

**The representation of Muslim-related
international conflicts in contemporary Anglo-
American theatre, 1992–2011**

by

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Alaa Abdelaziz Abdelaziz Mohamed Ali, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: *Alaa Ali* Date: 22 January 2015

Abstract

Focusing on plays created over the last two decades, this thesis investigates British and American playwrights' depiction of the Anglo-American wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and also their dramatisation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. My main hypothesis is that these plays' comments on the conflicts challenge the dominant discourses of both the Anglo-American politicians and the leaders of terrorists. Instead of reducing bloody confrontations to jingoistic labels such as the War on Terror or the War on Islam, the dramatic texts analyzed insist on portraying the suffering of innocent victims of these politically exploited conflicts, including civilians and soldiers.

Concerned with both common and different features of the three places and contexts of confrontation, the plays are insistently topical, in some instances by suggesting a comparison between historical and present episodes of the conflicts on the grounds of repetition and causal relations. As the texts seek to achieve an informative goal, their forms vary from tribunal theatre to dreamlike plays. Therefore, my theoretical approach to these plays eclectically utilises a combination of insights drawn from political theatre, documentary drama and performance studies, supported by explanatory paradigms of social semiotics.

The thesis is organised thematically so that the first chapter explores the intersecting roots of current confrontations. The second chapter focuses on the different forms of representing topical events whether by adopting documentary techniques, creating imaginary plots, or mixing both. In the third chapter I explore dramatic portraits of the Iraqi people's oppression throughout four disasters: the Gulf War in 1991, the economic sanctions, the unjustified invasion of 2003, and its aftermath. The fourth chapter analyses dramatic responses to the War in Afghanistan, on which playwrights comment by depicting three phases of Western occupations since the nineteenth century by Britain, Russia, and America, respectively. The fifth chapter focuses on the representation of two post-9/11 incidents of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, within which occasional individual tolerance keeps resisting the inherited hatred.

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To peaceful revolutionists who have sacrificed their lives in order to emancipate Egypt: Your noble death will always anathematise all the opportunists of Islamists, Nasserists and fake liberalists who, in their dirty war for power, have allied your killers, the worshipers of corruption and dictatorship.

Introduction

The last twenty five years have witnessed an unprecedented inclusion of the dramatic characters of Muslims within Western playwrights' works. This dramatic phenomenon was the matter that initiated this project six years ago. The main question of my research was about the way in which Muslim characters are portrayed by these playwrights. Back then, I was aware of the causal relationship between the so-called War on Terror and the increasing representation of Muslim characters. However, I considered neither the specific circumstances of each event of the multi-phased military confrontations, nor the geopolitical roots of the conflict before 9/11. In addition, I did not consider the social, cultural and political aspects that might define Western societies, some of which were targets of operations planned and executed by violent Islamist groups since the 1990s. Instead, from a standpoint of an Egyptian researcher, I simplistically relied on a vague mixture of geographical, linguistic and ethnic features of the notion 'Western' to describe non-Arabic, European and American playwrights. I consider this old topic the first phase of my thesis because some of this early topic's aspects intersect with those my current topic investigates. Moreover, some early answers to the main question raised by the old project helped me in shaping both the topic and the hypotheses of my thesis.

By taking a historical approach, I found that examples of portraying Muslim characters in European theatre can be traced back to the sixteenth century. For instance, Shakespeare's characters use the word 'Turk' in a negative sense, which can be read on the grounds of Jonathan Burton's claim that 'the term Turk was coextensive with Islam in early modern European rhetoric' (Burton 2000, 126). In the first scene of the second act of *Othello*, Iago says 'it is true, or else I am a Turk' (Shakespeare 1997, 169).¹ However, the most offensive words against Muslims come from *Othello*, the most famous, or infamous, Moorish character. As a Moor, *Othello* is supposed to be Muslim. However he fights for Venice against the Turks. Moreover, in his last speech before stabbing himself he harshly declares:

Where a malignant and turbaned Turk

¹ Because of the discrepancy of line numbers between different editions of Shakespeare's plays, his works are cited here by page number to avoid confusion. At the same time, play divisions are mentioned through in-text citations.

Beat a Venetian, and traduced the state,
I took by th' throat the circumcised dog
And smote him—thus! (Shakespeare 1997, 331)

Whether Othello, a Moorish refugee who converted to Christianity, hides his Islam for military glory, or even believes in no religion at all, it seems that Shakespeare's character reflects the Elizabethans' foregrounding of the Moors' ethnicity rather than religion.²

Anthony Barthelemy explains:

The word *Turk* itself carries many of the same connotations that *Moor* does, but *Turk* almost always means Muslim and hence an enemy of Christianity. The single greatest difference between *Turk* and *Moor* seems to be the recognition of the ethnic difference and the Eurasian origin of the former group. [...] The *Turk* may be an enemy of Christianity, but he is neither African nor black. (Barthelemy 184)

In this respect, while Iago's description of Othello as a 'black ram' who dared to marry a 'white ewe' (Shakespeare 1997, 121–2) is an ethnic and non-religious discrimination, the Moorish character's condemnation of Turks distinguishes them, as Muslims, from Christians.³

However, I realised that my reading of the word 'Turk' in the Elizabethan plays simplistically limited its connotation to the religious identity, because I neglected the historical and political contexts of these dramatic texts. The Ottoman Empire was a great power, which reached one of its peaks in the sixteenth century and had confrontations with European/Christian states. At the beginning of *The Jew of Malta*, the Turkish officials threaten the Christian governor of Malta by asking for unpaid tribute, which might reflect on the historical event of the Turks' siege of Malta in 1565. Likewise, the Ottoman-Venetian Wars were factual events that shaped the background to the dramatic action of *Othello*.

Although the references to the historical incidents within *The Jew of Malta* and *Othello* are marginal, the critique of the Turks, including their image as enemies of

² A claim that a few number of Turks and Moors converted to Christianity in England since the second half of the sixteenth century can be found in Matar (19-21).

³ For more examples, see Shakespeare (1986, 120-1), where Hamlet uses the phrase 'turn Turk' whose meaning according to Bernard Lott, is to 'take a turn for the worse', and/or to 'change from a Christian to an infidel'. In Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, not only do the Turkish slave Ithamore and his Jewish master Barabas kill Christians out of religious hatred, but Ithamore also betrays his master.

Christianity, possibly references Ottoman military aggression against European territories. I also realised that while the reasons for the Turks' wars in Europe were mainly political and economic, the Ottoman rulers motivated their soldiers by claiming that this war aimed to spread Islam over the land of the infidels. In turn, the leaders of European states utilised Christianity as a method of achieving an alliance against the Muslim army.⁴

The focus on distancing Islam from Christianity as two different systems of ethics and behaviour continues throughout the seventeenth century as I can find in *Christian Turned Turk*, written by Robert Daborne in 1610, Philip Massinger's *The Renegado, or The Gentleman of Venice* (1624), *The Island Princess*, written by Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher in 1621, and John Dryden's *The Conquest of Granada* (1670). However, it is hard to decide whether these specific aspects of the Turks are totally shaped in the Elizabethan era or inherited from earlier stances of conflictual and/or cultural encounters between Europeans and Muslims such as the Crusades.⁵

Mixing political and religious reasons to negatively depict Muslim characters is manifest within a number of Spanish plays. These plays seem to respond to the long encounter with the Muslim occupation of the Iberian Peninsula in the period between the eighth and fifteenth centuries in what was known as Andalusia. Despite the end of Islamic rule, a small Muslim population stayed in Spain only to be expelled in 1614. Marchante-Aragón mentions that, just after three years of the eviction of Muslims, in 1617, the Duke of Lerma commissioned Mira de Amescua to write *The Masque of the Expulsion of the Moriscos*, which was performed in the same year. Apart from the festive nature of the Masque, which recalls the Duke's successful effort to expel Muslims, the image of Moorish characters in the performance is always related to evil and anti-Christianity (Marchante-Aragón 98–101). The playwright Francisco Martínez de la Rosa's *Aben Humeya o La Rebelión de los Moriscos*, 1830, is a history play in which the writer portrays the revolution of Moors led by Aben Humeya against Philip II in the middle of the sixteenth century. The play depicts Muslims as barbarians, whose defeat occurs because of their betrayal of Aben Humeya who is eventually beheaded.

⁴ For more information about the economic motives of the Ottoman–Venetian Wars, see Inalcik, (262–8). A detailed eyewitness record of the siege of Malta can be found in Balbi di Correggio. For discussions of the exploitation of Islam to justify the Ottoman wars in Europe, see Yurdusev (190-9), and Rudolph Jr. (53). For using Christendom to unite European countries against the Turks as 'infidels', see Curtis (2009, 25).

⁵ For detailed discussions of the Crusades from different points of view, see the studies of Hillenbrand and Madden.

Even decades after the Muslim occupation of Andalusia, the negative image of Muslims can be found in Federico García Lorca's *Play without a Title*.⁶ The character of a lustful Muslim young man in the play feels happy to be killed only because he will be able to live together with a large number of women. The Muslim character explains: 'I'm hoping to die so I can have a million concubines. The women are expensive here' (Lorca 122). This speech parodies some verses of the Holy Qur'an, which describe the eternal life of Muslims in heaven. What distinguishes *Play without a Title* from *The Masque of the Expulsion of the Moriscos* and *Aben Humeya* is that Lorca's play, whose dialogues revolve around the comparison between the bourgeois and working-class audiences, does not include any reference to the nationalist struggle against the Muslim occupation. The most striking feature of the Muslim's speech within *Play without a Title* is that it suggests that the playwright acquires information about Islam that enabled his critique of Muslim characters to extend beyond their physical traits or behaviour to draw a link between such behaviour and the Qur'an. In their analysis of the suicide operations by the members of some radical Islamist groups since the 1990s, a large number of European and American academics and journalists comment on specific verses of the Qur'an, which are recited by the leaders of these groups in order to justify violence.⁷

The previous examples of plays do not offer a comprehensive record of the representation of Muslim characters, or culture, within Western drama in general or English and Spanish theatres in particular. Nevertheless, my examination of these dramatic texts led to some observations, which I utilised to define the topic of this dissertation. Firstly, the inclusion of Muslim characters within these plays seems to be partly pertinent to, and motivated by, specific sociopolitical contexts of conflict. Secondly, while the polemically intersecting circumstances of the ongoing War on Terror are remarkably different from both the Ottoman wars in Europe and the Muslim occupation of Andalusia, the discourse of Osama Bin Laden since the middle of the 1990s seems, in some respects, to recycle the historical claim of the Muslim holy war against the Christian infidels. Moreover, some

⁶ Lorca unfinished play was written in 1936, but not published until 1978.

⁷ Claims that the Qur'an (Koran) includes many verses that praise brutality and violence can be found, for example, in McCarthy, B. Gabriel, M. Gabriel, and Winn. More profound approaches to reading the relationship between the Qur'an and terrorists' discourse of justifying violence is taken by a large number of scholars such as Roy 2004, Juergensmeyer, Silverstein, and Kurzman.

scholars and historians analyse the attacks of militant Islamists in the US and Europe on the grounds of a nostalgic desire to retrieve the powerful Muslim state in Andalusia.⁸

My third observation was that although the phrase ‘Muslim characters’ seems able to serve as a general descriptive term, it ignores the differences between, for example, Moorish and Turkish dramatic characters. Such differences are based on the intrinsic interactions amongst ethnic, religious, geographic, and historical elements. Thus, I realised that my simplistic categorisation of Muslim characters as a feature of the contemporary plays I intend to study ignores the differences that can be found between, for instance, Sunni and Shii dramatic characters in a play about Iraq.⁹ Moreover, discrepant ethnic and non-religious traditions can be crucial in distinguishing both from dramatic characters that represent the Sunni majority in Afghanistan.

Finally, and most importantly, within the vast majority of these English and Spanish plays, the representation of both Moorish and Turkish characters usually includes aspects of a stereotyped image commonly created and accepted by the society of each playwright. In many cases, these images reflect on the official political orientations of England and Spain at the time of the play. In his comment on the representation of the Moors by English dramatists in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Barthelemy argues: ‘Because playwrights could rely on a common tradition, on widely held assumptions about Moors, Moors serve as valuable examples of moral depravity in general or of special moral vices and lapses’ (Barthelemy 199). Such an aspect is very crucial to distinguish these examples of plays from the dramatic texts studied in my thesis, where contemporary playwrights comment on different events of the War on Terror by questioning, and even contradicting specific claims raised by official political discourse and/or the Western media coverage of the ongoing conflicts.

From these observations, I concluded that my initial project noticeably needed to be modified. Thanks to my supervisor’s advice, I have taken a different approach to studying contemporary British and American political theatre. The prominence of Muslims characters has proven to be one of the salient features in representations of Muslim-related

⁸ For examples of such a psychohistorical approach to explain international militant Islamism, see Kepel (2004, 8), and Domínguez (86). In Ahmed (2), the term ‘the Andalusia syndrome’ is coined to describe the fear that haunts the Muslim minority in India, whose members allegedly recall the fate of the Moors in The Iberian Peninsula.

⁹ Shii, Shiti, or Shhi‘ite is the largest faction amongst the minor sects of Islam, while Sunni, or Sunna is the major sect, especially in the Arabic countries. Inside the Shii sect, there are several subdivisions. In addition, Shii or Sunni is utilised as an adjective to describe Muslims who belong to each sect.

conflicts with Western countries, especially the Anglo-American coalition. Yet British and American playwrights have not chosen Muslims as dramatic characters to explore particular societies or social dynamics; instead, the task of portraying the military and political conflicts of the past few decades is what has demanded the utilisation of these characters. In this respect, the wider approach enables this research not only to explore these dramatic characters, but also, and most importantly, to investigate the response of contemporary British and American theatre to one of the most controversial conflicts in history: the War on Terror. Consequently, instead of dealing with the War on Terror as merely motivation for portraying Muslim characters, which was the assumption of my old project, I realise that investigating both the pivotal phases of the War on Terror and the violent operations that initiated it is necessary in order to analyse dramatic texts.

In addition, the plays studied in my thesis cannot be reduced to the inclusion of Muslim, or even Arabic, characters. Rather, these topical plays respond to specific events of the ongoing conflicts, within which geopolitical, economic, religious, and cultural factors interact. In such complicated contexts, even notions such as the West, Arabs, Muslims, and terror demand a clarification. To give an example, considering the overlap between ethnic and religious elements is crucial in order to distinguish Arabic nationalist movements from radical Islamist groups, the vast majority of whose members are Arabs. Based on their violent operations against Western targets, including civilians, both types of organisations are described as terrorists. However, there are subtle differences between each, whether in terms of their methods of violence or regarding their leaders' declared reasons for their operations.

Initial observations on dramatic texts

The vast majority of contemporary Anglo-American playwrights' responses to Muslim-related confrontations with the West tend to increase their spectators' awareness of the conflicts in general, or of a specific factual incident. To achieve such an enlightening role through their topical plays, it seems that playwrights themselves have to extend their knowledge beyond what the media coverage of the events offers. The inclusion of this information within texts adopts the techniques of documentary theatre and Bertolt Brecht's approach to epic drama. It seems that contemporary political theatre is a revival of both Piscator's works in 1920s and the tribunal plays of Peter Weiss and his comrades in the 1960s.

Moreover, I realised that many playwrights insist on referring to a process of research they have made before writing their plays, which can be related to the adoption of documentary theatre. For instance, *The Great Game: Afghanistan* is a group of thirteen plays, premiered at the Tricycle Theatre, London on 17 April 2009.¹⁰ In the introduction to the publication, the artistic director of the Tricycle Theatre, Nicolas Kent, who commissioned the thirteen British and American playwrights, declares that ‘some of them have chosen their own subject, and some have been ‘coerced’ into periods of Afghan history about which they knew nothing, and have now become expert’ (Kent 8). Apart from the exaggeration of supposing that few months of reading is enough to turn a playwright into an ‘expert’ in a topic he/she used to know ‘nothing’ about, Kent’s observation suggests the necessity of research for writing topical plays.

A perfect example of playwrights’ intentional mentioning of their sources of information can be found in the American playwright Naomi Wallace’s published plays about the conflicts in Iraq and Palestine, where bibliographies of many political and historical studies are added under the title of ‘Further Reading’. Although such lists of references can be accessed by the readers rather than the audiences of these plays, it is possible that directors of potential productions of these plays—and all practitioners—follow Wallace by reading one or more of these studies.

It seems that playwrights ‘reading about conflicts is crucial to represent events that occur in geographically and culturally distant places, namely Afghanistan and Iraq. To increase their own knowledge about the topic on which their plays comment, playwrights’ pre-writing readings usually focus on social, cultural and historical aspects of Muslim and Arabic societies. Moreover, with the echoes of conflicts within playwrights’ own societies, they may need to consider knowing more about domestic matters such as, to give examples, the co-existence of Muslim and Arabic immigrants, or the military system of recruiting soldiers and sending them to battlefields.

I have gradually realised that the vast majority of the plays’ comments on the different phases of the War on Terror are interwoven with a critique of several aspects of a stereotyped discourse about the conflicts. Most of these negative stereotypes are variations stemming from the age-old dichotomy of West versus East. While terrorists’ speeches

¹⁰ The ‘Great Game’ was the expression that described the fierce competition in the nineteenth century between Britain and Russia, both of whom had colonial ambitions to dominate the Central Asia region, especially Afghanistan.

insist on a Christian-Muslim confrontation, terrorists' attacks are sometimes reduced to a sign of cultural inferiority, which is full of hatred and envy.¹¹

I do not argue that the group of plays I study in this thesis suggests that there is no difference between Western and both/either Arabic and/or Muslim cultures. My claim is that these dramatic texts suggest that, firstly, dealing with both cultural and religious differences is an unavoidable part of the consequences of the presence of Western soldiers and humanitarians in Afghanistan and Iraq. Secondly, some of these discrepancies must not be seen by either side as a deviation from its own culture as a benchmark. Finally, my investigating of these plays gradually implied that, regardless of religion, cultural values, social class, or age, the soldiers and civilians from both sides are – to different extents – victims of terrorists, politicians, and the exploitive creation of, and support for, misconceptions. These observations drew my attention to the necessity of reading what these plays suggest as Western values through a specific, although not ultimate, understanding of the 'West' as a cultural identity of both playwrights and their dramatic characters.

What is the West?

The word 'Western' is insufficient to encompass the differences between British and American playwrights though I have resorted to using it because dramatists in both countries comment on comparable aspects of the wars their nations fight in the name of *secular democracy*. The latter I utilise as an essential feature of what I mean by Western societies, within which secularity and democracy respectively materialise the religious and political aspects of the freedoms of belief and expression. This observation is crucial to understand that I occasionally describe some Arabic and Muslim regimes as secular, because their leaders marginalise, or even neutralise, religious presence in their political systems. However, these dictatorships are systematically against political freedom.

In contrast to Arabic *secular* dictatorship, I contextualise the notion of secular democracy by drawing on shared values between Britain and the US as *Western* countries. My thesis adopts James Gow's definition of the West, which he mainly establishes on a

¹¹ Here, I refer to the terrorists, who planned and executed the attacks of 9/11, as they were described by George W. Bush, the American President (2001-2009). Bush's comment has been controversially analysed by both journalists and scholars.

discussion of Samuel Huntington's description of the 'West' in the latter's controversial study *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1997). Gow argues:

The focus on individualism, rather than collectivism, that marks out the West is at the core of the values and culture on which Western societies depend, whatever the defects in practice over time. This core value gives rise to the way in which others manifest themselves in Western societies – whether artistic creativity, scientific enquiry, the rule of law, or pluralist and representative politics, where change is assumed on the grounds that no rulers can be perfect, omniscient or comprehensive. All of this constitutes values that both represent and generate Western power. (Gow 10)

Gow's insistence on 'individualism' as an essence of Western 'values and culture' was helpful in supporting my claim that various forms of 'collectivism' played a crucial role in the emergence of the violent groups in the vast majority of Arabic and Muslim countries in the first place. In order to strengthen their authority, dictators and radical Islamists lure individuals to concede their rights and freedoms in the name of 'collectivism', which is based on jingoistic mottos and religious promises of heaven, respectively.

