظهر هذه الدراسة وبإيجاز بالغ بأن حدود التماس بين القوات المحتلة والجماعات المسلحة ما عادت محددة بخطوط القتال المتعارف عليها بل شمل حتى جسد المرأة. واعتمادا على نتاجات باحثين بارزين في دراسات الصدمة، مثل فرويد وكاثي كاروث، توضح هذه الدراسة بأنّ الغزو الأميركي للعراق في عام ٢٠٠٣ قد أطلق العنان لسلسة من الأحداث الصادمة أصبحت فيه النساء العراقيات، كما هو الحال في هذه القصة، أهدافًا رئيسية لها.

الكلمات الافتتاحية: الرملي، تمكين، جسد الأنثى، السرد، الصدمة، الغزو الأميركي.

Introduction:

Muhsin Al-Ramli is an Iraqi-Spanish writer, who was born in 1967 at Sedira, a village in northern Iraq. He left Iraq after the second Gulf War and has been living in Madrid since 1995, where he works as a professor at St Louis University. Al-Ramli has written several novels focusing is Iraq before and after the 2003 invasion of Iraq. His interest in the Iraqi woman is evident in the works that examine the aftermath of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, especially his story, "I Killed her Because I Loved her", and also his novel, *The Daughter of Tigris* (2019). At an interview in 2021, Al-Ramli states that in this novel he expresses his "long-term interest in the turbulent, unstable situation in Iraq since it was invaded and occupied" and also the bravery and resilience of Iraqi women.

Male writers' interest in females' stories:

Muhsin Al-Ramli is not the first male to write about female characters; notable example is Jawad Al-Assadi whose play, *Women in War* (2003), revolves around three Arab female refugees, an Iraqi, a Palestinian, and an Algerian, who fled their countries because of war and political instability and gather at a detention centre in Germany. The play depicts war, Hadeel Abdelhameed observes, "as a death machine that has been consuming Arabic women's lives, as it has consumed the lives of women all over the globe" (2017, p. 1). It is worth

noting that when the play was performed in Iraqi in 2005, Al-Assadi changed the women's identities into Iraqi. Speaking about this and other plays whose main focus is the Iraqi woman, Al-Assadi states that "In all my works I call for the freedom of women, and the presence of women is strong, for they are the basis of the nation" (Rebecca Joubin, 2005). Notable examples of works by Iraqi male writers whose focus is female issues include Farouk Mohammed's *The Hymn of the Rocking Chair* (1987), Mithal Ghazi's *A Feminine Solo* (2013), Ali Abdel-Nabi Al-Zaidi's *Summer Rain* (2017). The list of male authors who wrote about female characters includes Arabic writers like Naguib Mahfouz, Tayeb Salih, Yahia Haqqi, and Yusuf Idris. Female writers, such as Hanan Al-Shaykh, regard this interest as part of the above male writers' care for women in their works. Gender should not confine the writer, Al-Shaykh notes, and this is why she refuses to be labelled as a feminist writer (*Al Majalla*, 2018).

There is a widely held premise that male writers are unable, or refrain from depicting convincing major female characters. Alan Williamson observes that feminist criticism does not approve male writers' attempts to write about women because it is hard for them to "imagine what women experience" in addition to the fear that their works "will perpetuate stereotypes" because, regardless of their good intentions, their "patriarchal side can have the last word" (2001, p. 2). Moreover, male literary writing, M.A.R. Habib claims, is often believed to be disseminating male ideology where women are condemned to "virtual silence and obedience" (2011, p. 213). Simone de Beauvoir, a prominent feminist scholar, asserts that women are marginalised in male writing where the female is portrayed as the other and the male the absolute (1969, p. xvi). Yet, Cheryl Lange regards such notion of male writing about women as "discouraging" and "reinforce[ing] gender roles" because "If men continue to be seen as patriarchal and sexist, then they may never see themselves as anything different, and may resist change, thinking it is futile" (p. 2). This finds resonance in the literary critic Sarah Seltzer who approves "writing across genders" stating that "the attempt at understanding, empathy, and inhabiting the soul of someone whose life experience is not ours, helps us to grow as writers, and people too" (*The Atlantic*, 2013). Indeed, the above-mentioned Iraqi and Arabic writers tended in their works to present convincing and strong female characters who are neither confined in their homes nor subordinate to male characters.