Furthermore, I utilised what Gow refers to as 'the defects in practice' to analyse the effect of political mottos, raised by the US administration, which, I suggest, contradict the Western essential value of 'individualism'. To give an example, I mentioned how, for the sake of 'patriotism' and 'protecting the soldiers', American media coverage of negative consequences of some events of the War on Terror was limited, and some dramatic representations of these incidents were criticised. In this respect, this research urged me to realise that there are many differences between British and American political discourse about the conflicts and the media coverage of the events of the War on Terror in each country. Moreover, in terms of theatrical techniques and critical responses, especially in terms of political topics, there are some discrepant features.

Finally, I utilised my understanding of the West to explore one of the most significant consequences of the War on Terror, which is raising questions about the relationship, or even the discrepancy, between secularism and Islam. In the heart of these debates are the so-called rules of political Islam, or as Peter Mandaville prefers to name them: 'Muslim politics' (Mandaville 2007, x), which essentially contradict the Western notion of politics as a secular realm that must not be mingled with religion. On the other hand, political Islamists base their credibility on the belief that Islam is a thorough system

of life, which intrinsically includes the way in which Muslim societies must be ruled. In addition, these rules define both the rights and obligations of the minorities of other religions, by which they exclusively mean Christians and Jews.¹²

It seems important to mention that this claim dominates the speeches of a large number of Muslim clerics in the vast majority of Arabic and Muslim countries, including many of those who are described as moderate Sheikhs.¹³ In other words, the believers in political Islam include, but are not limited to, the movements that seek to rule in order to apply ‘Muslim politics’. I utilise this observation in order to analyse the conflict amongst dictators, political Islamists, nationalists, and liberals in some Arabic and Muslim countries, wherein terror was born.¹⁴

Topic of study

The dramatic phenomenon this research attempts to examine is the noticeable increase in British and American contemporary political theatre, which can be described as a revival of political theatre in general and documentary practice in particular. My main hypotheses are that, firstly, this increasing presence could be described as the dramatic equivalent of waves of international successive events that are accompanied by series of conflicting hypothetical ideas and a large number of mingled theories. Put differently, the catastrophes caused by terrorist attacks, followed by several military confrontations as part of the War on Terror, have created an increasing public interest shaped by extensive media coverage. I read dramatic texts as cultural product of, and a comment on these interactive contexts. Thus while these plays reflect the standpoint of playwrights as part of public opinion, they also, and most importantly, function as means of shaping this public opinion, alongside, but usually in opposition to, the dominant discourses of Western politicians and media. Secondly, it is crucial to study these trans-continental, ever-changing events and

¹² Unlike Christianity and Judaism, other minority religions are forbidden by all Islamists, who call them infidels. In several Arabic and Islamic dictatorships, minor religions, other than Christianity, are not allowed to advocating or practicing their beliefs publicly. Muslims who insist on converting to any other religion or become atheists are considered apostates, whose punishment is death penalty. For more information, see Fox (218-49), Schabas (91), and Lawrence (2014, 218).

¹³ The word sheikh (شيخ) literally means any person who is over fifty years old. In this context Sheikhs, with uppercase, means clerics of Islam, or Muslim scholars of religion. Both are the most common uses of the word in all Arabic and Muslim countries.

¹⁴ While Marranci explores the relationship between secularity and Islam from different perspectives, examples of the confrontation within Western societies between secularity and some of Islamic laws and values can be found in Gutkowski (2014, 162–209), Mandaville (2009), and Roy (2007).

theories as they profoundly influence the creation of the dramatic subject which lies at the heart of this research.

To examine these hypotheses my research raises a major question: how do these contextual events and attitudes influence the dramatic text, in respect of ideas and structural aspects? Three sub-questions follow: firstly, how do these plays comment on the different events in terms of political content and theatrical representation? Secondly, are there specific common features of the images of the soldiers and the civilian victims in the places of military conflicts? And what are these features? Finally, how do these features differ according to the background of both playwright and the theatrical characters?

To seek answers to these questions and to study the dramatic aspects of that considerable emergence of political and topical plays as a significant phenomenon within contemporary Anglo-American theatre, this research examines the social, political and historical contexts which, firstly, incited the western playwrights to bring those topics to their dramatic texts, and, secondly, motivated directors to put them on stage. Finally, but maybe the most important, these various contextual elements have created the atmosphere that prepares the audiences' collective interest in such topics. Accordingly, this research attempts the project of combining the approaches drawn from political theatre, documentary drama, performance studies and critiques of Orientalism, supported by the explanatory paradigms of social-semiotics.

I started by reading in Orientalism and interculturalism. While both helped me in shaping a theoretical approach through which to understand the dramatic texts' mention of social and political aspects of the War on Terror, I realized that some Western politicians, supported by the media, sometimes repeat the old colonial discourse. However, unlike the British and French writers who supported colonialism, most contemporary playwrights are against the Anglo-American occupation of both Afghanistan and Iraq. In addition, the exceptional aspects of the War on Terror make its effect on discrimination against Muslims in Western countries more complicated than a matter of co-existence of different cultural groups.

The informative nature of the plays demanded readings in the media coverage of the events alongside a large number of contradictory writings by politicians, academics and military specialists about the War on Terror. It seems important to highlight that although my knowledge as a Sunni Egyptian was helpful in understanding some aspects of the different phases of the conflicts, this knowledge not only has been proven to be

insufficient, but also dangerous unless I examine the socio-political, nationalist, cultural and religious contexts of the conflicts with maximum objectivity. As a researcher, my awareness of the necessity of excluding, or at least marginalising, my initial conceptions—and sometimes misconceptions—of the thorny circumstances of the War on Terror has been supported by my supervisor’s guidance and a large number of scholarly studies.

The texts of academics such as Kepel, Roy, Mandaville, Esposito, and Juergensmeyer offered precise and profound readings of political Islam and the War on Terror. In addition, I occasionally recite controversial claims by scholars such as Finkelstein, Chomsky, and Spivak along with opinions of popular polemicists such as Huberman and Hopsicker. On several occasions, I even extend my citations to include journalistic comments on different aspects of the conflicts. Although some of these opinions are dogmatic or inaccurate, especially compared to academic studies, their significance relies on the fact that they are more accessible to the public. Moreover, British and American playwrights comment on both the hasty, overlapping, and successive events of the War on Terror and the contradictory discourses about these events.

As many plays adopt documentary techniques with Brechtian influences, reading in political theatre and documentary drama was essential in shaping my understanding of how this political background is dramatised. I realized that many of the plays use a specific form of documentary theatre, which I knew nothing about, which is [V]erbatim theatre. I was reading the word ‘verbatim’ as its literal meaning suggests. This form of documentary theatre has its origin in British theatre and is sometimes conflated with tribunal plays, whether by practitioners or some critics.

Working on the first chapter, ‘Contextual frames of dispute: Dominating misapprehensions within contradictory discourses’, enabled me to realise that playwrights’ critiques of cultural misconceptions seem to be a response to the excessive presence of these stereotypes within both Western politicians’ discourse and the media coverage of the War on Terror. Most of these misconceptions suggest simplistic comparisons between the superior Western countries, especially the US, and uncivilized, barbarian or terrorist Muslims. Similarly, with some exceptions, the image of the West within most Arabic political, religious and literary discourses is haunted by a simplistic generalization. In a big sector of Arabic writings, Western confrontations with Muslim and Arabic countries are usually portrayed with exaggerated self-critique or self-pride, which reduces these confrontations to a large number of inaccurate dichotomies. In this sense, the West as the

occupier, materialist, evil, intelligent, democratic, scientific, secular, Christian, or even the infidel, is usually opposed to the occupied, spiritual, ethical, naïve, authoritarian, superstitious, or the religious, Muslim and Arabic countries.

The role of a large sector of the American media was crucial in portraying 9/11 as a sudden and purposeless act of hatred. However, reading about the historical contexts of the dispute between the US and Muslim/Arabic countries suggests that there are causes for anger against US policies.¹⁵ These reasons were exploited by terrorists to justify killing American innocents. One of the most important causes for conflict is the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, which, despite the specific aspects that distinguish it from the American-led confrontations with terrorists, was mentioned by Israeli officials as part of the War on Terror, at least theoretically. This situation led me to extend the range of study in the thesis to include plays that comment on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the 2000s in addition to the American-led military intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Through Chapter One, I support my arguments by mentioning specific speeches and/or dramatic actions within plays, most of which comment on particular aspects of the War on Terror, other than the three places of conflict. For instance, I cite from dramatic texts that depict how the US deprives the detainees in Guantánamo of their right to be treated as Prisoners of Wars according to International Laws. I also give two examples of plays that portray the problem of discrimination against Muslims in both the US and Britain as a consequence of 9/11.

Studying the revival of political theatre that included documentary techniques led me to realise the essential difference between contemporary political theatre and the work of both Piscator and Brecht. Instead of the latter's ideological insistence on Marxism, as an alternative to capitalism, most contemporary plays avoid this agitprop theatre by focusing on the disastrous effect of the wars from the perspective of the witness rather than the political rival. Chapter Two, 'Forms of topicality: New goals of political theatre' canvasses these issues.

In Chapter Three, 'The Representation of Iraqi conflict: Two Decades of military confrontations and economic sanctions', I discuss the First Gulf War in 1991 as I realised that many Western playwrights' comments on Iraq started with this conflict. Others have

¹⁵ For more discussions about the role of the Palestinian struggle as a significant factor in agitating Arabic and Muslim populations, and, consequently, as a repeated excuse by terrorists in order to justify their violent operations against the US, see Roy (2004), Kepel (2004), and Kepel (2008).

responded to the United Nations' economic sanctions on Iraq (1990-2003). In addition, the chapter explores the difference between British and American playwrights regarding their responses to the invasion and its aftermath.

Chapter Four deals with Afghanistan and traces misconceptions about three phases of conflict. I highlight the way in which playwrights' responses to the aftermath of the 2001 War in Afghanistan revisit history by portraying two historical events: the British and Russian occupation of Afghanistan in the nineteenth and twentieth century, respectively. While I analyse playwrights' highlighting of specific common features of the intervention in Afghanistan by Britain, Russia, and the US, I explore how these writers underscore specific aspects that distinguish humanitarian and political reasons for the American-led international presence in the Asian country from both British and Russian occupations.

Chapter Five focuses on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and covers controversial plays that comment on this complicated and long-running dispute. While some plays attempt to give a close image of life in both Israel and the West Bank through verbatim theatre by interviewing people from both sides of the conflict, other plays focus on specific bloody events within imaginary plots, where documentary material is marginal and scattered.

In chapters three, four, and five, my choice of case study plays is designed to explore the wide spectrum of perspectives adopted by British and American playwrights on different phases of the three confrontations. In addition, my reading of these examples of plays investigates the variety of dramatic styles by which topical themes are represented, whether through different forms of documentary theater, imaginary plots, or a mixture of both styles. Within the latter, I show how factual events are interwoven with fictional characters and actions. While I comprehensively analyse specific dramatic texts, I selectively highlight aspects of other plays in order to support my argument about the way in which British and American playwrights comment on each conflict.

In addition to exploring social, political, and cultural contexts of the War on Terror, to which contemporary British and American plays respond, I suggest that the contribution of my thesis to the field of theatre studies relies on my focus on the revival of political theatre, which, firstly, adopts the forms of documentary drama. Secondly, dissimilar to the agitprop political theatre, plays studied within my thesis tend to raise questions about the disastrous aftermath of the conflicts rather than attacking, or defending, a specific ideology. In 2009, while I was developing the topic of my thesis, Alison Forsyth and Chris Megson declared: 'The upsurge in fact-based and verbatim theatre in recent years has attracted a

voluminous amount of coverage in the arts pages of newspapers and websites but scholarly engagement has, to date, been limited' (Forsyth 2009, 1). Moreover, and most importantly, as a result of the emergence of the 2011 revolution in Egypt, the last three years has noticeably witnessed Egyptian practitioners' increasing preference of utilising documentary theatre in order to address political matters, which, because of the police state, used to be concealed behind symbolic plots. As a playwright and a potential academic, I hope that what I have learned from this research enable me to be a tiny part of creating free Egyptian theatre as well as to study this emerging documentary drama in Egypt.

Chapter One

Contextual frames of dispute: Dominating misapprehensions within contradictory discourses

This chapter explores some of the most decisive aspects of the complicated historical, geo-political and socio-cultural circumstances, within which the ongoing conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine were shaped. This chapter does not claim or intend to be a comprehensive study of the contextual frames of the conflicts, which needs profound and huge interdisciplinary research, including history, politics, and sociology. The rationale of investigating selected specific watersheds in the prolonged confrontations is to elucidate the reading of contemporary British and American plays, in which different phases of the conflicts are portrayed. Therefore, the main criterion that regulates the content of this chapter is its linkage with specific matters raised within the plays studied in this thesis.

The roads to 9/11: Palestine, dictatorship, and colonialism

a. Introduction

I trace the examples of the incidents of targeting the US by Arabic and Islamist violent groups back to the early 1970s. Leo Daugherty recalls: ‘On March 1, 1973, a group of armed terrorists belonging to the Black September Organization conducted an armed attack on the Saudi Arabian Embassy [in Khartoum] and abducted the U.S. ambassador and the former U.S. charge d’affaires’ (Daugherty 202). The Black September Organization (BSO) was a Palestinian group without any Islamic orientation; it was described by George Headlam as a militant group, which was founded in 1971 as a branch of the PLO [Palestinian Liberation Organisation]. To draw the international community’s attention to the rights of the Palestinian people, Headlam argues, the BSO committed several violent operations, including the murder of eleven Israeli athletes during the Olympic Games in Munich in 1972 (Headlam 54-5).¹⁶

¹⁶ The PLO (منظمة التحرير الفلسطينية) was established in 1964. Regardless of the degree of recognition by the international community, the PLO has acted as the official Palestinian authority. Yasser Arafat was the leader of the PLO from 1969 to 2004.

The main feature that distinguishes the violent operations of the BSO from the style of Hamas, as a Palestinian Islamist group, is the fact that the members of the BSO never committed suicide bombings. I highlight such an observation in order to realise that imposing nationalistic conflict within a religious context not only enabled the discourse of violent groups to include more justifications of their operations, but it also offered an allegedly Islamic permission for new methods of violence.¹⁷

In Beirut, hundreds of American soldiers and civilians were killed in two separate operations, which targeted the US embassy and the Marine Barracks on 18 April and 23 October 1983, respectively. In the 1990s, several attacks targeted many American interests in different countries, such as the residence of the American soldiers in Saudi Arabia on 25 June 1996 and the US embassies in both Tanzania and Kenya on 7 August 1998. Radical Islamists proved their ability to reach targets on American soil on 26 February 1993, when an explosion at the World Trade Center (WTC) wounded thousands and killed six civilians, including a pregnant woman.

Similar to the attacks of 9/11, these limited examples of earlier incidents of violence against American soldiers and civilians, whether by Arabic and/or Islamist groups, cannot be understood without exploring the historical circumstances within which the reasons for the ongoing conflicts are rooted. I establish my reading of these intersecting contexts on two correlative propositions. Firstly, I argue that what is claimed by the militant Islamist groups as an international holy war against the alleged Christian-Zionist conspiracy seems to be motivated by nationalist, political, and/or personal interests of the leaders of these groups. In other words, religion is exploited by these leaders to recruit, mobilise, and convince new members to execute violent operations, including suicide attacks. In this respect, I avoid the simplistic reading of the aftermath of both the terror and the war(s) against it as a religious conflict or a confrontation between cultures.¹⁸

The awareness of both religious and cultural differences, and sometimes contradictions, is necessary to analyse the war of words that accompanies military conflicts, including the discourses of the terrorists, Western politicians, and the media coverage of the

¹⁷ In Arabic the word Hamas (حماس), which literally means enthusiasm, is the initial letters of the Islamic Resistance Movement (حركة المقاومة الإسلامية).

¹⁸ While radical Islamists, including both nonviolent and militant groups warn about the threat of an American-led Christian-Jewish alliance, a large sector of intellectuals in both Arabic and Muslim countries insists that a new wave of the Western colonialism, which is led by the US, is accompanied, or even dominated by, the Western objective of the so-called 'cultural invasion'. For more information, see Abaza (174–81), Dessouki (48–9), and Hollander (xxxviii).

events, whether in Arabic or English. However, I insist that the causes for the militant Islamist violence and the American-led international war against it are essentially political rather than religious or cultural. Olivier Roy profoundly analyses the rationale of mingling religion and nationalist claims by terrorist groups. Roy claims:

The ‘nationalisation’ of Islamist movements is, incidentally, congruent with general phenomenon: Islam as such is never a dominant strategic factor. The religious dimension always contributes to more basic ethnic or national factors, even if it provides afterwards a discourse of legitimisation and mobilisation. (Roy 2004, 70)

On the grounds of my understanding of Roy’s comment, Bin Laden exploited nationalist disputes and political confrontations, such as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the American-led UN sanctions on Iraq, to justify al-Qaeda’s international holy war—within which all Muslims must fight—against the allegedly united forces of Jews, Crusaders, and infidels. Even the Palestinian-Israeli dispute, which the Arabic media used to describe as the Arabic-Israeli conflict until the middle of the 1970s, was gradually turned into a Muslim-Jewish religious war according to Hamas and the vast majority of its supporters.¹⁹

Through this intersecting process of ‘legitimisation and mobilisation’ militant Islamist leaders underscore one of the most dominating thoughts in the minds of a large sector of Arabic and Muslim populations, which is the belief that the policies of the US in the Middle East exclusively seek to protect Israel by harming the latter’s Arabic and Muslim neighbouring countries. Most political and artistic narratives in Arabic are haunted by the idea that the US has to be blamed for any Israeli action. Such an obsession can be understood partly due to the US political, military and financial support for Israel, and partly because it is much easier to convince yourself that your enemy cannot be as strong as it is without the help of a third party. Both possibilities might explain why both nationalist and Islamist violent groups have proven to be successful in recruiting successive waves of fighters against the US.²⁰

¹⁹ In Arabic the word al-Qaeda (القاعدة) has two meanings: the base or the rule.

²⁰ For more information about the history of blaming the US for Israeli actions by Arabic leaders and media since the 1940s, see Gardner (2009, 59), and Rubin (2005, 155-86). One of the paradoxes of the so-called Arab Spring is that both pro- and anti-revolution powers in different Arabic countries accuse each other of serving an American-Israeli conspiracy. For more information, see Selim (97-110), and Khatib (69). For scholarly explorations of the linkage between these uprisings and the US policies and interests in the region, see the studies of Pollack, Hudson, Rabi, and Gilboa.

My second proposition is that acts of international terror since the middle of the 1990s are rooted in regional conflicts in the Middle East as well as internal political problems in some of Muslim and Arabic countries. At the heart of this polemic reality, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict—as a nationalistic matter—occupied a core position from early on in the confrontation between Muslim and Arabic countries with the West in general, and with the US in particular. This conflict has been exploited by some Arabic and Muslim countries and movements, including nationalist and religious, nonviolent and terrorist groups, to achieve their political goals. These goals in turn are sometimes mixed with personal agendas of the leaders of these countries and groups.