The plight of Iraqi woman:

Al-Ramli's story focuses on the role and presentation of Iraqi women during three incidents: The Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988), the Gulf War (1991) and the invasion of Iraq in 2003, spanning a period of about 25 years. Women in Iraq are impinged upon by multiple layers of violence that affect their role in society such as war, patriarchy, gender discrimination and tribal and religious codes. Indeed, for a country like Iraq that fell a victim for recurring fights, war has become an unfinished phenomenon. In this story, whose focus is the narrative of one family, a mother and her three daughters, Al-Ramli provides a lens through which we might observe the hardships and traumatic experiences faced by the Iraqi people, and Iraqi women in particular. By juxtaposing two timelines, past and present, the story succinctly articulates the marginalisation of Iraqi women in the present time both temporally and spatially since the mother and her three daughters are presented as living in one room and their narratives are being related and commented upon by others, namely, male characters. This is done thematically as the four women are, in fact, a miniature of how Iraqi women are encapsulated gradually in roles inflicted upon by society as a result of a recurrent war whose borders of contact are no longer confined to the ordinary frontlines between countries, as is the case in the Iraq-Iran war, but incorporates streets and buildings of Baghdad, as is the case during the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 and its aftermath.

Al-Ramli's story deals with several issues amongst which is the impact of war on gender-based violence. Writing about gender and violence in the Middle East, Moha Ennaji and Fatima Sadiqi posit that "it takes interesting nuances and wears multiple faces in this region where tradition, social norm, religion, war, and politics intermingle in a powerful and tantalizing space-based patriarchy" (2011, 1). They maintain that violence against women, which could be done by a foreigner or family member, is "any act of gender-based violence resulting in physical, sexual, or psychological harm to women" and "may include verbal threats, coercion, economic abuse or arbitrary deprivation of freedom in both the private and public spheres" as well as "sexual harassment" (1). Gender-based violence, they note, is present in patriarchal societies where women are oppressed in times of war and peace (2). However, the situation exacerbates during war where the authority of law weakens. Al-Ramli's story casts light on the role of the American invasion of Iraq in paving the way for the political Islamic parties to

ascend to the political arena and rule. As a result, women's role in society shrinks and gender equity is no longer encouraged.

Since the story sheds light on the impact of war on Iraqi woman along three decades, it is important to provide a review of this issue. Nadje Al-Ali is a prominent scholar who investigates Iraqi women's situation since the establishment of the Iraqi State till the present time. In her paper, "Iraqi Women and Gender Relations: Redefining Difference", Al-Ali traces Iraqi woman's role before and after the Baath's regime. Al-Ali observes that according to her interviews with 200 Iraqi women, from inside and outside Iraq, she finds out that, regardless of their backgrounds, those women's reactions to the 1950s and 1960s periods in Iraq "were attracted to either of the two main political trends: Communism or Arab nationalism" (p. 406). This interest in the political situation was limited to the upper and middle classes where families encouraged their daughters to gain primary and secondary education. The gap in education was almost abridged between poor, middle and upper classes and between males and females when a decree issued in 1976 that made education compulsory for all Iraqis. Later, the Iraqi government, motivated by pragmatic considerations, sought to push women into the education system and the labour market although such efforts clashed with some middle and lower classes' conservative and traditional notions (p. 412).

During the eight-year war with Iran, the regime's need for women increased as they were wanted to ensure the country running by replacing the posts of thousands of Iraqi men who were fighting at the fronts. Gradually Iraqi women's burdens doubled as they became "the main motors of state bureaucracy and the public sector, the main breadwinners and heads of households but also the 'mothers of future soldiers'" (p. 413). Yet, with the end of this prolonged war, Iraqi women's role and participation in society diminished. Women started to feel the heavy impact of the loss of loved ones, and also the changes in the economic situation. As such, Iraqi women, Al-Ali asserts, "were increasingly pushed back into their homes as unemployment rates sky-rocketed, the economy faltered and the infrastructure collapsed" (413). The above review unveils how the state has invested, encouraged and curbed the Iraqi women's corporeality. Al-Ali summarizes this by noting that Iraqi women's bodies became the site of "nationalist policies and battles" (p. 413). This is augmented through decrees meant to restrict their marital choices by inhibiting Iraqi women from marrying non-Iraqi men.