To support my claim I start by giving an example of the political competition between Egypt and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, both of which influenced the political scene in the Middle East at many decisive moments since the 1950s. In addition, the two countries were the cradle for a large number of radical Islamists, who shaped the core of both nonviolent and militant movements. Many members of the latter became the planners or fighters of the international holy war against the alleged American-led Christian-Jewish alliance. Not only do the first and second leaders of al-Qaeda – Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri – point to a long history of radical Islamism in Saudi Arabia and Egypt respectively, but their unity is also the product of political mistakes made by successive regimes of the two countries.

b. The Saudi-Egyptian cold war: pan-Islamism versus pan-Arabism

Established in Egypt in 1928, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) is a good example of what can be called moderate political Islam, especially in comparison with other groups, most of which adopted some aspects of the framework of the MB, whether in Egypt or Arabic and Muslim countries. Mandaville describes the MB as ‘the prototypical modern Islamist movement and model for many subsequent groups around the Muslim world’ (Mandaville 2007, 3). However, there are usually marginal or essential differences between these ‘subsequent groups’ and the original paradigm manifested by the MB. The essential aspect of the Egyptian movement, which has enabled it to increase its popularity in Egypt since the 1970s is its charitable services, especially in the most marginalised villages and the slums around Egyptian big cities. Mandaville suggests that ‘we might want to wonder about correlations between increased urban poverty in Muslim-majority countries and the strength of Islamist social influence and mobilizing potential (Mandaville 2007, 349). This

observation does not mean that either the members or supporters of the MB belong to an impoverished population, but it suggests the way in which the group introduced itself as an alternative to the state.²¹

I highlight this charitable aspect in order to define one of the reasons for the popularity of Hamas amongst the Palestinians, as the group was essentially founded by the branch of the MB in Gaza. Roy explains: ‘The Palestinian MB, active mostly in the Gaza strip, founded the organization Hamas in 1987, directed by Sheikh Yasin; it immediately contested the legitimacy of the PLO, whose secular and nationalist ideology (there are many Palestinian Christians) is considered anti-Islamic’ (Roy1994, 110-1). Thus, in the footsteps of its Egyptian prototype, the MB in Palestine improved its status by offering charitable services to the deprived population of Gaza. Moreover, similar to Egypt, the Palestinian MB was appreciated by the Palestinians in comparison with the corruption of the PLO.²²

Before I trace the role of the Saudi-Egyptian competition in the birth and expanse of militant Islamism, it seems important to ask: why would Israel accept the existence of the MB in Gaza in the first place? Gilles Kepel answers:

In Palestine itself, the Muslim Brothers, which had been in existence for much longer than the PLO, were tolerated by the Israelis because the Brothers’ concerns were mainly charitable and pious. The Jewish state saw them as a nonpolitical outlet for the frustrations of the occupied Palestinian people and an inoffensive substitute for the militant nationalism of the PLO. (Kepel 2006, 122)

On one hand, Hamas seemed to inherit, and build on the Palestinians’ appreciation of the civil services of the MB, which partly explains the group’s victory in the 2006 parliamentary elections against the PLO. On the other hand, it seems that successive Israeli governments did not expect, or perhaps underestimated, the possibility of the ‘nonpolitical’

²¹ While I limitedly focus on specific aspects of the MB, a detailed record and analysis of the establishment and growth of the movement and different radical Islamist movements in Egypt can be found in Wickham, Kepel (2005), and Zollne. For detailed discussions about the expansion of the MB in Europe, see the studies of Marécha, and Meijer. In Rubin (2010), several scholars explore the MB’s presence in a large number of countries in the Middle East, Europe and North America.

²² For information about the financial corruption and nepotism within the PLO, see Shannon (2012), and Foreign Affairs Committee (2006, 159–60). For more information about the economic and political corruptions in Egypt since the 1970s, see the studies of Ghannam, Amin, and Blaydes. In Sonbol, corruption is claimed as a constant aspect of the rule of Egyptian military officers since 1954.

MB, not only to become a political group in 1987, but also to extend its activities to include violent operations against Israel. I utilise Kepel's precise explanation of the reasons for Israel's acceptance of—not the support for—the Palestinian MB, not Hamas, in order to contradict the controversial claim that Israel intentionally and secretly contributed to creating Hamas as a political opponent to the PLO.²³

After an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate the Egyptian President Gamal Abd el-Nasser (Nasser) in October 1954, six members of the MB were executed. Subsequently, thousands were imprisoned and brutally oppressed until the end of Nasser's era in 1970.²⁴ Meanwhile, a large number of the members escaped to Saudi Arabia. In addition to the Saudi Kings' confrontation with the 1952 Revolution, which ended the monarchy in Egypt, the Saudi regime opposed Nasser's ambition to achieve the so-called pan-Arabism, of which the Egyptian President was seen as the leader by a large sector of Arabic populations. While the two regimes were fighting their cold war, the Egyptian MB had the chance to ally with Wahhabism, the extremely conservative Saudi sect. According to Roy, Wahhabism is 'the most opposed to Shiism, and vice versa' (Roy 1994, 218). Roy's observation is crucial in explaining the role of this sectarian tension in two of the fiercest regional conflicts: the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990) and the Iranian-Iraqi War (1980–1988).²⁵

In contrast to Nasser, his successor Anwar el-Sadat had a good relationship with the Saudi's regime. The latter vitally utilised its oil to support the 1973 War against Israel. In addition, el-Sadat allowed the Egyptian Islamists, including the MB to increase their presence in the Egyptian universities and media in order to tackle the nostalgia for Nasser's socialism and charisma. Both attributes respectively seemed to challenge el-Sadat's political and personal image, especially before 1973. A turning point in the history of the region was el-Sadat's visit to the Knesset in 1977, which led first to the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty in 1979. Secondly, after nearly fifteen years of Egypt's political, economic

²³ Examples of this journalistic rather than academic argument can be found in Dreyfuss (191), and O'Neill (2007, 18).

²⁴ The incident is attributed to the MB by many scholars such as Blackwell (415), and Soage (41), while Kepel (2005 23-4) mentions that the MB accused the regime of arranging a fake attempt to assassinate Nasser in order to get rid of the movement.

²⁵ For discussions about the so-called Saudi-Egyptian cold war, see Lacroix (322), and Hegghammer (17). For more information about Wahhabism since its establishment in the eighteenth century, including its later relationship with the MB, see the studies of Commins and DeLong-Bas. A detailed record of the war between Iraq and Iran can be found in Hiro, while more academic analysis is introduced in Johnson (2011). For more information about the Lebanese Civil War, see Rubin 2009, and Haugbolle.

and military alliance with the former Soviet Union, the American-Egyptian relationship witnessed an unprecedented boost. The Soviet diplomat and scholar Viktor Israelyan argues: Sadat's growing contacts with the Americans, only some of which were known to Moscow, proved that Egypt had embarked on an entirely new foreign policy, which was pro-American and anti-Soviet' (Israelyan 214). Thus, the Russians lost a decisive battle of the Cold War, which was soon-to-be succeeded by one of the most significant chapters of the conflict between the two super powers in the second half of the twentieth century: Afghanistan.²⁶

A few months prior to the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty, not only was el-Sadat called a traitor by most Arabic leaders, but the latter also imposed economic sanctions on Egypt. Zachary Selden claims:

The Arab League, with the exception of Morocco, Sudan, [Somalia, Djibouti,] and Oman, threatened to impose a complete boycott on trade and aid with Egypt beginning in March 1978. In response, the U.S. offered \$4.8 billion in additional aid to Egypt. The Arab League implemented somewhat less stringent sanctions, and at [the] Saudi Arabia's request, did not take retaliatory measures against the U.S. (Selden 1999, 130)

I mention this incident for two reasons. Firstly, as Zachary's comment suggests, the Saudi regime was eager not to disturb its strategic relationship with the US, even for the so-called Palestinian struggle, which is declared as one of the central causes of the Saudi pan-Islamism. Secondly, and most importantly, the most insistent call for these sanctions on Egypt was from Saddam Hussein, who became the President of Iraq in July 1979. In the footsteps of Saddam, the PLO 'called for economic sanctions against the United States as well as against Egypt' (Safran 279). Since then, the Iraqi president protected his dictatorships and justified many of his humanitarian crimes in the name of being the defender of Palestine. Arafat in turn seemed to give Saddam unconditional support, sometimes at the expense of the credibility of the Palestinian cause.

²⁶ For more information about el-Sadat's utilisation of Islamists to support his political objectives, see Dalacoura (112–13), Baker (1990, 243–70), and Ismail (615–6). Claims about el-Sadat's awareness of the difficulty of competing with the superior image of his precursor can be found in Dawisha (29–2), and Ajami (108–9). For the effect of the Egyptian foreign policy during the era of Nasser and el-Sadat on the Cold War, see Saull (75–6), and Boyle (2008).

While the American aids overpowered the Arabic sanctions, el-Sadat was being praised by the Egyptian media as ‘the hero of war and peace’.²⁷ However, the Egyptian President was considered as an enemy of Islam by the newly founded extremist groups such as al-Jama’a al-Islameia (Islamic Society) and Tanzim al-Jihad (The Jihad Organisation). Led by Shukri Mustafa, a former member of the MB who was released from the prison in 1971, the Islamic Society was commonly named al-Takfir wal-Hijra whose meaning in Arabic suggests that the members of the group assume that most Egyptian Muslims are sinful and must be considered apostate. The group’s last and most brutal operation was the murdering of Sheikh el-Dhahabi, one of the moderate religious men, who the group kidnapped from his house.²⁸

The most striking feature of this operation is highlighted by Kepel when he claims that, because ‘Shukri's credibility within the group was threatened’, the leader of the group ‘decided that some master stroke was needed to restore his authority, some direct challenge to the state’ (Kepel 2005, 97). In this respect, if the boom in the violence of radical Islamism in the 1970s partly resulted from el-Sadat’s political and personal interests, the religious objectives declared by some of these violent groups are mixed with their leaders’ ambition to obtain power.

With a more disciplined framework than the Islamic Society, the Jihad Organisation, whose members included al-Zawahiri, did not antagonise the entire society. Instead, the militant group limited its goal to the overthrow of el-Sadat. According to the Egyptian jihad, although el-Sadat is a Muslim ruler, his friendship with Israel not only turns him into a faithless ruler, but the Egyptian President also becomes as dangerous for Islam as his Jewish ally. The significance of this interpretation of the notion of jihad by the Egyptian terrorists in the 1970s is its suggestion that even Muslims can be seen as foes of Islam by radical Islamists. Such an observation is mentioned by many scholars in the 2000s in order to differentiate Islam from the Islamic extremism in general and from the militant Islamism in particular. For instance, Adam Silverstein argues that ‘some extremists view all non-Muslims, and even those Muslims who disagree with them on points of theology or law, as infidels who must be defeated (Silverstein 73). With a cultural approach to explain

²⁷ See Moeller (200), and Meital (64).

²⁸ For references of Shukri Mustafa’s initial affiliation with the MB, see Khatib (211), and Chasdi (168). The incident of el-Dhahabi is mentioned in Dalacoura (113). Both Kepel (2005, 70), and Kenney (130–1) insist that the brutality of the incident was shockingly conceived by the vast majority of Egyptians as an anti-Islam act.

the way in which many Muslims are considered against their religion by radical Islamists, Gow claims that the latter adhere to ‘a narrow view of Islam, politics, and the world, in which modernity is a corrupting force and in which the representatives of modernity – including Muslims contaminated by it – are enemies’ (Gow 11). In this respect, I can understand, but indeed never justify, how al-Qaeda’s leaders dared to claim that they brutally kill non-Muslim innocents in the name of jihad.

Moreover, and most importantly, claiming the Palestinian matter as a major reason for the militant jihad was a remarkable turning point after two decades, within which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was essentially described as an Arabic nationalist struggle. In Arabic, the word Jihad (جهاد) means: suffering, exerting maximum effort, and resisting. In its religious context, while jihad implies that Muslims must resist their evil desires, which contradict the orders of God, the direct meaning of the word is: defending religion, or fighting against the enemies of Islam. Later, jihad became relevant to defending one’s own country against occupiers. For instance, in the public speeches of Nasser and el-Sadat, especially before 1973, the word jihad is utilized to describe the struggle of the Arabs, not Muslims, against the British, Israeli, and French occupations of Egypt, Palestine, and Algeria, respectively.²⁹

Egyptian politicians and clerics have mentioned the religious value of Jerusalem (al-Quds) since 1948. However, during the heyday of pan-Arabism (1954–1974), al-Quds’ religious significance was mostly highlighted in order to support the mainly nationalistic cause rather than to indicate a Muslim-Jewish religious conflict.³⁰ In contrast to Egypt, the Saudi regime, which is the fierce enemy of pan-Arabism, insisted on the religious aspect of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. Hegghammer explains:

The Saudi support for the Palestinian resistance was consistently justified and rationalized with reference to religion, and the government sought the approval of senior religious scholars for its policies. [...] On 3 December 1968, the [Saudi Great] Mufti issued a fatwa authorizing ‘the use of part of the *zakah*, [the Islamic equivalent of the taxes on wealth] to purchase weapons for the

²⁹ For discussions about the linguistic and religious meanings of jihad, see Mandaville (2007, 49-50), Silverstein (71–75), Ramadan (243), and Kepel (2006, iv). For examples of the speeches of the two Egyptian presidents in Arabic, see Abd el-Nasser and El-Sadat, respectively.

³⁰ There are only Two Holy Sanctuaries located in Saudi Arabia, in Mecca and Medina. Both Mosques have all Muslims’ ultimate respect as the most sacred sites. Nevertheless, some Muslim clerics imprecisely and literally describe al-Masjid al-Aqsa (al-Aqsa Mosque) in al-Quds as the *third* of the *Two* Holy Sanctuaries.

fida'in [fighters for freedom] who are fighting the Jewish enemies of God'. (Hegghammer 20)

While the gerund of the Arabic word *fida'in* or *fida'yeen* is *fidaa'* (فداء), which means sacrifice, *fida'yeen* was used as a description of commando-like Egyptian guerrillas who fought against the British occupation without any hint of suicide tactics. In this respect, the word describes the fighters for freedom, who neither belong to a regular army nor fear risking their lives.

Recently, the phrase sacrificing operation (عمليات فدائية) has been utilised by some Arabic media in order to avoid using more decisive expressions such as suicidal (إنتحارى), martyr (إستشهادى/ شهيد), or terrorist (إرهابى), each of which suggests a different degree of either acceptance or disapproval of any violent operation within which the attacker loses his/her life. In some cases, the Arabic media utilises more neutral words such as explosive or blasting attacks. Examples of such an elusive use of language by the Arabic media are too many to be mentioned here. For instance, while the official Arabic site of al-Jazeera describes the executors of suicideattacks on Israeli soldiers and civilians as *fida'yeen*, many articles on the English site of the Qatari channel use the phrase 'Palestinian suicide bombings'.³¹

While it is hard to decide what the Saudi Mufti meant by '*fida'in*', his fatwa extends the call for supporting the Palestinians, as a religious obligation, beyond humanitarian aid to include weapons. Both types of support might have been introduced by Saudi Arabia prior to the Mufti's decree, whether for the PLO or other Palestinian militant groups. Nevertheless, the most striking feature of the fatwa is that it is based on the assumption that the Jews are the 'enemy of God', which suggests that Israeli civilians, not only soldiers, are legitimate targets for the '*fida'in*'. Put differently, this fatwa was an early permission for later Saudi regimes to finance Hamas whose 'charity associations were bulging with petrodollars to spread throughout Gaza and the West Bank' (Kepel 2004, 25), when Hamas' militant branch – the Brigades of Ezze-Deen al-Qassam – started to attack both Israeli soldiers and civilians in the 1990s.

Before I move to the second phase of the road to 9/11 through the political conflicts within and between Arabic and Muslim countries, it seems important to highlight the most

³¹ For more information, cf. 'Qa'ema bel-'Amleiat al-Feda'ya al-Phalastineia', Falk, and 'Israel Says Bus Blast was "Terrorist Attack"'.

significant consequence of the emerging Saudi project of pan-Islamism, which is turning the nationalistic Palestinian struggle to a religious war against Israel. Hamas was classified as a terrorist group by the US and the European Union in August and September 2003 respectively. A few months after the American-led coalition's invasion of Iraq, speeches by members of Hamas condemned what they called an international hypocrisy that allows a Christian-Jewish coalition to kill people in three Muslim countries. So far, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict seemed to be the major cause of Islamist terrorism and, consequently, the War on Terror. Now, the conflict becomes part of both.³²

In this respect, Hamas' attacks on Israeli soldiers and civilians enabled Israeli officials to identify with the American administration as victims of, and fighters against, terrorism. Kepel explains:

Given Sharon's insistence that Arafat and bin Laden must be treated as equals, each suicide attack [against Israel] has reinforced Washington's support of Tel Aviv, and increasingly united the two capitals in their common "war on terror". That, in turn, has assured Sharon of the benign neglect of George W. Bush while Tsahal (the Israeli Defence Forces) reoccupies Palestinian territory, destroys its infrastructure and plunges its population into misery. (Kepel 2006, xiii)

As Kepel's statement suggests, the Israeli Prime Minister insisted on the resemblance between Arafat, not Hamas, and Bin Laden, which can be understood on the grounds of Israel's claims that the leader of the PLO is responsible for all of his compatriot groups, including violent movements. Therefore, when Slavoj Žižek refers to the similarity that enabled the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to be part of the US War on Terror, he mentions the PLO rather than Hamas. Žižek explains:

[F]or the US and Israeli hawks, the 'war on terrorism' is the fundamental reference, and Israel's fight against the PLO is simply a subchapter in this struggle; [...] for the Arabs, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the fundamental reference and the September 11 events are ultimately rooted in the injustice perpetrated by Israel and the USA against the Palestinians. (Žižek 127-28)

³² For more details about the two decisions and the comments of Hamas' leaders, see the articles of Bruni and La Guardia.

What Žižek suggests as a kind of analogy between the US and Israel, in terms of their dispute with the Taliban and Hamas respectively, can be portrayed by Hans Hansen's model of 'metaphorical parallelism'.³³

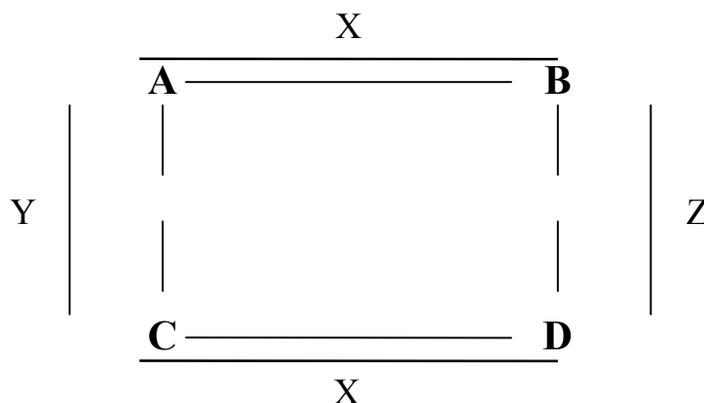


Figure (1)

Hans Hansen's Metaphorical parallelism

According to Hansen, metaphorical parallelism occurs when the relationship between two elements, like (A) and (B) in Figure (1), becomes a metaphor of another relationship like (C) and (D). Whether (A-B) is a metaphor of (C-D) or vice versa, the two relationships must share a similar quality, which is (X). In addition, each element shares a specific aspect with the corresponding element in the other relationship. In the Figure, (Y) is the common feature of both (A) and (C), while (Z) is the shared trait between (B) and (D) (Hansen 7-8). Realising such resemblances is important to reveal the repetition of particular features within each conflict. In addition, stressing the likeness between specific aspects of the three conflicts exposes the way in which they intersect and interact, which is the case in the alleged similarity between the War on Terror and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Figure (2) illustrates the alleged similarity between (Israel) and (the US) in terms of being victims of terror. While the analogy (al-Qaeda – Hamas) is based on their sharing of several attributes, such as belonging to fundamentalist Islam and killing civilians, and most importantly being agitated by hatred, both the US and Israel are liberal, democratic countries whose innocent citizens have been attacked by radical Islamists.

³³ Hansen's model is based on Charles Sanders Peirce's explanation of the double representative levels of metaphor.

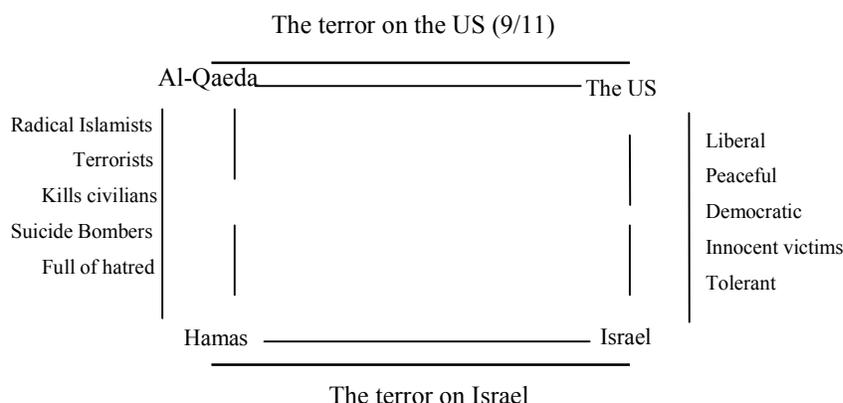


Figure (2)
The War on Terror in Palestine

Although Figure (2) does not distinguish the multi-national structure and targets of al-Qaeda from the nationalist nature of Hamas, it is important to consider the support of both Saudi Arabia and Iran for the Palestinian movement.³⁴

Turning the nationalistic resistance into an Islamic jihad, including suicide bombings, had disastrous effects on the Palestinian cause. Kepel declares:

For the Palestinians, confusing a national struggle and the kind of terrorism embodied by suicide attackers has proved to be a political disaster in both the eyes of the world, and of the intellectuals and civilians in the West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem who have called for their immediate halt. (Kepel 2006, xiii)

I use Kepel's observation, along with my earlier exploration of the Nasserist secular conception of the dispute as an Arabic-Israeli conflict, in order to discuss Jacques Derrida's 2001 claim that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a 'confrontation between two groups with a strong religious identification' (Derrida 117-18). In general, each side of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict usually conflates the other's ethnic, nationalistic and—most regularly—religious facets of identity according to the situation. Distinguishing between these complicated elements of identity seems to be difficult, if not impossible.

On one hand, although Israel was established as a home for Jews, the bulk of Israeli officials' discourse since the 1950s has mainly identified with Western democratic

³⁴ References of Iran's support for Hamas can be found in Levitt (171-8), and Axworthy (358).

countries in contrast to the surrounding Arabic dictatorships. However, many Israeli settlers insist on the religious nature of Israel as a Jewish state. Such an insistence can be traced back to the 1970s, Kepel argues:

Gush Emunim (The Bloc of the Faithful), [was] a political-religious movement born in the aftermath of the Arab-Israeli war of October 1973', which ended in a psychological defeat for the Jewish state. [...] It became the self-proclaimed herald of the re-Judaization of Israel, over against a state and a society culturally dominated by a secular and quasi-socialist conception of Zionism. (Kepel 1994, 140)

The most striking feature of Kepel's statement is that such religious movements are opposed by both the Israeli government and the vast majority of Israeli populations. Nevertheless, it is hard to ignore the fact that Israel gave its raids in Gaza religious names, which are borrowed from the Old Testament, such as Operation Cast Lead in December 2008 and Operation Pillar of Cloud in November 2012.

On the other hand, while turning the Palestinian resistance into an Islamic jihad is usually attributed to the establishment of Hamas, Arabic countries' support for the PLO on the grounds of the idea of pan-Islamism can be traced back to the 1960s. In addition, denouncing the Jews as a race and a religious group gradually became a common feature of the sermons of Muslim clerics in Arabic countries, especially after 1967. In this context, while Egyptian jihadists' dream of an Islamic, anti-Israel rule of Egypt seemed to be more plausible after the 1979 Revolution in Iran, the assassination of el-Sadat by a group of military officials of jihadists in October 1981 was encouraged by the description of the Jews as the 'enemy of God'. Moreover, when the Egyptian President hosted the toppled Shah of Iran, who was replaced by the radical religious and political leader Ayatollah al-Khomeini identified el-Sadat with the Shah, as both are allies with the US and Israel, and allegedly enemies of Islam. Later, a street in Tehran was named after one of the assassins of the Egyptian President, Khalid el-Eslambolly.³⁵

³⁵ In many Arabic and Muslim countries, including Egypt, the murder of el-Sadate was praised by Communists and Christians, who were provoked by al-Sadat's initial alliance with Islamists. For more information, see Kifner A1, McDermott (59), Scott (64–91), and O'Mahony (72–3). For discussions about the Iranian Islamic regime's relationship with Egypt, including the former's reaction to the assassination of el-Sadat, see Rubin (2014, 47-8), Habeeb (6-7), and Hunter (202).

In addition to increasing the number of anti-Israel regimes in the Middle East, one of the significant consequences of the Revolution in Iran was the unity of the three authoritarian rulers of Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Egypt against the revolutionary dictatorship in Iran. Such a situation led to several violent confrontations within the region, wherein both American and Israeli interests intersected.

c. The Saudi-Iranian cold war: Sunni or Shii pan-Islamism?

In addition to representing the possibility of an Islamic revolution in general, the Iranian leaders attempted to revolutionise the politically oppressed Shii sectors in different Arabic countries. Gary Sick claims that '[t]he earliest targets of attention by the revolutionaries were their brethren among the disadvantaged Shi'i populations of Iraq, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Lebanon (Sick 356). For the Saudi regime, Roy explains, 'The Iranian revolution of 1979 immediately contested the very legitimacy of the Saudi dynasty ("There is no king in Islam" said the slogans). [...] Iran became the main adversary, but this antagonism was translated in religious terms: true Islam versus Shiite heresy' (Roy 1994, 116).³⁶

This complicated Sunni-Shii, Arabic-Persian dispute was the background of the attacks of 1983 on the American embassy and the marine barracks in Beirut, wherein the Iranian-Saudi competition over the political leadership of the region interacted with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Lebanese Civil War, and the Iranian-Iraqi War. The two violent operations against the US in Beirut were preceded by the Israeli invasion of Lebanon on 6 June 1982. David Wills argues: 'Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon was looking for a reason to invade Lebanon and "clean out" the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO); he got it on June 3, 1982 when Palestinian gunmen attempted to assassinate the Israeli ambassador to Great Britain, Shlomo Argov' (Wills 49).³⁷

Whether the Israeli intervention in Lebanon was previously determined, the presence of the PLO in Lebanon gave Israel a good excuse to attack. However, the Israeli

³⁶ For more information about the Shii populations in the countries of the region and their practice of politics, see Nafissi. Claims about the political marginalisation of the Shii relative majority in Lebanon and Iraq in the 1980s and 1990s can be found in Roy (1994, 124) and Shanahan. The Iranian-Saudi political rivalry since 1979 is soundly analysed in Fürtig.

³⁷ Although many scholars argue that the failed assassination was operated by Abu Nidal Organisation (ANO), whose leader dismissed the PLO, some Israeli officials usually accuse the leader of the PLO of being a supporter for any violent operations by Palestinians. For more information about the ANO and the exchanged accusations between Arafat and the Israeli officials regarding the support for Abu Nidal, see Murphy (27–8), and White (219).

response extended beyond the retribution for a failed attempt to kill an Israeli official. As Wills describes:

Within a matter of days, the IDF [Israel Defence Forces] was at the outskirts of Beirut, pounding away at suspected PLO strongholds with artillery and airstrikes. [...] The carnage was catastrophic, and the media quickly broadcast pictures of the siege, including reports of numerous civilian casualties, to the rest of the world. In Washington, President Reagan³⁸ saw the pictures and was appalled. [...] Reagan phoned the Israeli prime minister and demanded the shelling be stopped. (Wills 49-50)

The most striking point in Wills' observation is the fact that Reagan obliged the Israeli government to stop its excessive use of power, at least temporarily. However, when the US sent its soldiers to Lebanon as part of a multinational peacekeeping force, the Israeli invasion was turned into an occupation, for which Hezbollah declared its attack on American soldiers and civilians as a punishment.³⁹

With a nationalist orientation, Hezbollah declared its responsibility for the bombing of the embassy only as retaliation for the American support for Israel, which enabled the latter to occupy Lebanon. Later, it was proven that Hezbollah was the mastermind behind the killing of the US marines. Declared as revenge for the US supporting Iraq in its war against Iran, the attack on the marines' barracks was initially claimed by the Islamic Jihad Organization. Ihsan Hijazi, the correspondent of the *New York Times* in Lebanon argues: 'The Islamic Jihad Organization, which took responsibility for today's bombing of the United States Embassy here, is believed to be an underground group associated with Moslem Shiite fundamentalists in Lebanon who support the Iranian leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini' (Hijazi A12). Later, it was revealed that the Islamic Jihad Organization was 'founded by members of Hizb Allah in 1982 and used by Hizb Allah for cover operations' (Esposito 2003, 147). Hezbollah's manoeuvre exemplifies the intersections between nationalist and religious reasons for violence, both of which demonstrate political interests. Despite Hezbollah's major quest to free Lebanon, its structure is intrinsically religious because the group is 'mainly constructed of the large Shii

³⁸ Ronald Reagan was the American President from 1981 to 1989.

³⁹ The Arabic phrase (حزب الله), which is sometimes written as Hizb Allah or Hizbullah, literally means the party of God. However, by considering the interpretation of the expression within the Holy Qur'an, it more precisely describes God's followers or God's worshippers.

clans of the Bekaa Valley and Shii refugees forced by civil war into the slums of Southern Beirut' (Esposito 2003, 115). In addition, Hezbollah applies the Shii rule of Wilayat al-Faqih (ولاية الفقيه), according to which the political leader of the group must be or consult the higher cleric whose religious authority is based on divine superiority.⁴⁰

However, Hezbollah's contribution to Iran's revenge for the American administration's support for Iraq cannot be reduced to a religious collusion. Such an alliance is based, instead, on political interests, whose influence on Hezbollah's decisions can be realised in the context of The Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990). Although Esposito claims that the members of Hezbollah 'strongly identify with the Palestinians and deeply resent Israel' (Esposito 2003, 115), the movement allied with the Lebanese Phalange, the Christian party which committed one of the most brutal crimes against Palestinian refugee camps in September 1982. Known as the massacre of Sabra and Shatila, the carnage was encouraged by Israel. Mark Ensalaco argues:

No one knows with certainty the number of Palestinians slaughtered in Sabra and Shatila, but it was no fewer than 700 and perhaps three times that many. Israel's complicity in the massacres is beyond doubt. Israeli soldiers transported the Phalangist militiamen to Sabra and Shatila, and they were present just outside the camps throughout the massacre. (Ensalaco138)

While there is not enough evidence to prove Hezbollah's direct participation in the attack, the Shii movement's grouping with the Phalange Party continued.⁴¹

Along with Iran's support for Hezbollah, the latter's alliance with the Phalange seemed necessary to fight several Lebanese Sunni groups, which were supported by some Arabic countries, especially Saudi Arabia. The intervention of the Saudi Kingdom in Lebanon can be traced back to the 1950s. Frederic Wehrey, Theodore W. Karasik, Alireza Nader, Jeremy Ghez, Lydia Hansell, and Robert A. Guffey claims that the Saudi regime 'has long seen Lebanon as a proxy arena to outmaneuver its regional competitors, illustrated by its support in the 1950s and 60s for Lebanese opponents of Nasserism such as

⁴⁰ For information about Hezbollah's adherence to Wilayat al-Faqih, see Alagha (248–50), and Sivan (66–7). In Roy (2004, 60), Kepel (2006, 392), and Dekmejian (65), Hezbollah is respectively described as an 'Islamist movement', 'Islamic party', and 'Islamist group'.

⁴¹ In Axworthy (222), there is a reference to the arrival of Iranian soldiers to Lebanon few days after the Israeli invasion. Some of these fighters stayed in Lebanon after the massacre in order to train the members of Hezbollah. Nevertheless, Axworthy does not assert the participation of the Iranian soldiers or Hezbollah in killing the Palestinians in Sabra and Shatila.

Pierre Gemayyel and Kamil Sham'un' (Wehrey et al. 78). As this observation suggests, the Sunni Kings allied with Christian Lebanese politicians in order to tackle what William Harris describes as 'the high tide of Nasserism' (Harris 2012, 214).

The Saudi-Iranian proxy war in Lebanon turned into one of the bloodiest chapters of the history of the region when Iraq—backed by Arabic financial and military support—utilised American weapons to attack Iran on the latter's soil. With Saddam's own fears from the encouraging influence of the Iranian revolution on the Shii populations in Iraq, the new dictator sought to achieve several goals. Kepel argues:

The threat of Persian nationalism served as an excuse for Saddam Hussein's attack against the Islamic Republic [of Iran] in September 1980. [...] At the same time, by militarizing his own society, he hoped to consolidate his recently won power while preventing Iraq's narrow majority of Shiites from mobilizing against his regime, as the Iranian Shiites had done against the shah. (Kepel 2006, 120)

While the US exploited the political goals of Arabic regimes in order to deter the emerging Islamic foe in Iran, Saddam managed to create his fake image as a nationalist and Sunni hero. Later, the Iraqi tyrant directed his power to kill his people. Furthermore, not only did Iraq invade Kuwait, but Saddam also threatened Saudi Arabia, the major financial patron of the Iraqi aggression on Iran. Eventually, the US-Iraq alliance turned into a series of political and military conflicts whose aftermath affected the Iraqi people for decades.

The most significant aspect of the Iranian-Iraqi War is the so called 'martyrdom operations' of Iranian children. When the Iraqi troops managed to occupy part of the Iranian territories, Saddam's army utilised land mines to prevent the Iranian soldiers from retrieving their land. In response, Iranian children voluntarily stepped on these mines. Since then, suicide attacks have become a common feature of many violent attacks by nationalist and religious groups. In this example, the word suicide is replaced by 'martyrdom', which describes the most consecrated sacrifice made by a Muslim, leading to a high-ranked place in Heaven.⁴²

⁴² While Kepel highlights the influence of Iran's suicide operations on Hezbollah, Hamas, and al-Qaeda, Roy, who traces the phenomenon of suicide attacks back to the nineteenth-century Russia, refers to the utilisation of this method as a common feature of guerrilla warfare in different places of conflict in the 1980s. For more information, see Kepel 2008, 9 – 10, and Roy 2004, 43.

As with el-Sadat and the Shah, Saddam was declared an enemy of Islam. Dilip Hiro argues ‘Khomeini had characterized Saddam Hussein as ‘an infidel’ who was ‘corrupt, a perpetrator of corruption and a man who resembles the Shah’ (Hiro 53). Consequently, Iraqi soldiers who obey the ‘infidel’ deserve to be killed.

It is important to assert that, according to the rules of Islam, committing suicide is a mighty sin; the Muslim person who intentionally ends his/her life dies a non-Muslim. Furthermore, in Islam, no one is entitled to decide, on behalf of God, whether the person is going to Heaven or Hell. Moreover, the notion of martyrdom is exclusively related to death in a specific situation, including the case of being killed when compelled to defend one’s life, land, religion, honour, or even while obliged to protect money and other possessions. Finally, there is not a single mention of jihad by Muslims’ suicide, whether in the Holy Qur’an or the Sunna.⁴³

So far, I have argued that specific political situations in Arabic and Muslim countries as well as these countries’ endeavours to expand their influences on the region are the main reasons for the emergence of both nationalist and Islamist violent groups. If Mark Curtis claims that ‘[el-] Sadat’s policies helped spark the emergence of global Islamic radicalism’ (Curtis 2012, 107), the Egyptian President’s predecessor and successor, along with the leaders of Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq played vital roles in turning this evil ‘spark’ to an uncontrolled fire, whose flames reached the heart of many Western countries, including the US. Yet, this claim does not ignore the fact that, when the American geostrategic goals intersected with, or intervened in, some of the political or individual interests of Arabic and Muslim leaders, the US became the target of the terror.

d. Frankenstein creates the monster: whose mistake is it?

In the Tricycle’s 2004 Verbatim play *Guantánamo: Honour Bound to Defend Freedom*, compiled by Victoria Brittain and Gillian Slovo from spoken evidence, Wahab Al-Rawi is one of five British-Muslim detainees in Guantánamo.⁴⁴ Al-Rawi recalls his factual experience as a prisoner when he was asked by the American interrogators about Bin Laden. The Muslim prisoner replies: ‘I don’t know Mr Bin Laden, you probably know him more than I do, you trained him’ (Brittain 17). Because he was proven to be innocent,

⁴³ Here, the word Sunna means the practices and the narrative of the prophet Mohammed, including his explanations of the verses of the Holy Qur’an, both of which shape Sharia, or Shariah, Law (الشريعة).

⁴⁴ In order to distinguishing this specific type of documentary theatre, which I explore in the next chapter, from the literal meaning of the word ‘verbatim’, I write it with an uppercase letter.

Al-Rawi's answer evokes the irony of being punished for the US's mistake of turning Bin Laden into a terrorist, the action for which the US is widely blamed in most political and historical studies, including the writings of American authors.

Linguists suggest that the excessive use of any metaphor usually turns it into a cliché. However, it seems that utilising the two imaginary characters in Mary Shelley's novel as a metaphor of the reversal of the relationship between the monster and his creator does not lose its novelty in the world of politics.⁴⁵ Elizabeth Young argues: 'The Frankenstein story has a long history of being used as a political metaphor, and at the start of the twenty-first century, it continues to shape political debate' (Young 2008, 1). In what could be one of the first utilisations of the metaphor to describe the relationship between the US and Bin Laden, in January 1999, one of the US officials in Peshawar, Pakistan claimed: 'The point is that we created a whole cadre of trained and motivated people who turned against us. It's a classic Frankenstein's monster situation' (qtd. in Burke 1999, 19). At this point, Bin Laden's stated hostility was accompanied by evidence of his links with all the Islamists' attacks on the US targets in the 1990s. After 9/11, for many Western scholars and journalists, using the metaphor became more tempting in hindsight. Khondakar Mowla claims that Bin Laden was 'supported by Reagan administration's "Frankenstein factory"'. Contrary to what many Bush administration officials want you to believe, bin Laden was no stranger to the United States, especially the intelligence agencies under the Reagan-Bush Sr. administration' (Mowla 486).⁴⁶

Limiting the responsibility for the horror caused by the leader of al-Qaeda to the US not only ignores Bin Laden's complex mixture of religious, political and personal objectives; it also underestimates the roles played by many leaders of Arabic, Muslim and Western countries in turning the alliance between religion and politics into the threat of international violence. Exploring historical events suggests that monsters often have more than one creator. Put differently, the US was not the only lead actor where the three locations of ongoing conflicts were stages for powerful countries' successive competitions, whether in the recent or distant past. Moreover, within the locations of conflict, there are always supporting players, whose political desires contradict their peoples' interests.

The American intervention in Afghanistan during the Cold War can be seen as part of a wider strategy to tackle the former Soviet Union's influence over several Third World

⁴⁵ *Frankenstein: Or, The Modern Prometheus* is the title of Mary Shelley's 1818 novel.

⁴⁶ George H. W. Bush was Vice-President to Ronald Reagan, and succeeded him between 1989 and 1993.

countries. Because of Afghanistan's strategic significance, the competition between the US and Russia was fierce, especially when the latter invaded the Asian country in 1979, which proved to be a very decisive year in the modern history of the Middle East with international repercussions. Kepel claims:

The takeover of the American Embassy in Tehran and the internment of its staff on November 4 [1979] were followed immediately by the Soviet Army's invasion of Afghanistan at the end of December. In the Cold War world, in which anything that was bad for Washington was good for Moscow and vice versa, the dramatic confluence of these two events brought the region into the geopolitical spotlight as never before.⁴⁷ (Kepel 2006, 137)

Carter's administration opposed the Iranian Revolution.⁴⁸ Consequently, a group of Iranian activists attacked the American embassy in Tehran and detained fifty Americans as hostages. Known as the Iran Hostage crisis, this started in November 1979 and did not end until January 1981. Derek Gregory claims that 'on the day that the hostages were released, President Ronald Reagan announced that terrorism would replace human rights as America's primary foreign policy concern' (Gregory 78). Ironically, in order to defeat the Russian occupation of Afghanistan, Reagan's administration encouraged the unity between the Saudi Wahhabism and Egyptian jihadists, which led to the birth of the most powerful militant Islamist group: al-Qaeda.

The invasion of Afghanistan by the former Soviet Union is an example of the co-operation between colonialism and dictatorship. Because the communist government of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), which took power after a takeover in April 1978, was suffering from increasingly angry insurrections, the leaders of the PDPA repeatedly asked Moscow to intervene. Although the Russian politicians were reluctant to accept the eager calls of their Afghan allies for invasion, the former eventually decided that a military presence in Afghanistan was essential for protecting Russian political interests in the region.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ The co-operative effects of the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on dragging the US into the Muslim World are mentioned in Clarke (36), and Schulzinger (41–2).

⁴⁸ Jimmy Carter preceded Reagan in the period between 1977 and 1981.

⁴⁹ For more information about the political circumstances of the Russian invasion, see the studies of Galeotti, Westad and Suri.