The situation became even worse during the long years of economic sanctions (1990-2003) which brought the most devastating impacts on women's role, welfare and gender relations. Moreover, their employment rate, Al-Ali notes, fell from 23% at the end of the 1980s to 10% at the end of the 1990s (p. 414). Further, there were changes regarding socializing and dress code which forced women to wear Hijab. In addition to this, the expectations of conducting "honor killings" rose sharply during the 1990s and 2000s especially after the presidential decree in 1991 that granted immunity to men accused of such crimes. Following the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the dissolving of Iraqi army and security forces, the process of restricting Iraqi women's roles and participation exacerbated as Iraqi women became vulnerable to physical assaults committed by the occupying forces whether at check points or during house search. Furthermore, academic women, activists, lawyers and doctors became targets for armed groups, religious extremists, and assassins. Besides, Iraqi women working with or cooperating with the US army or American organization or officials in the new Iraqi government and institutes become the target, Sherifa D. Zuhur purports, for armed groups and "Islamist insurgents and vigilantes" (2006, p. 28). Contrary to the occupying forces' claims that the invasion is meant to emancipate Iraqi women, women's rights were in constant deterioration (Human Rights Council, 2014). Iraqi women in Al-Ramli's story live in similar traumatic situations. Their vulnerability to violence, which is bodily inscribed and psychologically inflicted, turns out, later, to a traumatic experience whose impact lasts longer than the physical one.

Empowering women voices and the politics of the female body:

The title that Al-Ramli used for his story has appeared in several stories found on the internet by persons narrating or writing stories revolving around family crimes in which a member in the family or a lover kills another. Yet, the scope of this story goes beyond familial issues to address national ones. The action in this story takes place in Al-Fadhil District in post-2003 Baghdad. The story begins abruptly with the following sentence by an anonymous narrator, "We found Qamar's body in the courtyard – it was half past five in the morning, and her mother's screams echoed throughout the old Baghdad house in the Fadhil District" (Al-Ramli, 2018, p. 23). Qamar, as the narrator tells us, is "the most beautiful girl in our neighborhood" (p. 23). The narrator describes Qamar's body, while standing in the second-floor balcony, as being "crucified" (p. 23). Referring to how her death is confirmed, the narrator adds that the landlord approached her,

checked her pulse, and announced her death. Then, he pulls a "slip of paper from her fingers" with the words "I killed her because I loved her" (p. 23). The murderer is expected to be from the property because the landlord checked "the padlocks and bars that had been installed after the American came" and found them all locked (p. 23). This is an instance of Al-Ramli's mockery of the American invasion, which was disseminated in American media and politics as being intended to liberate Iraqi people from the tyrant's grip. Instead of augmenting security and forcing order, the American troops' presence has dissolved Iraqi security forces and turned the country into a prison. This is further portrayed in the story when the narrator states that the city is subject to curfew at ten every night.

The above extract about Qamar and her mother expressively conveys how women in Iraq, following the 2003, are denied voice. The mother is unable to conduct verbal communication and her screams, which are echoed throughout the house, deliver no message other than expressing grief and sadness for her daughter's death. Further, the slip with the seven words indicates that women in this story are not provided with the space and opportunity to express themselves or relate their narrative. As described by the narrator, the building, where he and the mother and her three daughters live, has two stories and eight large rooms – four on each floor. Qamar, her mother and her two sisters, Fadhila and Sahar, live in a room in the ground floor. The eldest daughter, Fadhila, is a graduate from Baghdad University with a BA in English language, and the youngest one, Sahar, is a high school student. Both Qamar and Sahar were born in Egypt and were named by their Egyptian grandmother (p. 26). The mother and her three daughters were in Egypt, but following the American invasion, the mother left her Egyptian husband in Cairo and returned, with her three daughters, to Baghdad. The mother's marriage to an Egyptian man conveys her father's nationalistic views where the Arabs are perceived as brothers belonging to one homeland. The mother's decision to return to Iraq following the invasion evidences her patriotic sentiment as an Iraqi woman whose grandfather "had fought against the British occupation" and whose father "was an officer who had helped transform Iraq from a monarchy to a republic" (p. 26). Finding the roof of the house she inherited from her father destroyed by the American shelling, the mother decided to rent a room in this property, hoping to rebuild the house "once the American occupation end[s]" (p. 27).

Iraqi women's chances of finding jobs dropped sharply following the US invasion in 2003. Due to financial problems, the mother in this story was forced to sell fish to "restaurants and private homes" and, to help her mother pay the rent of the room, Qamar decided to work "as a translator for the Americans" (p. 31). As her elder sister, Fadhila, was more proficient in English than her, Qamar sometimes gave her "documents to translate" (p. 31), which evidences how the second daughter was implicated in this risky work aiming to help increase their income. In addition to being the target of armed groups combating the US invasion outside the property, the daughters, especially Qamar, were the target of male gaze inside the property which entails the young as well as the old like the landlord. In addition to this, some females kept an eye on Qamar, such as the landlord's widowed daughter, who thought that "Qamar was sabotaging her chances of finding a husband" because all the men in the building were "only interested in Qamar" (p. 32). I consider these examples, which narrate how men react to the presence of the mother's daughters in the property, especially Qamar, are meant indirectly to empower their voices. Moreover, it reveals the response of the landlord's widowed daughter to the loss of her husband at war.