Seen by a large number of Afghans as a symbol of atheism, the former Soviet Union's relationship with the PDPA fuelled religious anger, even before the invasion. Peter Tomsen observes some of the Afghan communist government's provoking procedures. Tomsen argues:

Marxist-Leninist sloganeering on Kabul radio broadcasts, and the introduction of a new flag—red with a yellow seal—that was similar to those in the Soviet Central Asian Republics, stirred popular resentment that the Afghan communists were attempting to foist Soviet atheism on the country. [...] Mullahs fulminated against the PDPA decrees in their Friday sermons. (Tomsen 133)

Mosques had started to play a political role by alerting Muslims to the danger of an atheist government. Later, after the Soviet invasion, the situation worsened because of the Russian army's atrocious practices. According to Tom Lansford the occupation 'prompted Afghan Muslim clerics to declare a jihad, or holy war, against the regime and its Soviet allies. The rebels became known as mujahideen, or holy warriors' (Lansford 2003, 125).⁵⁰ Thus, Russia and its Afghan puppet regime engendered the alliance between the nationalist struggle for freedom and the Islamic call for jihad.

The significance of the foregrounding of religious affiliation can be realised in terms of the complicated fabric of the Afghan population, which demanded the use of Islam as a common element of ethnic and tribal variety. Roy explains:

[C]harismatic leaders, generally ulamas or leaders of religious orders, launched the call for jihad and formed tribal coalitions. To unify the tribes, they imposed the *sharia* in defiance of the local common laws; the fundamentalism of the mullahs became a political force because the *sharia* was used against *asabiyya*, against tribal and ethnic segmentation, which in contrast was exploited by the colonizers.⁵¹ (Roy 1994, 31-2)

The most striking feature of Roy's claim is his suggestion that, by utilising the claim of defending Islam as the common goal of the fighters for freedom, Afghan clerics extended their role as preachers to become political leaders. Put differently, these Sheikhs acquired

⁵⁰ Mujahideen (sometimes Mujahidin) pronounces the Arabic word (مجاهدين). The latter is the plural of Mujahid (jihadist), which in this context means soldiers who fight to defend Islam.

⁵¹ In this context, '*asabiyya*' means that the members of each tribe or ethnic group ultimately and zealously adhere to the norms of their tribe and the orders of its leader.

the credibility to make political decisions, including the acceptance of the Christian US as an ally in the holy war against the atheist Russia.

In his first comment on the Russian invasion, Carter condemned it as ‘a deliberate effort by a powerful atheistic government to subjugate an independent Islamic people’ (qtd. in Glad 199). Not only did the American President eloquently address the Afghans’ nationalist and religious feelings, Carter’s short statement hinted at the common aspect of the Christian US and the Muslim Afghanistan: both believe in God, in contrast to the ‘atheistic’ Soviets. Later, the US aids were blessed and mediated by Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Egypt, three of the most powerful Muslim countries. Phil Rees argues that ‘it was Pakistan’s ISI [the Pakistani intelligence agency] that had the most direct control over the mujahedin [sic]. The ISI and the Wahhabi sect in Saudi Arabia had forged a partnership in Afghanistan that would be difficult to split later’ (Rees 274).

Accepting the American orders and privileges, Mubarak’s regime encouraged a large number of Egyptian Islamists to fight in the holy war in Afghanistan. Kepel argues:

[M]any of the radicals jailed after Sadat’s killing [in October 1981] had been freed in 1984, and sent to perform pilgrimage in Mecca, whence they boarded connecting flights to Peshawar, Pakistan, the operation base for Arab volunteers fighting in Muslim International brigades against the Red Army. At the time, they were dubbed ‘freedom fighters’ by Washington and Riyadh alike, trained and equipped by the CIA, and supported by petro-dollars from the Arabian peninsula (Kepel 2005, 16)

Disguising their political and personal interests with the pretense of defending a Muslim country, the leaders of these regimes served the geostrategic goals of the US, leading to the latter’s Cold War victory. However, what was meant to temporarily exploit the religious motivations of a nationalist struggle to challenge the Soviet Union turned into a decisive factor in al-Qaeda’s capability of waging its holy war against the US. In turn, the US declared the War on Terror, whose consequences ironically included the intervention of the American-led forces in Afghanistan. Thus, this Muslim-Christian alliance against the Russians seems to be a paradoxical moment in history, at which point the Afghan clerics, the Americans and the leaders of Muslim countries pragmatically deferred to religious disputes in what was actually motivated by political goals. In other words, while the US is

the most responsible for creating the Bin Laden's monstrous terrorism, the Doctor had other assistants helping to create Frankenstein, including rulers of some Muslim countries.⁵²

Considering that the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was the last episode of the so-called Great Game, I argue that the responsibility for provoking the holy war as a method of mobilising and instigating fighters for freedom can also extend to include the British Empire, which repeatedly invaded Afghanistan from 1839 onwards. According to Harold Raugh, the Afghan tribes, which fought the British soldiers, were inspired by an idea of holy war against the infidels (Raugh 10). Here, I can see that the US plays the role that the British Empire used to play, not only in Afghanistan, but also in the two other places of current conflicts, namely Iraq and Palestine. Such an observation is underlined by contemporary British and American playwrights in their commentary on the three conflicts. It is important to realise that several scholars read American foreign policies in the post-Cold War era as a manifestation of imperial ambitions. For instance, Noam Chomsky claims that 'the United States is behaving like every other power. So when the British were running the world, they were doing the same thing' (Chomsky 2003, 119).⁵³

On one hand, my thesis highlights specific resemblances, whether between the conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine, or between the American-led intervention in the three places of conflict and the role of the British Empire in the nineteenth and twentieth century in the three countries. On the other hand, my metaphorical reading does not neglect the significant geopolitical and historical circumstances of each conflict, which also distinguishes all of them, as part of the complicated political scene in the twenty-first century, from historical colonialism. My reading of British colonial history is not limited to considering it as a comparable example of, or even an ancestor to the American interventions in Arabic and Muslim countries. I also focus on the way in which Britain has effectively utilised its colonial experience in the War on terror. In 2014, Stacey Gutkowski argues that 'the UK has played a significant role in the ways in which the wars of the past decade have been conducted. In particular, the appropriation of the British imperial counterinsurgency strategy has proved deeply influential within the US and NATO military

⁵² Ironically, when some of the Egyptian Islamists returned to Egypt in 1990, they were interrogated and imprisoned as a terrorist group referred to by the government as 'The Returners from Afghanistan Organisation'. For more information, see Kepel (2003, 12-13).

⁵³ For detailed discussions about the American imperialism, especially in comparison with the historical British Empire, see the studies of Bacevich (2002), Harvey, and Freeman. In Gregory, resemblances are claimed between the presence of the American-led coalition in Afghanistan and Iraq and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

establishments' (Gutkowski 2014, 21). Realising the important part played by the British imperial experience in the War on Terror has crucially helped me to read many journalistic and political comments on the relationship between Bush's administration and the government of Tony Blair. The British Prime Minister was repeatedly accused of being subordinate to American policies. The criticism of Blair extends beyond political comments to works of art, including theatre.⁵⁴

Caryl Churchill's *Drunk Enough to Say I Love You*, premiered in November 2006 at the Royal Court Theatre, London, seems to be an example of the critique of Blair's conformity with Bush's policies. Churchill metaphorically represents the British subsidiary role in supporting American politics as a homosexual relationship. The two characters in the play, as Michael Billington explains, are 'Sam (as in Uncle) and Jack (as in Union) - they might even be Bush and Blair' (Billington *Drunk Enough*, web). However, when the play was published, Churchill weakened such a metaphor by changing the name of Jack to Guy. She explains:

Sam was always called Sam, because of Uncle Sam. I gave the other character the name Jack, thinking of it as just a name, but some people understandably thought it referred to Union Jack and that Jack was Britain in the same way that Sam was America. But I always meant that character to be an individual, a man who falls in love with America, so I have changed his name to Guy'. (Churchill 2008, 269)

It is hard to define whether Churchill was retreating or if this case is one example of the text's ability to suggest ideas that their authors do not intend. In either case, the word 'understandably' suggests that Churchill believes that seeing Jack as Blair was a valid interpretation of her play, which was interpreted as critique of the Prime Minister's policies towards the US.

Jenny Hughes suggests that it is possible to assume that 'Blair's decision to work with the US administration represented a fundamentalist enactment of his own Christianity in concert with the US administration's faith in its own moral integrity rather than any

⁵⁴ For more information about the condemnation of Blair's alleged docility to the American President, where the former is described by journalists and through the mass media as Bush's 'puppet', 'poodle', or 'foreign minister', see Deer (174), Tripathi (36), and Seymour-Ure (245). These derogatory descriptions of the British Prime Minister are sceptically mentioned in Foreign Affairs Committee (2010, 136). For claims that Blair's friendly policy towards the US was at the expense of Britain's relationship with Europe, see the studies of Morgan (2003), Riddell, and Larres.

concern for reason, evidence or democratic process' (Hughes 2011, 115-16). In addition to the fact that Hughes's speculation is impossible to prove, Blair's discourse contradicts this religious interpretation of the British partnership with the US. Not only did Blair's discourse avoid any religious reference, but he also did his best to raise Bush's awareness of 'the importance of getting public opinion on side, of creating international coalitions, of avoiding a war of civilizations between Muslims and Christians' (Meyer 191). I argue that, whether because of England's long colonial history or due to modern English society's inclination towards secularity, British politicians were more against imposing religion in political and militaristic confrontations, especially in Arabic and Muslim countries. Thus, Blair's partnership with Bush in the War on Terror, including the invasion of Iraq, seems to reflect Britain's interests. In 2003, when criticism of Blair's co-operation with Bush's plans peaked, Ben Pimlott argued:

[T]he Blair Government believes—and the Prime Minister himself appears to believe passionately—that the American President needs British moral support so badly, the United States could not go to war without it; and that Britain's friendliness towards the Americans, so far from being a sign of weakness, is therefore a position of leverage and strength. (Pimlott 186)

By linking what Pimlott describes as the British 'position of leverage and strength' and the claims that the US clandestinely seeks to achieve imperial interests in Afghanistan and Iraq, I suggest that Britain seems to retrieve its colonial history, rather than being the obedient follower of the US.

In this context, I agree with Mark Curtis's political explanation when he claims that Blair excessively supported the US policies for 'reasons of pure self-interest: that terrorism would provide a rationale for a new phase in Britain's own military intervention around the world' (Curtis2012, 249). Curtis' argument takes account of historical facts about Britain, not only as an Empire, but also because the three locations of conflict were located in areas of former colonial domination, something that is mentioned by many plays that comment on the current Anglo-American wars. The British historical intervention in these locations within plays, though, is not introduced as an irrelevant fact to the present occupations, but as an episode in three long stories of the chaotic outcome of Great Powers' ambitions.

A crucial moment in the history of the British Empire was the Suez War, also known as the tripartite aggression (العدوان الثلاثي) in 1956. Following Nasser's nationalisation

of the Suez Canal, Egypt was attacked by an alliance of Israel, Britain and France. As the subtitle of Keith Kyle's book suggests, the failure of this aggression was a sign of *Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East*. In his comment on the consequences of the aggression, Klaus Larres argues:

In the process of recovering from the humiliating Suez Crisis and after the resignation of Prime Minister Anthony Eden, [...] London had realised that without close co-operation and collaboration with the United States, Britain would no longer be able to punch above its weight and maintain an important voice in global affairs. This was also one of the main reasons why Tony Blair joined George W. Bush in the invasion of Iraq. (Larres206)

In addition to tracing the reasons for Blair's role in Bush's war in Iraq back to the 1950s, which conforms to Curtis' claim about British imperial ambitions in the new millennium, Larres' statement suggests that the US seemed to fill the vacuum created by the declining British role in the Middle East.⁵⁵

The resemblance between the old British and new American policies appears in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The former Empire played the most crucial role in creating the conflict in the first place by what is known as the Balfour Declaration in 1917. In a letter from British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour to Walter Rothschild, the unofficial leader of the British Jewish community, the British government promised to give its support for the establishment of a Jewish nation in Palestine. During the British Mandate for Palestine, which started in the early 1920s, Britain sought to make good on its promise by the establishment of the country of Israel in 1948.⁵⁶

David Hare's *Via Dolorosa*, which premiered in 1997 at the Royal Court in London, is a good example of the effect of Britain's historical role in the dispute between Israel and Palestine as depicted by contemporary British representations of the conflict. *Via Dolorosa*, in which Hare reflects on his 1997 journey to Israel and the Palestinian territory, was his participation in a three-part project about the British Mandate of Palestine. In his comment on Hare's play, the Israeli academic Eitan Bar-Yosef claims that 'the postcolonial guilt that

⁵⁵ For more information about the harmful effect of the 1956 War on the image of the British Empire, whether politically or ethically, see Marlay (1073), Allain (47–72), and Stockwell.

⁵⁶ In Arabic countries, the Balfour Declaration is called the Balfour's Promise (وعد بلفور). The text of the letter can be read in Schmeer (341). For more information about the British mandate for Palestine and the consequences of Balfour Declaration, see Allain (73–100).

seems to permeate Hare's narrative, both his representation of Israel/Palestine and the representational techniques employed in the production could be traced back to Hare's Victorian and early twentieth-century predecessors' (Bar-Yosef 261). Whether due to the feeling of 'guilt' or the belief in the aggression of Israeli governments, what Bar-Yosef refers to as Hare's sympathy for Palestinian people seems to be a dominant tone of contemporary British playwrights' response to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The fifth chapter of this thesis raises a question about the difference between the representation of the conflict by British and American playwrights.

Since 1948, successive American administrations dealt with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in various ways, which the vast majority of Arabs and Muslims usually consider to be in favour of Israel. However, the Palestinian suffering has never been neglected by any American President to the extent endured during George W. Bush's Presidency. The problem of the era of Bush, Jr., according to Patrick Tyler, is that the members of his administration who were aware of the necessity of focusing on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were outnumbered and defeated by their more influential colleagues, who convinced him later, according to Tyler, to invade Iraq (Tyler 11-12). The consequences of this neglect of the Israeli-Palestinian matter proved to be disastrous. In 2004, Richard Clarke, who was responsible for US counter-terrorism policies declared: 'If we could achieve a Middle East peace much of the popular support for al Qaeda and much of the hatred for America would evaporate' (Clarke 224). The significance of Clarke's observation is its consideration of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as an essential factor in agitating most Muslim and Arabic populations, from which the supporters and members of al-Qaeda emerged.

In order to understand Clarke's statement, it seems important to realise that, a few months before Bush's arrival at the White House, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict witnessed the beginning of one of its fieriest crises: the so-called Second Intifada, which lasted between September 2000 and the early months of 2005. Hamas' victory in the 2006 parliamentary elections is hugely attributed to the increasing popularity of the movement as the only resistant to the Israeli oppression during the Intifada. Kepel explains: 'The mosques and the international Arab media revived the legitimacy of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, strengthening their hands against Arafat' (Kepel 2004, 19). Ironically, the leader of the PLO was blamed by a large sector of the Palestinians for his peace negotiations with Israel, while the latter accuses him of encouraging Hamas' violence.

Since September 2000, the scenes of Palestinian casualties have increased the anger of Arabic and Muslim populations against Israel. Kepel explains: ‘In the weeks before September 11, 2001, the Arab world—and more generally the Muslim world, including Asia, Africa, and even the outskirts of European cities—was swept up in feelings of solidarity with the Palestinian cause and hatred of Israel’s policies’ (Kepel 2004, 20). This anger though was not limited to Israel or even the US, but it extended to include the dictatorships of most Muslim countries, especially Arabic regimes, whose rulers were described as pro-Israel and American puppets. The Palestinian Uprising proved that these dictators are too weak to have any influence on the American administration. Kepel argues: ‘The depth of bitterness among Muslims was matched only by their sense of powerlessness. The fatal weakness of Arab armies had never been revealed so harshly’ (Kepel 2004, 20). Moreover, before 2011, demonstrations for Palestine used to be the only permitted gathering of people for a political cause in most Arabic and Muslim dictatorships. However, with their political and military weakness exposed to their peoples, these dictators brutally dealt with the demonstrations during the Second Intifada. Kepel argues that ‘pro-Palestinian protests were quickly contained or squelched by neighboring Arab regimes as soon as these rallies showed any sign of challenging the state’s passivity’ (Kepel 2004, 21).

Not only did a large sector of Muslim and Arabic populations blame the US for supporting Israel, the American policies were also accused of supporting dictatorships in the Middle East. Chomsky argues that ‘the leaders of the Arab states are at some level pro-Israel because they understand that Israel is part of the system protecting them from their own people’ (Chomsky 2003, 103). Derrida goes further by stressing the role of the American support for Arabic dictators in motivating Islamist violence, including the attacks of 9/11, which according to Derrida were an attempt to undermine pro-America Arab regimes more than an attack on the US (Derrida 111–12). Along with Chomsky’s claim, Derrida statement can be understood on the grounds that radical Islamists attacked the US for the latter’s support for Arabic dictatorships, which in turn protect Israel.

While the explanation suggested by both Chomsky and Derrida might be valid, to some extent, in describing both the monarchy of Saudi Arabia and Egypt under the rules of Mubarak and his predecessor, it is a fact that several anti-America regimes in Iraq, Iran, Syria, Libya, and even in Egypt during Nasser’s era were autocratic. Ironically, when the US utilised its mighty influence on some dictators in order to move Arabic leaders towards

democracy, radical Islamists were exploited the marginally allowed freedom of speech to criticise the allegedly American-led Christian West. Consequently, in order to strengthen their dictatorships, these leaders exploited the US administration's fears of the duplication of the Iranian stance. Huntington argues: 'Some openings in Arab political systems have already occurred. The principal beneficiaries of these openings have been Islamist movements. In the Arab world, in short, Western democracy strengthens anti-Western political forces' (Huntington 1993, 32). However, the bulk of these 'openings' came in the form of governmental support for puppet political parties, whose opposition was as superficial and futile as the Arabic regimes' pretentious critique of the US policies.

Just as Palestinians elected Hamas, more Arabic youths started to support Islamist movements, which were the only organised alternative to corrupt regimes. In both Saudi Arabia and Egypt, from which most of the leaders of Islamist groups have come, the vast majority of liberals were oppressed by both dictatorships and radical Islamists. Understandably, the latter's violence against liberals was always tolerated by Arabic governments. Many liberals, who were too young, or perhaps too weak to bear this pressure have ended up as pro-regime or surprisingly became members of the increasingly powerful radical Islamist groups. Such an observation helps me to understand Jürgen Habermas' claim that 'some of those drawn into the "holy war" had been secular nationalists only a few years before' (Habermas 33). This was one of the paths to 9/11, which perhaps could have been closed if the West, especially the US, were more supportive of liberals rather than trusting in puppet regimes, including superficial oppositions, to deter violent political Islam, whose defeat in its own soil seems impossible without unconditional democracy.

The question is if the rationale of attacking the US is to punish Arabic regimes, why did militant Islamists not challenge these dictatorships directly? I answer this question by using the title of Roy's 1994 book: *The Failure of Political Islam*. Put differently, the dream of replacing Arabic dictators by radical Islamic regimes was proved to be impossible by the early 1980s. Therefore, the major radical Islamist groups, namely the Egyptian jihadists and untamed Wahhabis in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia found their refuge in Central Asia during the Russian occupation of Afghanistan. Later, the jihadist-Wahhabi alliance, which was expelled from the two Arabic countries in the early 1990s, started to direct its revenge against the US and several Western countries, wherein democracy was punished under the motto of the holy war. Put differently, the dream of retrieving Andalusia in Western societies resulted from the failed attempts of radical Islamists to establish

Islamic states as religious ‘collectivism’ instead of the dominant political ‘collectivism’ in Arabic countries. I utilise Gow’s comparison in order to suggest that the respect for ‘individualism’ in Western countries enabled groups of militant Islamists to live, and spread their thoughts and violence seeking the alleged new Andalusia.

As these episodes of history in both the Middle East and Central Asia suggest, the complicated interaction between nationalistic and religious motivations for violence against the US challenges any simplistic description of the terror attacks of 9/11 as a sudden or a causeless action. Moreover, different terrorist groups are not identical, especially if I consider the discrepancy, not to say the hostility, between Sunni and Shii violent movements. Furthermore, the intersection between the political situation in Arabic and Muslim countries were vital factors in shaping both the American policies in the region and the violent reactions to these policies. Finally, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict significantly occupies the centre of the contradictory projects of pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism. Consequently, referring to the suffering of Palestinian and Iraqi people will be a common feature of jihadists’ justification for violence. However, there are usually unspoken political goals behind the emphasis on retaliation against the US for its negative influences on Arabs and Muslims. In this war of words, both the Arabic and Western media played a crucial role.

Terrorists discourse: How to justify violence?

While post-operation speeches simply the terrorist group’s victory, the most significant role of these statements is to insist on the reason(s) for which the leaders of these groups believe that violence is justified. By claiming that their attacks against the US retaliate for its harmful policies in the Middle East, both nationalist and Islamist violent groups indirectly assume the role of the original victim who obligatorily turns into an aggressor. Even when the plotters of terrorist operations are captured, courtrooms give them a perfect chance to extend their argument about the justness of their violence.

In a statement made by Ramzi Yousef in his trial for planning the 1993 bombing of the WTC, he argues: ‘The ability of Israel to commit these crimes is the direct result of the considerable military and financial aid which the United States of America provides annually to Israel, and it is this aid which gives Palestinians and Lebanese the right to attack U.S. targets’ (qtd. in McKinley Jr. 27). While such a declaration seems to be addressed to the Western media, Yousef’s focus on Palestine and Lebanon cleverly

designed to appeal to the nationalistic sense of Arabic populations. In other words, Yousef mentions the death of Muslim and non-Muslim civilians in both Palestine and Lebanon because of American weapons and Israeli soldiers in order to justify violence against American civilians. In addition, Yousef reminds his listeners from different nationalities of the Israeli government's recent use of its mighty power in order to oppress the Palestinian First Intifada, which, according to Kepel, 'had tarnished Israel's reputation on television screens worldwide. The image of a child with a stone in his hand facing down an Israeli army tank suddenly transformed the descendants of Nazi Holocaust victims into oppressors of a dispossessed Third World population' (Kepel 2004, 13).⁵⁷

Yousef's political critique of the US took a further step, when he recalled historical cases of the US's excessive use of its military and political powers against non-Muslim and non-Arabic countries. In its 9 January 1998 edition, under the title: 'Excerpts from Statements in Court', the *New York Times* quoted Yousef's claim that he is proud to be called a terrorist by the Americans. By killing tens of thousands of women and children in Japan and Vietnam, the militant Islamist argues, the US is the real terrorist. In addition, he mentions civilian victims of the American-led economic embargoes, which were placed on countries such as Iraq and Cuba (Esposito 1998, B4). On one hand, this list of what Yousef considers as victims of the American terrorism ignores the specific historical circumstances of the US military or political conflict with each country he mentions. On the other hand, by conflating all these cases, it seems that the militant Islamist seeks to turn the image of his brutal operation from a terroristic action to a just revenge for the crimes committed by the US. In addition, the nature of the courtroom as a secular space, wherein religion is irrelevant, can explain why the high-ranked member of al-Qaeda pragmatically chose to identify with nationalist cases rather than adhering to the most repeated word within al-Qaeda's discourse: al-jihad.

Criticising the US did not absolve Yousef from his charges, which he concedes proudly. His message attempts to convince potential suicide bombers that attacking the US constitutes a rightful punishment for all its crimes, especially supporting the Israeli government. The operation Yousef successfully planned in 1993 proved to be 'an eerie

⁵⁷ Lasting between 1987 and 1993, the First Intifada was initiated as a response to the Israeli invasion of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Because the main feature of the Intifada was throwing stones at Israeli soldiers by Palestinian youth and children, the uprising is named in most Arabic countries as 'The Children of the Stones'. This name was the title of a large number of articles, poems, documentaries and songs in different Arabic countries.

forecast of the terror to come scarcely eight years later' (Juergensmeyer 4). In other words, Yousef's motivating message seemed to be delivered more to Muslim and Arabic young men, some of whom decided to sacrifice their lives in the disaster of 9/11 for a fake promise of heaven.

The victims of the vast majority of the operations against the US included Arabs and Muslims. This fact usually does not prevent the leaders of terrorist groups from declaring their association with these operations. However, when Muslim or Arabic casualties of the violent attack outnumber the American or Western victims, it seems that the planners of the operation become reluctant to declare their responsibility. In addition, because several operations target American interests outside the US, it is more likely that the victims of the terrorist attack include a large number of the citizens of these countries. I do not claim that terrorists might sympathise or regret killing innocents regardless of the latter's nationality or religion. Nevertheless, the increase in the number of the victims among local citizens, compared to the Americans, challenges the terrorists' claim that the attack was a vengeful act against the US. Moreover, harming a large number of Muslims essentially invalidates the rationale of the holy war from the standpoint of those who support it and from which potential warriors of the holy war is needed by the leaders of militant Islamist groups.

The incidents of Kenya and Tanzania are a good example of the terrorists' reluctance to declare their responsibility. Describing the attacks on the US embassies, Kepel argues: 'The first spectacular suicide missions that can be attributed to Al Qaeda' (Kepel2008, 98). However, 'the organization did not claim responsibility for them at the time' (Kepel2008, 98). Moreover, Michael Scheuer, the chief of the CIA's Bin Laden Unit between 1996 and 1999, attributes the bombings to al-Qaeda. However, the only evidence given by Scheuer of Bin Laden's declaration of responsibility is an online source within which Bin Laden is claimed to describe the operations as 'two mighty smashes' (Scheuer 117).⁵⁸ I base my argument on the fact that a large number of Muslims and non-American were victims of the two attacks. This would seem to deter Osama Bin Laden from conceding his group's connection with the incidents on the information that '[in] Nairobi, over 4,500 people, mostly Muslims, were wounded and 213 died (among them 12

⁵⁸ For more claims about al-Qaeda's responsibility for the attacks in the two African countries, see Kepel (2004, 93). In (Roy 2004, 306), a link is drawn between the strong presence of al-Qaeda in Nairobi since 1994 and the allegations of its role in the attack on the American embassy.

Americans). In Dar es Salaam, 85 were wounded and 11 died (none of them American)' (Kepel2008, 98). In this respect, although the mission of any terrorist organisation would never be completed without a declaration of responsibility for the damage its operations caused, Bin Laden's reluctance to give a direct statement about these attacks is not meaningless. In addition, I use this incident to read Bin Laden's contradictory statements about al-Qaeda's most harmful attack in 9/11.

Days after Bin Laden's denial of any responsibility for the attacks, he announced the reasons for committing them on a televised statement through al-Jazeera News Channel on 7 October 2001.⁵⁹ It is crucial to realise that Bush affirmed the responsibility of Bin Laden in an address to a joint session of Congress on 20 September, 2001, before the leader of al-Qaeda's two statements of denial and confession. More than a decade after the disaster and with considerable evidence pointing to al-Qaeda, the question about who did commit the attack is still asked by the public and journalists, who suggest an American conspiracy. Gerry Ganavan refers to the spread of this controversial explanation of the catastrophe inside the US itself. He explains:

The 9/11 Truth Movement is the umbrella term for a number of groups that have sprung up following September 11 which seek to prove using video evidence that the attacks were undertaken by intelligence agencies rather than al-Qaeda for the purpose of justifying American military intervention in the Middle East. They typically spread their ideas through online discussion forums and viral videos, most notably the ninety-minute Internet film *Loose Charge*. (Ganavan 132)

Whether such a claim was only part of a 'mixture of rumour, gossip, and misinformation' (Taylor 2003, 317), as Philip Taylor suggests, the narrative about the War on Terror includes many contradictory interpretations of a large number of events, especially with the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq. The question is why Bin Laden insists on making his declaration of responsibility more accessible than his denial? To answer this question, I focus on two things: the channel chosen by Bin Laden to deliver this speech and the messages included within his discourse.

⁵⁹ On 28 September 2001, the Pakistani newspaper *Ummat* (literally means nation in both Arabic and Urdu and figuratively means the Muslim world), published a long interview with Bin Laden, in which he not only insists that he was not involved in 9/11, but he also claims that – as a Muslim man – he condemns the killing of innocent human beings.

The role played by al-Jazeera in making the voice of al-Qaeda clearly and widely heard has been criticised by many Western politicians and writers. Hugh Miles recites examples of negative comments given by the American and British media on the Qatari news channel. Miles observes: ‘Al-Jazeera was bin Laden’s ‘mouthpiece’, declared British tabloids, and was run by Palestinian and Syrian extremists. The *Daily Telegraph* called it ‘Bin Laden TV’. ‘All News Channel bin Laden Loves,’ read the *New York Post*’s headline on 4 October [2001]’ (Miles 112). Simultaneously, because Israeli officials are allowed to give exclusive statements to al-Jazeera, which is an unprecedented policy by the Arabic media, the Qatari channel was usually blamed by many Islamists and nationalists for being the mouth of Israel.⁶⁰

But if al-Jazeera was seen by a sector of Bin Laden’s targeted audience as ‘pro-Israel’, why would Bin Laden choose the channel to be his means of communication with the Arabic and Muslim populations? Since its emergence in 1996, al-Jazeera has revolutionised the Arabic media, whether in terms of its journalistic professionalism or regarding the channel’s inclination towards blunt critique of many Arabic regimes. Mamoun Fandy claims that ‘Al-Jazeera has contributed to raising the ceiling of what can and cannot be said on pan-Arab television. However, this does not apply to local television stations inside each country’ (Fandy 47). Therefore, al-Jazeera managed to maintain its popularity because the channel seemed to continue, or even replace, what the Arabic BBC offered to the Arabic populations, especially since the 1950s: an alternative to Arabic dictatorships’ propaganda.

Decades before al-Jazzier, the BBC used to be the target of the Egyptian media during the epoch of Nasser, who denounced all British media, including the BBC, as the voice of colonialism. This observation might explain Hugh Miles’s claim that, while ‘the channel [is] now widely dubbed ‘the Arab world’s CNN’, [...] Al-Jazeera said it preferred to be compared to the BBC rather CNN’ (Miles, 113). One of the most famous examples of the credibility of the BBC Arabic radio, in comparison with the Arabic media coverage, is the War of 1967. When the vast majority of the Arabs were preparing to celebrate the fake

⁶⁰ For examples of such accusations, see Rinnawi (103), and Swanson (58).

victory described by all Egyptian radio stations and newspapers, the painful facts about the humiliating defeat were bluntly offered by the Arabic BBC.⁶¹

In this respect, the appearance of Bin Laden on al-Jazeera seems to maintain its self-image as the only independent Arabic channel on which all contradictory opinions are represented, while the popularity of the channel generally suggests why Bin Laden practically decided to address Arabic populations through its screen. In addition, there are more pragmatic reasons for Bin Laden's choice. These reasons can be realised by reading the content of Bin Laden's speech from October 2001. Ewen MacAskill observes that the leader of al-Qaeda 'proved tactically astute [...] in releasing his video soon after the attack. His videotaped interview was designed to address the three main Arab grievances: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; Iraqi sanctions; and the presence of US troops in Saudi Arabia' (MacAskill 2001, 6). As causes for anger, the suffering of Iraqi people from the economic sanctions since 1991 and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which witnessed a new bloody episode with the Second Palestinian Intifada (2000 – 2005), are more influential on Muslim and Arabic populations than the American military bases.

Nearly a decade before 9/11, the establishment of five American bases in Saudi Arabia during the preparation for freeing Kuwait from the Iraqi occupation was fiercely criticised by both the Arab-nationalists and Islamists. Roy claims that 'during the autumn of 1990, the Islamist and neofundamentalist networks [with the exception of Hamas] abandoned Saudi Arabia en masse, accusing it of having allowed an infidel army to protect the sacred sites. Hamas, dependent on Saudi money and opposed to a PLO tied to Bagdad, chose [to support] Riyadh' (Roy 1994, 121).⁶² Many Arabic regimes considered the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait a reasonable justification for the presence of the American troops in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, In addition, after the 1991 War, the harm of the American bases gradually seemed more symbolic than factual, especially when it was overshadowed by the aftermath of the economic sanctions on Iraq. The latter in turn seemed to be remarkably eclipsed by the bloody events of the Second Intifada.

⁶¹ Later, in the 1970s Monte Carlo Arabic-speaking station started to get Arabic populations' trust as a source of information besides, or second to, the BBC. For more references to the incident of 1967, see (Hammond 49), (Fandy 37), and Samuel-Azran (36–7). For more information about the Qatari channel news, see Seib.

⁶² The way in which each movement of the two Palestinian rivals identified itself with one side of the new conflict between Iraq and the Saudi-led Gulf countries proved to be influential on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the following decade. For discussions about the consequences of this incident, see McNair (39), and Peretz (14).

Nevertheless, for the leader of al-Qaeda, it seems that the American bases' offence extends beyond occupying part of the sacred land; it has become a sign of his own defeat. Because of his role in precipitating the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989, Bin Laden returned to Saudi Arabia as a hero. When the Iraqi army invaded Kuwait in August 1990, Bin Laden was eager to fight the Iraqi soldiers. Tyler claims that:

[I]n the fall of 1990, bin Laden approached the royal family, offering his services to drive Saddam out of Kuwait. [...] The royal family's rejection of bin Laden's offer marked the beginning of an estrangement that would lead him, ultimately, to violent opposition against the House of Saud. (Tyler 379-80)

Apart from contradicting the 2003 allegations made by the Anglo-American alliance about long-time co-operation between al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein, this incident played a crucial role in paving the way to the soon-to-emerge confrontation between Bin Laden and the US.⁶³

Whether Bin Laden was provoked by the Saudi officials' refusal to give him the chance to become the leader of liberating Kuwait, or because of the Saudi regime's subservient relationship to the US, Lawrence Wright claims that Bin Laden lost both his nationality and his family's financial support in 1994 (qtd. in Burton 2012, 75). Eventually, he returned to Afghanistan where he declared the War on America. Ensalaco refers to 'bin Laden's "declaration of War Against the Americans who occupy the Land of the Two Holy Mosques" in 1996' (Ensalaco 5).⁶⁴ It is important to realise that, in contrast to the vast majority of the Arab media, al-Jazeera occasionally allowed some of its nationalist and Islamist pundits to condemn the American bases in Saudi Arabia. Put differently, in addition to al-Jazeera's popularity, the Qatari channel seemed to be the perfect platform for Bin Laden to revive his 1996 declaration of war against the US.

Regarding the two other 'main Arab grievances', namely the sanctions on Iraq and the Palestinian Second Intifada, al-Jazeera was a vital factor in escalating the anger of Arabic and Muslim populations. Mohammed El-Nawawy and Adel Iskander observe:

⁶³ Bin Laden's proposal of using his followers of jihadists in order to fight the Iraqi army as an alternative to the American troops in Saudi Arabia is mentioned in Atwan (45-6), Lansford (2012, 234), and Gurulé (32).

⁶⁴ This declaration was published by the London-based newspaper *al-Quds al-Arabi*, whose name literally means the Arabic Jerusalem, on 23 August 1996. Two different translations of Bin Laden's statement can be found in Lawrence (2005, 23-30) and Berner (30-61). For the analysis of some of the thoughts included within the declaration, see Kepel (2006, 317-9).

‘Upon the launching of Al-Jazeera, [in 1996] senior producers and directors have made this [matter of sanctions] a vital issue on the network’s agenda, with various documentaries aired to demonstrate the plight of the Iraqi people under the sanctions’ (El-Nawawy 36).⁶⁵

The most striking feature of al-Jazeera’s unequivocally supportive coverage of the Second Uprising is the religious blessing given on its screen to the Palestinian suicide operations against Israeli soldiers and civilians. Kepel explains:

Suicide attacks soon won the support of preachers throughout the Muslim world, even among “moderate” Islamists like Sheikh [Yousef al-]Qaradawi, the star of a religious program on Al Jazeera’s satellite television channel. He justified the killing of Israeli civilians by explaining that all Israelis, men and women alike, perform military service and, as reservists, constitute legitimate military service and, as reservists, constitute legitimate military targets for a jihad that seeks to recapture Muslim territory from impious occupiers. (Kepel 2004, 19)

As Kepel’s observation suggests, the speech of the ‘moderate Sheikh’ avoided considering the *Jews* as an intrinsic enemy to Islam. Instead, al-Qaradawi established his decree on a mixture of nationalistic and religious bases: the *Israeli* occupation of a ‘Muslim territory’. Moreover, the fatwa went further by permitting the killing of civilians rather than limiting the attacks on the soldiers of the aggressor(s).

In contrast, a large number of Muslim clerics and movements, including al-Qaradawi and Hamas, condemned the attacks of 9/11 as an anti-Islamic action. In its response, al-Qaeda expressed its eagerness to identify with the Palestinian suicide bombers by a statement released in April 2002, within which the leaders of the terrorist group blamed the critics of the attacks on the US for distinguishing the American civilians from the Israeli victims of suicide attacks.⁶⁶

By failing to get the official religious acceptance to identify with Hamas, which itself condemned the attacks of 9/11, Bin Laden’s discourse seems to miss one of its most significant justifications for violence, although the Palestinian cause itself did not lose its effect on Arabic and Muslim populations. Moreover, by challenging the large number of Muslim clerics, who objurgated al-Qaeda’s attacks as anti-Islamic, Bin Laden breached the

⁶⁵ For more information about the support of al-Jazeera for the Second Intifada, see the studies of Zayani and Al-Mutafy.

⁶⁶ For more examples of the condemnations of the attacks of 9/11 by official Egyptian and Saudi Sheikhs, and al-Qaeda’s response, see Burke (2011, 29), Kurzman (43–4), Wiktorowicz (76-7), and Miles (193).

rules on which he established his claim of the holy war, which are essential in mobilising new suicide bombers for the sake of alleged martyrdom. Nevertheless, two crucial factors seemed to retrieve the influence of Bin Laden's discourse on a big sector of Arabic and Muslim population: the Invasion of Iraq in 2003 and some polemic messages included in the American officials' statements, whether at the next moment of the attack, or within the US declaration of the War on Terror. Both were exploited by al-Qaeda to support their myth about the American-Israeli war on Islam.

The American official discourse

a. Envy theory ignores the causes for conflict

In his response to the disaster of 9/11, Bush asked 'Why do they hate us?' Bush's answer to his question was to argue that Muslim extremists are enemies of US democracy and freedom. Later, many US officials repeated the same claim. On one hand, such a depreciatory, 'they-us', reading of the attacks can be understood on the grounds of James Cherry's description of 9/11 as 'a moment that illuminates how the Manichean dichotomies favored by the Bush Administration – a black and white world spinning on axes of good and evil – did not, and do not, suit the complexities of the moment' (Cherry 167). On the other hand, participating in the planning or finishing of any terrorist act needs an unimaginable amount of hatred and brutality. The direct suggestion of the question and its simplistic answer is that there is no political or historical reason for 'hate'.⁶⁷

Ignoring the causes for dispute can be understood on the grounds of most Western writers' insistence that the refusal to consider terrorists' demands or understand the causes of their violence has always been the US reaction to terror operations since the early 1970s. Although there is a possibility for what can be called behind-the-scene work of intelligence agencies, which might include secret negotiations with terrorists, I analyse the declared discourse of American Presidents. William Farrell argues: 'No concessions to terrorists has been the official U.S. policy since it was first enunciated by President Richard M. Nixon in

⁶⁷ The debate about Bush's controversial statement about the reasons for hatred is discussed in several sources such as: Farer, Chomsky (2002), Hyde, and in Esposito (2007). The latter's Arabic translation was published in 2009. For examples of journalistic writings, within which most Muslims are described as haters, see Gabriel (2002), Gabriel (2006), and Sowell. Claims that Islam intrinsically encourages violence can be found in the studies of McCarthy and Winn.

1972. A policy of no concessions is an absolute that allows no flexibility on the part of the national leadership' (Farrell 298).⁶⁸

Successive US Presidents' responses to terror operations suggest that all of them refused to respond to terror's demands. Moreover, they tend to avoid mentioning the causes of violence. Instead they always describe violent operations as if they are reasonless acts. Joseph Campos describes Reagan's comments on the crisis of the US embassy in Tehran. Campos argues that Reagan was 'intensifying negative images of terrorists as he framed perceptions of terrorists using terms that suggested insanity, unpredictability, and the capacity to unleash advanced technological resources which threatened the nation's security' (Campos 47). It is understandable that terror must be treated seriously and decisively. Accepting terrorists' requests gives them the recognition they seek. Moreover, it may encourage even peaceful groups to see violence as an effective way to get their demands. Nevertheless, ignoring terrorists' discourse altogether is also dangerous, especially when the same reasons for violence are mentioned after several attacks.