The response to Fadhila's work with the Americans did not last long; forty days after Qamar's murder, the residents once again woke up to the mother's screams in the courtyard. The narrator states that he looked down and found Fadhila in the same place, a "spitting image of Qamar" who "looked like she'd been crucified and nailed to the ground" (p. 33). The landlord followed the same procedures he did when finding Qamar's body and took the same slip of paper from Fadhila's fingers with the same word, "I killed her because I loved her". What happened later broke the mystery; more than thirty American soldiers broke down the gate of the property and two of them "ran over to lift Fadhila's mother off the corpse" and tied her hands (p. 34). While she was on the way to the vehicle that carried her away, Fadhila's mother shouts: "It's me who killed her, because I loved her!" and shouts again as if to clarify why she has done that: "It's me who killed her, because I love her, and I love Iraq!" (p. 35). Then, one of the residents, who was a policeman, told the narrator that he "know she was working with some of the insurgent groups, and that she disapproved of her daughters working with the Americans, but I never imagined that she would go as far as to kill them" (p. 35). I argue that empowering the women's voice is being concisely depicted here along with the mother's response to her plight. The mother's sentence and, then, shout, "I killed her because I loved her", is mentioned three times in this page, once written and twice using her own voice. The screams, which are being

described as echoing, have turned into complete sentences that are being heard by the residents and forced them to wake up early in the morning and delivered to us through the narrator. The more those screams are repeated, the more they are heard and delivered, and the more they are empowered, and the more we become aware of the Iraqi woman's plight during the US invasion which was often proclaimed as a moral campaign to free Iraqi people and Iraqi women, in particular. A good example to refute this proclamation is the way the mother is arrested and carried away with no attention is ever being paid to Sahar, the third daughter in the family.

The literary allusion of the employment of bodies in literary works has been the focus of several scholars. In her book, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Elizabeth Grosz asserts that "If the writing or inscription metaphor is to be of any use for feminism – and I believe that it can be extremely useful – the specific modes of materiality of the "page"/body must be taken into account" (1994, 156). Commenting on the aspect of resistance in the human body, Grosz notes that being "a site of knowledge/power, the body is thus a site of resistance, for it exerts a recalcitrance, and always entails the possibility of a counter-strategic reinscription, for it is capable of being self-marked, self-represented in alternative ways" (1990, p. 64). In her essay, "(White) Women and (White) Guilt in the 'New' South Africa", Georgina Horrell purports "That the body is a suitable site for the inscription of guilt, as well as an apt place for the exacting of penalty, is by no means an unwritten text. […] The body becomes a tablet, a notepad for the texts, which must be obeyed, for debts that must be paid." (2008, p. 19). Murdering the two daughters, I contend, is an act of resistance. The way the two daughters are placed on the ground is described in Al-Ramli's story as an act of crucifixion, where they are nailed to the ground. This metaphor indicates two meanings. Firstly, it signifies a punishment, it is the debt they have to pay, for their "cooperation" with the American soldiers, which is being disapproved by the insurgent groups. Secondly, their punishment, which is described as a crucifixion, is, in fact, a revolt against those groups.

After asserting the significance of the body as a site of resistance, I intend, in this paragraph to address the importance of the voice in the story and its relation to body. Mladen Dolar proposes that voice "is like a bodily missile which separates itself from the body and spreads around, but on the other hand it points to a bodily interior, an intimate partition of the body which cannot be disclosed – as if the voice were the very principle of division into interior and exterior" (2006, 70). The mother's shouts and screams reveal what her body has meant to portray.

It is worth noting that except in final part of the story, the female characters in the story are mainly muted. Muted female characters are under researched in literary works with the exception of Susan Glaspell's play, *Trifles* (1916) where the two female characters, Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale, discover how and why Mrs. Right, who never appears on stage, killed her husband. Mrs. Wright's story is narrated and commented upon by those two female characters. Contrary to Glaspell's play, the four female characters in Al-Ramli's story are commented upon by male characters. Thus, this paper contributes not only to scholarship on Iraqi fiction but also to literary empowerment of female voices. Overshadowing women in this story is meant to disclose their marginal role following the US invasion of Iraq. The four females in the family are not provided with the opportunity to express themselves until the end of the story where only one of them, the mother, repeats one sentence, "I killed her because I loved her". It is only at this moment that we come to know that the mother is the murderer of her two daughters due to their divergent perspectives on their work and role in society. The two daughters perish because they revolt against patriarchy and also against a society which never tolerates difference and nonconformity. Accordingly, the two daughters' work as translators is an expression of agency. As Atasoy (2006) observes, "[a]n emphasis on agency assumes that women are active, rational subjects who desire autonomy and self-realization by struggling against the dominants norms and institutions that oppress them" (206). Al-Ramli's story articulates women's agency in relation to the entrenched domestic and foreign power hierarchies existing at a critical period in Iraq and conveys the barriers set against their efforts to grapple with this issue. In addition to this, the story shows how the US invasion is complicit in forcing Iraqi women to fit into particular gender roles because by disbanding Iraqi army and security forces, the stage is paved for armed groups to prevail. In so doing, the daughters in this story demonstrate how Iraqi women are forced to pay the heavy cost of invasion, chaos and disorder.