Unlike politicians, who have to consider the effect of declaring any 'concessions to terrorists', behaviourists, sociologists, and perhaps dramatists can undertake the mission of talking with members, or ex-members, of violent group in order to understand how and why political, or religion, opinions are expressed in such violence. Premiered at the Theatre Royal Bury St. Edmunds in April 2005, Robin Soans's *Talking to Terrorists* comments on the War on Terror by suggesting that conversations with terrorists are a worthwhile activity.

The Verbatim play is composed of factual statements of real persons. These statements include five stories that recall previous cases of violent groups from different places, namely the Irish Republican Army, the Ulster Volunteer Force, the Kurdish Workers Party, the National Resistance Army of Uganda, and the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade. It seems that Soans' play indirectly reminds its audience that terrorism is not limited to Islam. The dominant tone of the play is one of sympathy with the five ex-terrorists who, to different extents, are portrayed as victims of their societies: due to difficult childhoods, they are more likely to be recruited by violent groups. To understand and sympathise with, not to support or accept, the social, psychological, and even political motivations of violence is important to prevent potential terror from (re)occurring. In addition to the stories of people who used to be terrorists, Soans cites the former Secretary of State, who argues: 'If you

⁶⁸ Nixon's comment was on the kidnapping of US diplomats in Khartoum, which occurred in 1973, not 1972.

want them to change their minds, you have to talk to them. They won't do it very willingly because they don't trust you, but yes, you have to talk to terrorists' (Soans 2005, 28). Despite all the difficulties, Soans' play suggests that talking to terrorists is necessary.

In contrast, by describing violent groups as envious, nihilist, insane, unpredictable, and ineradicable, it seems that the US official discourse elusively attempts to exempt US policies from any blame for stimulating violent responses; as long as terrorist operations are merely unprovoked actions rather than reactions to US previous harmful policies, there is no way to prevent future terror. Consequently, there is no need to consider terrorists' discourses. The disaster of 9/11 though is different from the crises that both Nixon and Reagan had to deal with. While violent groups negotiated with them over specific measures in return for the release of American hostages, the suffering of Palestinians was repeatedly mentioned by both Arabic and Western human rights organisations and a large number of writers of different nationalities.

Thus, portraying 9/11 as a sudden and reasonless—except for envious hatred—disaster ignores both historical facts and other suggested reasons, whether related to British and US policies or the dominant structure of power in most Arabic and Muslim countries. It is understandable that the mighty toll of the terrorist attack was an unprecedented and terrific moment. This moment was exploited and fixed by the mass media, whether for political or commercial reasons. Stuart Hall argues that the mass media 'have an integrative, clarifying, and legitimating power to shape and define political reality, especially in those situations which are unfamiliar, problematic, or threatening' (Hall 77). Put differently, the media's insistence on repeating the spectacular act of horror keeps depicting it as an exceptional event, an unavoidable disaster, caused by terrorists.

Furthermore, the footage of the terrorist attack portrays a rare moment of weakness in the history of the US. Wendy Hesford argues: 'The visual repetition of the 2001 burning, collapse, and ruins of the World Trade Center [sic] on 9/11 on television screens across the world had codified perceptions of the terrorist threat and U.S. vulnerability' (Hesford 30). In addition to this negative uniqueness of the moment, or because of it, its 'visual repetition' means that there is no place for more weakness, no consideration of terrorists' reasons, even if these reasons are shared by millions of Muslims and Arabs. In contrast, as many of the plays studied in this thesis suggest, terrorism is not a foundling, it is the child of two grotesque parents: brutal puppets in Arabic countries and their operators' disastrous mistakes on the two sides of the Atlantic. Moreover, if 9/11 was an exceptional moment, as

an unlawful brutality, the War on Terror has seemed to include many occasions when law and humanity are excluded.

b. The crusade(s): wrong message and intentional misreading

In 2001, during the preparation for the war in Afghanistan, President Bush's use of the word 'crusade' generated what seemed to be an endless debate in the Arabic media, where most Islamists, along with a large number of journalists claimed that Bush had revealed the religious rationale of his War on Terror. The voices of Arabic scholars, who explained the figurative connotation of the word as a campaign to achieve a specific goal, seemed fewer than Bush's enemies in Arabic countries, who are not limited to Islamists. Insisting on the similarity between 'crusade' and jihad in terms of the discrepancy between the literal meaning and the implications each word has in its own language, Kepel argues:

In the Muslim World, a significant proportion of public and media opinion see this "war on terror" as a "crusade" directed against Islam—following the American President's use of the term in the wake of the bloodbaths in Washington and New York. [...] Although English is not my native tongue, I have had to explain to number of acquaintances in the Arab World, during the year following 9/11, that in English the term "crusade" has acquired a metaphorical character. (Kepel 2006, iv)

Yet, the unpopularity of the American President and the language barrier were not the only reasons for urging a large sector of Muslims to relate the word to the Christian military expeditions between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries.

Bin Laden literally and excessively utilised the word 'Crusade(s)' and phrases such as the 'American-Crusade', 'Zionist-Crusader alliance', and 'Judeo-Crusader forces' in all his statements and interviews through the 1990s. For instance, within Bin Laden's 1996 declaration of war against the US, he not only uses the word to describe the American-Israeli responsibility for the suffering of Muslims in Palestine, Iraq, or even Bosnia, but the leader of al-Qaeda also blames this alleged Christian-Jewish alliance for what he calls the massacres of Muslims in Burma, the Philippines, and Thailand.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ For more examples of Bin Laden's use of the word 'Crusade' in the 1990s, see Lawrence (2005, 58-63), which is a translation of Bin Laden's declaration of the World Islamic Front on 23 February 1998. The soon-to-be leader of al-Qaeda's interview with John Miller, the reporter of ABC, is quoted in (Berner 70-82).

Similarly, prior to Bush's use of the word crusade, Bin Laden's declaration of responsibility for 9/11 traces the allegedly Western religion-based aggressions against Muslims back to British, French, and Italian colonialism in the 1920s. According to the leader of al-Qaeda, Muslim countries were occupied by what he calls the 'Crusader banner', under which Bin Laden conflates the Serbian atrocities in Bosnia and the suffering of the Chechens from the military intervention of Russia. The latter, Bin Laden argues, 'embraces the Christian Orthodox faith' (qtd. in Rubin and Rubin 2002, 258). In this respect, Bush's speech seemed to justify the leader of al-Qaeda's claim about the holy war against America.

It is important to realise that Reagan utilised the same word many years earlier to describe the war on communism. Therefore, he was called 'The Crusader', a title also used for Paul Kengor's 2007 book, *The Crusader: Ronald Reagan and the Fall of Communism*. In this respect, Bush seems to follow Reagan in intending the metaphorical meaning of the word. However, the atheist identity of the former Soviet Union, which was described earlier by Carter as an 'atheistic' country, might imply a religious connotation associated with the campaign against communism. For instance, 'Onward Christian Soldiers' is the caption of Tony Auth's cartoon, published in *Philadelphia Inquirer* on 10 March 1983, within which Auth mockingly depicts Reagan as a Crusader whose cross is equipped with a bayonet (qtd. in Foglesong 184). What distinguishes Bush's use of the word from Reagan's is the fact that the Crusades are part of the history of Muslims. Considering that Jerusalem, which was the significant battlefield of the Crusades, is in the heart of the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict, might explain why Bush's speech hugely offended Muslim populations and suggests the reason for Bin Laden's use of the phrase 'Zionist-Crusader alliance'.

Apart from Bush, some Western writers claimed that many US politicians' speeches included several religious connotations, which mistakenly sent very negative messages to Muslims all over the world. For instance, Derrida argues that 'phrases such as "God bless America", "evildoers", "axis of evil" and "infinite justice" are just some of the signs that prove the biblical reference in America's official political discourse' (Derrida 117). Whilst I argue that the occasional imposing of religious phrases within political speeches is more

likely a method of mobilisation rather than a belief in waging a Christian war on Islam, every use of the phrase increased support for Bin Laden's claim of a Holy War.⁷⁰

Later, when Bush announced that God asked him to invade Iraq, he left no alternative for a large number of Muslims than to believe Bin Laden's claim that the Anglo-American coalition intentionally fights Islam. Jack Huberman argues that Bush claims that God tells him what he has to do, not only about wars against Muslim countries, or even US foreign policies, but also regarding American domestic matters (Huberman 181-2). The most striking point of Huberman's argument is his observation that religious claims tinted Bush's discourse in general, which means that the US President's infamous reference to the war in Iraq was not a deliberate offence to Muslims. However, it was hard for most Muslims to take such observations on board, especially when most of the coalition's pre-war declarations were proven to be lies. Rees explains: 'Many Muslims argue that the 'War on Terror' is a crusade, using terror as a euphemism similar to others used by Anglo-American forces during the attack on Iraq. That conflict was described as a war not an invasion, a liberation not an occupation, and cities were secured not captured' (Rees366). With the figurative rather than factual inclusion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the War on Terror, the negative consequences of religious discourse were multiplied.

It is important to stress that, in addition to a large number of scholarly and journalistic writings, the American President himself was keen to remove any misunderstanding by distinguishing terrorists from the rest of Muslims. Jonathan Rieder claims that Bush 'studiously avoided stigmatizing Islam, separating the terrorist squads who perverted the faith from those who were its true exemplars' (Rieder 265). Nevertheless, the critique of specific aspects of the War on Terror was sometimes mingled with hints at its allegedly religious motivation. Richard Harries claims: 'The phrase "Just War criteria" is [...] sharply contrasted with a crusade mentality that works on the assumption that one side is fighting God's enemies on behalf of God' (Harries 31). As this comparison suggests, Harries seems to describe a [C]rusade versus a Holy War, a reading with which I disagree, although many aspects of the War on Terror challenge its lawfulness as a fair punishment for the disaster of 9/11. When the US breaches 'Just War criteria', their leaders may assume the authority of the international community, not God. Put differently,

⁷⁰ There are hundreds of Arabic web sites, including electronic journals, blogs, and videos, which exploited Bush's use of the word 'crusade' to link between the American-led conflicts in Muslim countries and the Crusades.

unlike Bin Laden's directly and excessively religious discourse, the occasional use of religious terms by US politicians, whether intended to be conceived literally or figuratively, seems to be a method of mobilisation of their people, or troops, rather than a declaration of a religious war.

In this respect, and despite Bush's neglect of several factual reasons for anger, or even hatred, his question/answer explanation of the terrorist attack is a statement stressing superiority at a moment of national disaster. McCrisken argues: 'Indeed, on September 11 itself, President Bush argued that America's exceptionalism was the very reason it had been attacked by terrorists' (McCrisken 2009, 187). However, establishing superiority on the basis of religion is against the US principle of freedom of belief, which is one of the essential features of 'individualism', if I use Gow's expression. In this respect, the inferiority of the other, even if Bush was referring to all Muslim countries, is due to the lack of Western values. America's exceptionalism is mainly irreligious. It is based on the Western core value of freedom, which is backed by the mighty economic, political and military powers of the US. However, I claim that the clearer this exceptionalism practically and regularly manifested itself, the more infamous the War on Terror became, not as a war on Islam, but rather as a challenge to *Western* respect for law and human rights.⁷¹

c. The rule of exceptions

As the battlefields of the coalition's confrontations extend to include more locations, the most substantive sign of the US's enforcing of its own rules is not in Muslim or Arabic countries: it is Guantánamo Bay detention camp in Cuba. Thousands of articles and studies written by politicians and experts in international law insist that the US practices unlawful detention. Reports by tens of organisations have revealed inhuman treatment and brutal interrogations in Guantánamo. Even when Britain expressed its concerns, which caused 'a row [that] threatened to snowball into the first major Anglo-American split since the attacks of September 11' (Watt 2002, 1), the infamous prison is still there, challenging law and humanity. In *Drunk Enough to Say I Love You*, Sam/the US, declares that Guantánamo 'need[s] exemption from rules forbidding cruel, inhuman or

⁷¹ For detailed discussions about the history and aspects of the so-called 'American exceptionalism', see the studies of Bacevich 2008, Murray, and Hodgson.

degrading' (Churchill 2008, 304). As the speech of Churchill's character suggests, Guantánamo is itself an exemption from rules.⁷²

Guantánamo: Honour Bound to Defend Freedom cites Donald Rumsfeld's comment on accusations of illegality in the US's treatment of prisoners of war (POW), the American Secretary of Defense argues: 'We said from the beginning that these are unlawful combatants, and we're detaining them. We call them detainees, not prisoners of war. We call them detainees' (qtd. in Brittain 32). The most noticeable aspect of Rumsfeld's argument is its insistence on the exceptional case of the 'detainees' in Guantánamo, who cannot be considered 'prisoners of war' because they are 'unlawful combatants'.

Such an elusive use of language attempts to evade the US's description of its military expedition(s) to defeat terror as a 'war', which Habermas considers an inaccurate definition. Habermas argues:

'I consider Bush's decision to call for a "war against terrorism" a serious mistake, both normatively and pragmatically. Normatively, he is elevating these criminals to the status of war enemies; and pragmatically, one cannot lead a war against a "network" if the term "war" is to retain any definite meaning'. (Habermas 34-5)

Made in 2001, the importance of Habermas's comment is his prediction of future practical problems arising from the use of the word 'war'. Whether we call the captives in Guantánamo 'detainees' or 'prisoners', 'unlawful combatants' seems inapt to describe them according to International Humanitarian Law. Gary Solis argues that 'there are only two categories of individual on the battlefield: combatants and civilians. Unlawful combatants/unprivileged belligerents *are not* a third battlefield category' (Solis 207-8). Moreover, after years of Rumsfeld's claim, it was proven that a large number of these alleged 'unlawful combatants' are innocent.

In his statement after being released from Guantánamo, Jamal Al-Harith says: '[s]ometimes I do think it's a war on Muslims, a war on Islam. That came to mind when I was over there' (Brittain 53). The War on Terror, which was declared because a disastrous attack was made by tens of envious terrorists, seems to create more enemies, whose anger is not due to US policies, but because of unfair treatment at the hands of American guards,

⁷² For claims that many techniques of interrogation at Guantánamo breach the UN Convention, see the studies of Nowak and Saul.

interrogators, or soldiers. Luke Howie argues: ‘Through acts of violence carried out in the name of ‘counterterrorism’, it [the War on Terror] has also created generations of future terrorists ready to once again make witnesses of those who are watching their televisions or computer screens when terrorists strike’ (Howie 3). Although Howie’s claim precludes a religious explanation of the war, he suggests that the exchanges of extreme violence allow the possibility of an endless war.

Both Rumsfeld’s speech and Sam’s line in Churchill’s play describe a case of exception, wherein the rule is disrupted. Commenting on the status of the detainees at Guantánamo, Giorgio Agamben argues:

Neither prisoners nor persons accused, but simply “detainees,” they are the object of a pure de facto rule, of detention that is indefinite not only in the temporal sense but its very nature as well, since it is entirely removed from the law and from judicial oversight. The only thing to which it could possibly be compared is the legal situation of the Jews in the Nazi *Lager* [camps], who, along with their citizenship, had lost every legal identity. (Agamben 3-4)

In this respect, Agamben suggests that the detainees are not only excluded from being considered POW, but they are also deprived of their identity; as they are not charged, they are not even prisoners. Put differently, they do not exist.

In his 1921 pioneering study, Carl Schmitt claims: ‘From a juridical point of view, it is only relevant that, whenever a state of exception arises, the one who is in full command has to decide for himself’ (Schmitt 13). In his comment, Schmitt justifies the right of the ruler, who own the power, to enforce whatever he solely considers necessary during a state of exception, regardless of the institutions of the country. This dictatorial image is based on the ruler superiority. In other words, this ruler himself seems to be an exceptional person, whether in comparison with other individuals or even legal institutions.

Similarly, I argue that the supremacy of the US is the vital factor in its ability to apply the ‘politics of exception’. Trevor McCrisken claims:

The term ‘American exceptionalism’ describes the belief that the United States is an extraordinary nation with a special role to play in human history; not only unique but also superior among nations. [...] The ways in which US foreign policy is made and conducted are influenced by the underlying assumptions Americans hold about themselves and the rest of the world. (McCrisken 2003, 1)

As McCrisken's words suggest, US superiority seems to be a fundamental belief, which extends beyond the comparison with the inferiority of the Arabic and Muslim world to include all other countries. In this context, I can understand US reactions to European countries' opposition to the invasion of Iraq. Charles Peña argues that 'Rumsfeld was dismissive of France and Germany [...] Rumsfeld also antagonized Germany by including it with two countries designated as state sponsors of terrorism – Cuba and Libya' (Peña 129). In addition to suggesting that the US assumed its superiority towards powerful countries, the standpoint of two *Christian*—if I use this simplistic description—countries rebuts the allegation that the invasion of Iraq was part of the alleged Crusade.

Jenny Hughes utilises Bertolt Brecht's *The Exception and the Rule* (1930) in order to suggest that 'politics of exception' (Hughes 2011, 2) were applied to Guantánamo and the invasion of Iraq. In Brecht's short play, a rich Merchant kills his Coolie by shooting him. However, the Judge declares the killer innocent because the Merchant mistakenly thought that his Coolie was trying to kill him with a stone. Apart from the fact the Coolie was trying to give his own bottle of water to his master, the most important point of the incident is the exceptional circumstances that justified the verdict. Both the Merchant and his Coolie were tired, thirsty, and lost in a desert, where there was no protection from any possible attack from the Coolie on the Merchant. According to the Judge, because of the Merchant's fear, he had the right to expect his servant to kill him. Eventually, the Merchant is acquitted.

Jenny Hughes argues: 'During the most recent war on terror, declarations of exceptions to the rule supported the spread of war into new territories and the indefinite detention of prisoners of war held without recourse to legal representation' (Hughes 2011, 2). In this respect, both Guantánamo and the War in Iraq are as exceptional as the Judge's verdict in Brecht's play. However, there is a big difference between the latter and the two factual events of the War on Terror. To reveal this difference, it can be useful to utilise the model of metaphorical parallelism in order to compare between Brecht's play and both the detainees in Guantánamo and the War in Iraq.

By combining the two analogies, figure (3) portrays the rule of exception in the three cases. Just like the Coolie in Brecht's play, both the invasion of Iraq and Al-Harith, as an example of Guantánamo's prisoners, are blamed and penalised for what were later proven to be false accusations made by the US, the coalition, and the Merchant,

respectively. However, in Brecht's play, the decision to exempt the merchant/aggressor is taken by a third party, which is the judge. In contrast, the US as an aggressor, whether solely or as part of the coalition, decides by itself that the prisoners of Guantánamo and the War in Iraq are two exceptions to International Humanitarian Law.

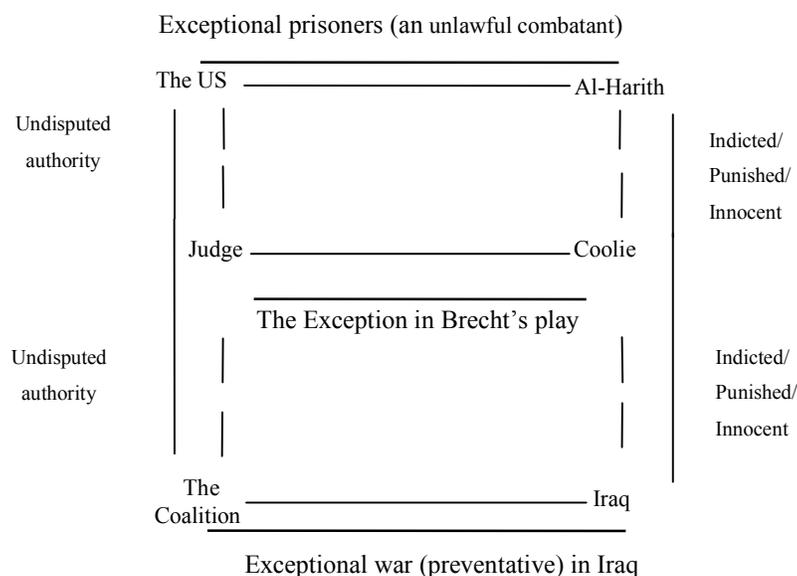


Figure (3)
The rule of exceptions

Put differently, when the invincible political and military power supplants the undisputed authority of law, the Anglo-American coalition possesses the dual identity of aggressor and judge, who has the ultimate authority to define all exceptions as a rule. It is important to reaffirm that while Bin Laden establishes his exceptional brutality on religious authority, the coalition relies on its political and military power.