Recurrence of wars, violence and oppression shape the citizens' views of life and the world they live in. The views and the narratives such people narrate would often affect the recipients even if they are not associated with or directly linked to them or their inflicted persons. Cathy Caruth defines trauma as "an overwhelming experience of a sudden or catastrophic event in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucination or other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth, p. 11). Although the Greek meaning of the word trauma indicates a wound, what really matters, in the theoretical context of trauma, is the psychological rather than the physical one

(Caruth, 1969, p. 3). That is because it is the psychological wound which brings the victim back into the incident which caused the traumatizing process. In this sense, it is not the catastrophic experience which is the actual locus of the traumatic incident but its "unassimilated nature" which has been missed at the time of the incident. The psychological wound might be articulated, Freud notes, through a re-enactment of the painful incident as an instance of the "repetition compulsion of traumatic neurosis" (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1920, p.16). The mother's murder of the second daughter is an example of this compulsory repetition of the traumatic incident.

The second murder relates, except with the source of the voice, to the story of Tancred and Lucinda, where Tancred, unknowingly, wounds his beloved Lucinda during a duel, and then wounds her again when slashing his word in a tree where her soul is imprisoned making blood streams from the cut along with Lucinda's voice. Freud states that the traumatic patient "is obliged to repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, remembering it as something belonging to the past" (1920, p. 288). The mother in this story is a traumatic person whose nationalistic upbringing and patriotic views are not in accord with her daughters' work. The mother's final words: "It's me who killed her, because I love her, and I love Iraq!" (p. 35) indicate a clash between her love to her daughter and her love to Iraq, which caused a psychological wound that turns into physical when she murdered her first daughter. With the second murder, the physical wound turns into psychological which causes her screams and shouts. Speaking about the relation between the person's voice and the traumatic experience, Caruth notes that "We can read the address of the voice here not as the story of the way in which one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound" (p. 8). In Al-Ramli's story, the voice expresses the pain of both, the mother and her daughters.

If the voice in Tancred and Lucinda story is a complaint against the wrongdoing of the lover, I read Al-Ramli's story as a sorrowful complaint released through a wound that is both physical, in relation to the daughters, and psychic, in relation to the mother. The sentence "I killed her because I loved her" discloses not only a contrastive emotion but a profound struggle inside the mother's mind and heart, between protecting and murdering her daughters. It seems that the mother has reached a conclusion where she can no longer be able to protect her

two daughters and, thus, the only option left for her is to murder them herself. What has aggravated the mother's condition is the repetition of the situation when her second daughter, Fadhila, resumes Qamar's job with the Americans. As a traumatized person, the mother relives the same horrific event which makes her repeatedly traumatized. Her shout, which is a repetition of the first one, with the words "I killed her because I loved her" has become a protest against women marginalization, stereotyping and abuse. It symbolizes her revolt against patriarchy, whether male or religious, which regards her daughters' work as a proof of betrayal or violation of ethical codes. If males are believed to be the tools to punish those who cooperate with the invaders, the mother's decision to murder her daughters by her own hands is a revolt against this. Moreover, if her daughters have violated religious principles and ethical codes that prohibit female Muslims' involvement with American soldiers, the way she manages the crime scene, which is being described as an act of crucifixion, conveys much.

Conclusion:

Through its focus on one family, a mother and her three daughters, Muhsin Al-Ramli's story explores the impact of the US invasion of Iraq on Iraqi woman and conveys how it helps in forcing Iraqi women to fit into particular gender roles. It also shows that Iraqi women's traumatic experiences are far from being resolved. While depicting the female characters in this story muted, their voices are empowered through the repetition of a sentence that overwhelms the beginning and end of the story and also through screams that keeps on echoing. It also portrays how the body, as being unwritten text, corporeally empowers women's voice to the extent of demonstrating revolt against both patriarchy and invasion. Last but not least, by making the tragedy of the mother and her daughters the focus of his story, Al-Ramli turns their trauma from a familial trauma into a collective one.

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