So far, I have argued that the reasons for Islamic and nationalist terrorism against Western countries in general and the US in particular are rooted in national and regional disputes. However, the co-operation of dictatorships in Arabic and Muslim countries with the geopolitical interests of the British Empire, the former Soviet Union, and the US was a crucial factor in implanting terror in Western lands. Moreover, while radical Islamists kept repeating the myth of a new Crusade, the discourse of some American politicians as well as specific aspects of the War on Terror mistakenly supported such a myth, at least for a big sector of Muslim populations.

One of the most significant consequences of both 9/11 and the War on Terror, which was exploited by extremists to affirm the allegation of the war on Islam, is the so-called discrimination against Muslims in Western countries, including Britain and the US. The following is my argument that, apart from very few stances wherein Islam was identified with terrorism, the bulk of discrimination was incited by patriotic and/or cultural worries, rather than religious prejudice.

Secularity versus Sharia Law

As soon as the attack of 9/11 was proven as planned and executed by a group of Arab Muslims, a large number of both British and American Muslims and Arabs felt that they were obliged to defend themselves by declaring their refutation of terrorist acts. Simultaneously they sought to acquit their religion by refuting the terrorists' allegations, in which the latter cited verses from the Holy Qur'an to justify their violence. Commenting on the state of Muslim minorities on the two sides of the Atlantic in 2003, Mandaville observes:

Suspicion, discrimination, and outright persecution of Muslims have been commonplace over the past two years, and Muslim leaders-now constantly challenged to repudiate militancy in the name of their religion-have been put on the defensive. [...] New debates (combined with rehearsals of older ones) about what it means to be a Muslim, who speaks for Muslims, and how Muslims should respond to September 11 have emerged. (Mandaville 2003, ix)

However, Muslims in Britain and the US were still seen as enemies by some of their compatriots. Jessica Falcone argues that because of '[t]he barrage of television images of Osama bin Laden and his fellow Al Qaeda extremists, clad in turbans and sporting long beards, there was a series of cases of "mistaken identity" in which Sikh Americans were targeted as terrorists' (Falcone 89-90). The most striking point of such incidents of discrimination is their twofold generalisation: first, by blaming all Muslims for 9/11; second, and most importantly, by reducing the image of radical Islamists to a stereotyped code of costume and appearance. This phenomenon is mentioned by Holly Hill in her introduction to *Salam. Peace: An Anthology of Middle Eastern-American Drama*. Hill claims:

Just few weeks after 9/11, Cornerstone [Theatre Company in Los Angeles] opened *The Festival of Faith*, a work they had been developing long before the attacks. *The Festival of Faith* explored feelings about being Muslim, as well as South Asian and Sikh (Sikhs were mistaken for Muslims and attacked after 9/11), and presented twenty-one theatrical offerings at a Buddhist temple, a Bah'i center [sic], a Methodist church, a Jewish temple and an Islamic school. (Hill 2009, xxiv)

Both this performance and its timing suggest that theatre swiftly responded to the terrorist attacks in general, and commented on the consequences of 9/11 on Muslim Americans in particular. The most significant aspect of Hill's observation is that the company was preparing the play prior to 9/11. On one hand, al-Qaeda's attacks foregrounded the question: how do you feel as a Muslim in the US? On the other hand, such a question seems pertinent to the intrinsically complicated structure of multicultural societies, which acquired new difficulties after 9/11.

The huge religious and cultural variety in the US suggests that the vast majority of discrimination against Muslims was not established upon the dominance of Christianity or the minority status of Islam, even when the discriminator is Christian. In Britain, Gutkowski claims that 'it is not entirely clear who is the dominant group: is it Christian or non-religious' (Gutkowski2010, 320-1). Furthermore, with consideration of the fact that there are different degrees of secularity and that some secular people are inclined, to some extent, to a specific religion, attacks on Muslims are more likely to be an attack upon the enemy of the country, not of the religion, especially with the possibility of the conflation between the nationality, race, and religion of Muslims and Arabs. Put differently, Muslims and Arabs are attacked because the terrorists, who attacked our country, are the same. Moreover, these Muslims and Arabs repeat the same reasons declared by terrorists for attacking our country.

Later, the attacks of 7/7 on London, which seemed a punishment for the British alliance with the US in the occupation of both Afghanistan and Iraq, worsened the image of Muslims and underlined the link between Islam and violence. The most striking point of 7/7, in addition to the innocent victims, is that the terrorists were home-grown Muslims, who might be expected to be loyal to their nationality. Instead, they waged an alleged holy war on the country they lived in, which meant that a new War on Terror had to be launched in Britain. In her comment on British policies to deter terrorism, Gutkowski seems to agree

with the critique of the stereotyped image of terrorists suggested by US officials. Gutkowski claims that ‘secular views made it difficult, for example, for British policymakers to understand the dynamics of Islam as a social phenomenon or how Islamism might motivate an otherwise well educated, well-off and socially integrated individual to commit violence’⁷³ (Gutkowski *International Relations*, 349). As Gutkowski’s observation suggests, it seems that British policies repeated Bush’s answer about envious hatred, which again contradicts the fact that hundreds of young Muslims, all over the world, did not turn into terrorists because they were poor, ignorant, or lived in Western segregated societies.

As a result, a large number of Muslims and Arabs became reluctant to express their anger, fearing that they would be misunderstood. Ronan Bennett argues ‘Muslims are under siege. Worried that if they speak out they will be accused of being quasi-Islamist’ (Bennett 2007, G2). These circumstances suggest the significance of contemporary British and American plays that comment on the War on Terror. While the vast majority of these plays mainly focus on the roots and aftermath of the war in the three locations of conflict, some plays respond to the echoes of the war, which are heard on the two sides of the Atlantic, where the question of co-existence is increasingly asked in both the US and Britain.

In *Back of the Throat*, written by the Egyptian-American playwright Yusef El Guindi in 2004 and premiered at Theatre Schmeater, Seattle, in June 2005, Khaled is a Muslim-American, who is visited by two official interrogators. There is an uncertainty about Khaled’s casual relationship with someone, who was suspected of being a terrorist in a failed operation. However, the play suggests that after 9/11, being a Muslim is reason enough to be accused. Bartlett, one of the two American investigators, tells Khaled:

[A]t no time should you think this is an ethnic thing. Your ethnicity has nothing to do with it other than the fact that your background happens to be the place where most of this crap is coming from. [...] You’re a Muslim and an Arab. Those are the bad asses currently making life a living hell and so we’ll gravitate towards you and your ilk until other bad asses from other races make a nuisance of themselves. Right? Yesterday the Irish and the Poles, today it’s you. Tomorrow it might be the Dutch. (El Guindi 34)

⁷³ In the 1980s and 1990s, Egyptian governments failed to deter the noticeable increase of radical Islamists because of the wrong supposition that they were uniformly poor, ill-educated, and unemployed

As Bartlett's words suggest, Khaled is suspected, not because all Muslims are terrorists, but because, by coincidence, the members of al-Qaeda are Muslims and Arabs. At these exceptional moments, some Muslims and Arabs might become an exception to the entire society, and the exception's differences from the rule must be underlined. However, despite the similarity between El Guindi and his protagonist, in terms of original nationality and religion, Khaled is not portrayed as an ideal person, who becomes a victim of US brutality. He is a normal person who makes mistakes. This part of his character makes him representative of a large number of Arabs and Muslims, rather than a melodramatic sign of goodness being assaulted by evil.

As the following dialogue from *Back of the Throat* reveals, the first two letters in Khaled's name 'Kh' is the equivalent to only one letter in Arabic language: (خ) whose sound, as it should be pronounced in Arabic, does not exist in the English alphabet. It is more like the sound of 'X' in Russian, 'J' in Spanish and (CH) in German. Bartlett intends to emphasize the difficulty of uttering Khaled's name to hint at his different culture – or, put differently, to remind him that he cannot consider himself a completely integrated American citizen:

BARTLETT: 'Haled'?
 KHALED: More Khaled.
 BARTLETT: 'Kaled'.
 KHALED: That's good.
 BARTLETT: But not exactly.
 KHALED: It doesn't matter. [...]
 BARTLETT: It's that back of the throat thing.
 KHALED: Right. (El Guindi 28)

Because the sound of (خ) comes from the back of the throat, the title of the play suggests that, in spite of all efforts to be close, some cultural differences cannot be denied. In the movie *My Name is Khan*, the Indian Muslim protagonist's surname name begins with the same letter (خ) and he is accused of being a terrorist as well. However, unlike Khaled, Rizvan Khan, who suffers from mental illness, repeats 'My name is Khan and I'm not a terrorist' (*My Name is Khan* DVD). In addition, with a happy finale, just like the vast majority of Bollywood movies, Khan is released and consoled by the newly elected first African-American President. Such a sign of hope that Barack Obama's presidency may end the era of discrimination against Muslims is affirmed by glimpses of some women who

wear hijab amongst the crowd. As *Back of the Throat* suggests, Khaled does not mind being called ‘Kaled’ or ‘Haled’, as long as he is not accused of being a terrorist. Khaled’s hope is unlikely to be realised, at least ‘until other bad [members of] other races make a nuisance of themselves’. Nevertheless, both the play and the movie suggest that pronouncing (خ) is hard, but not impossible. It just needs some effort.

Thirteen years after 9/11, the difficulties that face Muslims’ integration in Western society extend beyond, and scarcely include the possibility of being mistakenly suspected as terrorists. Rather it is the tension, not to say the collision of some of Islamic culture, in the heart of which is Sharia Law, with secularity, which—to different degrees—regulates the majority of Western countries. In the heart of this Islamic culture—religious rules and traditions—is Sharia Law, which strictly defines the conduct of matters of marriage, education, inheritance.

In this respect, it seems that Muslim culture, not Muslims, is the exception to secular values, not to Christianity. However, it seems crucial to consider two points. Firstly, the number of secular people with Christian inclinations is more likely to be larger than secular Muslims in Western countries. Secondly, while both secularity and Christianity co-exists in a conformation with the dominant laws and most values of Western countries, the latter are hugely contradicted by many aspects of Muslim culture, especially regarding women rights and equality, and the freedom of belief. In 2007, Roy claimed:

[T]he critique of Islam is today a rallying point for two intellectual families that have been opposed to each other so far: those who think that the West is first and foremost Christian (and who, not that long ago, considered that the Jews could hardly be assimilated) and those who think that the West is primarily secular and democratic. In other words, the Christian Right and the secular Left are today united in their criticism of Islam. (Roy 2007, ix)

This crisis of multicultural societies is portrayed by the English playwright Richard Bean’s *England People Very Nice*. Premiered at the Oliver Theatre, National Theatre in February 2009, the play exploits the current debate about Muslims’ integration in British society to investigate Britain’s history of receiving and absorbing several cultures and religions. The play portrays four waves of immigration to England, the French Huguenots, the Irish, the Jews, and Asian Muslims; it seems that the newcomers are always discriminated against because they are different. Differences are not limited to religion and language, but also the

type of food each group eats. Historically, there are big gaps in time between the four waves, but Bean treats them as successive periods.

The technique of the play-within-a-play enables Bean to make the same actors play different characters over the course of four acts, which shape the inner play. In the frame play, these actors are a group of asylum seekers, who are waiting in the airport, hoping to be accepted into England. Killing time, they collectively write a play, which is an overview of four acts of historical immigration. It seems that Bean suggests that Britain will always be attractive for immigrants. Both the frame play and the four acts of the inner play contain a large number of ethnic slurs and disparaging remarks, whether regarding religion or culture. For instance, when Sanya, one of the asylum seekers from Kosovo, rehearses her lines as a narrator in the frame play, she offends the French, the Irish, the Jews and Muslims, respectively. She says: ‘Fucking FROGS! Fucking MICKS, Fucking YIDS! Fucking PAKIS’ (Bean *England People*, 10). Similar derogative remarks are made about all of the four groups throughout the inner acts.

The most striking feature of the play’s message is its fluctuation between suggesting that different cultures and religions are able to live together, and the impossibility of such integration. On one hand, Mushi, the moderate Asian Muslim, is a smart, kind and attractive man, who is able to turn himself from a poor immigrant into a successful businessman. Moreover, he drinks alcohol and has a relationship with an English girl. Even his mistakes in language are not conceived as an inability to communicate as he always manages to say understandable and smart things. Furthermore, Mushi is upset because his daughters wear hijab; he complains: ‘My daughters gone hijabi, and they bully my wife into niqab! One minute I’m living with four beautiful Indian women, next minute I’ve got a house full of bloody Arabs!’ (Bean *England People*, 105). Relating niqab-wearing to Arabs relies on the fact that it is mainly worn by women in Saudi Arabia. However, the burqa is a more strict form of dress worn by Afghan women, which shapes one of the Western ‘secular misconceptions’, as the plays studied in the fourth chapter suggest.

On the other hand, the play utilises visual elements to suggest that every new wave of immigrants enforces its religion; while the French build a church (20), ‘*the RABBI disposes of the cross on the outside of the church and puts up a star of David*’ (75), then an ‘Islamic crescent replaces the Star of David’ (90). It is hard to know exactly which meaning *England People Very Nice* suggests. At this point, the message of the play is baffling. Finally, it is important to mention that Bean’s play discusses the ways in which radical

Islamists are portrayed in theatre. Through a discussion between Philippa, the English officer who undertakes the role of director, and Taher, the Christian Palestinian asylum seeker they debate:

PHILIPPA: Iqbal. You've shaved your beard off. Your beard was the reason we cast you as the mad Imam. [...]

TAHER: The group turned my imam into stereotype – mad, blind, hooks for hands. The imam will be better without the beard and the beard wig.

TATYANA: It is not a stereotype, they've all got beards! (*Bean England People*, 11-12)

Both opinions seem reasonable. As an Arabic Christian, Taher knows that neither the beard nor its size is relevant to radicalism. Tatiana, the Serbian girl, is right because this is the image of radical Islamists in the Western media. By asking for a more normal image of the radical imam, Taher suggests that theatre can profoundly represent the facts by contradicting both: the superficial image of reality and its reflection in the eye of the media. The gap between the media coverage and dramatic representation is investigated in the next chapter. In order to give their comment on the three ongoing conflicts, contemporary Anglo-American playwrights theatricalise the complex historical, cultural and political contexts explored in this chapter. The next chapter investigates the ways in which their plays utilise different dramaturgical forms in order to engage these contexts in the imaginary realm of theatre.

Chapter Two

Forms of topicality: New goals of political theatre

This chapter investigates how the large number of plays that comment on the ongoing War on Terror have foregrounded political theatre as a prominent trend in contemporary British and American theatre. In addition, the chapter explores the different ways in which playwrights utilise specific theatrical techniques in order to represent the events that preceded and accompanied the Anglo-American coalition's confrontations in the three locations of conflict.

All plays can be political, but not political theatre

Due to the essential effect of the ruling political system on all aspects of society, dramatic representations of this society may indicate specific political features. Sociological approaches to the study of theatre suggest that, since Aeschylus' *The Persians* (472 B.C.), plays can reflect indirectly on the dominant political structure of their time. Even a farcical or a melodramatic love story, for instance, can reveal the tension between the two different classes the lovers belong to. These occasional political manifestations, though, do not prove that the whole history of theatre can be described as political theatre.

By its nature, political theatre intentionally utilises textual and theatrical methods in order to express its opposition to a de facto situation which was created by the dominant political power(s), whether directly or indirectly. By addressing this situation, political theatre insists on the need for change. In this respect, we can understand Augusto Boal's opinion as he argues that 'all theatre is essentially political, because all the activities of man are political and theatre is one of them. Those who try to separate theatre from politics try to lead us into error – and this is a political attitude' (Boal ix). As a director and theorist, who believes in the social and political function of theatre, Boal's claim can be understood as an attack on the capitalist commodification of theatre, which turn it into an apolitical method of entertainment. In contrast, a literal reading of Boal's argument will contradict his noticeable dedication to creating an alternative political theatre, which is made by, and addresses, the politically and economically marginalised social classes.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ For claims that Marxism essentially framed Boal's theory and practice of the Theatre of the Oppressed, see Babbage (53-9), and Magnat (200-1). For several perspectives on Boal's theatre, see Emert and Friedland. In

All theatre can be political, but is not necessarily political theatre. This is what Graham Holderness insists on when he claims:

Theatre may be ‘political’ without becoming ‘political theatre’, in the sense that a play may represent political matters or address political issues, in exactly the same way as a play can represent love, or old age, or poverty, or madness; if, that is, the play performs that representation of politics in an objective way, without taking sides. Such drama is in a sense political by accident. Politics proper is surely, however, incompatible with a detached, objective perspective (Holderness 2).

However, Holderness suggests a very strict criterion: that even plays that raise political matters can be excluded from political theatre, unless they become, Holderness argues, ‘partisan, splitting along the lines of party conflict, lining up with one particular political group, or cause, or ideology’ (Holderness 2). This insistence that political plays cannot be objective describes agitprop plays, in which the political message is obviously based on a strict political affiliation. In such plays, the playwright’s support for a specific political side, whether that is an ideology or a political party, is inseparable from his/her critique of the other ideology or party and vice versa. Although this ‘partisan’ type of political theatre can be found in a large number of plays in specific periods of the twentieth century, it is different from the vast majority of contemporary British and American political plays that comment on the three conflicts. For instance, when an American playwright contradicts the invasion of Iraq he/she does not seek to attack the Republican administration in order to support the Democratic Party, even if he/she belongs to the latter.

Moreover, although the vast majority of the plays studied in this thesis have clear standpoints on the conflicts to which they respond, their ‘cause’(s) does not take the form of a dichotomy between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Opposition to any aspect of the War on Terror, for instance, cannot be considered to constitute support for terrorists. In addition, some plays do not declare their messages in a direct way, or they even confine their purpose to giving an objective narrative about the topic they comment on. Theatre in general is very responsive to social and political changes. Political theatre in particular reflects on these changes. Therefore, the goal of political theatre in the twentieth century cannot be identical

to those of its ancestors in the previous centuries, regardless of the similar theatrical techniques.

One of the most striking features of political theatre is that it usually flourishes at the decisive junctures in the history of societies. Jenny Hughes claims:

Crisis has inspired and mobilised political performance practice across the contemporary history of western performance, from the explosion of workers' theatres in between the two World Wars [...], to the proliferation of alternative theatres of the counter-cultural movement in the 1960s (Hughes 2011, 18).

Focusing on the 1920s and 1960s does not contradict the fact that there have always been Western playwrights, including British and American, who write political plays. However, the third and the seventh decades of the twentieth century were two booms in political theatre, in which theory was engaged with practice. Moreover, the legacy of both is crucially influential on the vast majority of political plays since the 1930s, including contemporary plays, wherein the techniques of documentary theatre seem to prevail in the representations of the conflicts. The following is an attempt to highlight the major characteristics of 'political performance practice' in the 1920s and 1960s.

The origin(s) of Documentary Theatre: Piscator and Brecht

The inclusion of documentary content within plays, whether by representing factual incidents or in the shape of fragments of real persons' speeches uttered by dramatic characters, seems to be an old phenomenon. Attilio Favorini argues:

From its origins and throughout its history, Western theatre has engaged, represented, and/or attempted to affect the course of history. Phrynichus and Aeschylus wrote plays on the Persian wars when they were still fresh in the memories of their auditors. [...] Early in the sixteenth century French *sotties* commented on Papal politics; late in the same century Elizabethan playwrights began to exploit contemporary crime stories. (Favorini 31)

Apart from the satirical nature of the '*sotties*', which distinguishes them from the Greek tragedy and Elizabethan drama, the most common feature of all these cases, mentioned by

Favorini, is playwrights' instant response to actual events.⁷⁵ This aspect is always present in all topical plays, including the plays studied in this thesis, which can be explained as an exploitation of ready subject matter, in which public opinion is interested. Yet, the representation of recent or historical factual incidents does not mean that the play belongs to the so-called documentary theatre. In other words, neither the topicality nor the factual origin of the dramatic action or characters, as such, determines the genre of the play.

Documentary theatre, in which documentary content is utilised in order to deliver a specific political message, started with the German director Erwin Piscator. Even Favorini, who insists that the roots of documentary theatre can be traced back to the Greeks, declares: 'In 1925 Erwin Piscator directed and co-authored what in retrospect may be named the Ur-text of the documentary theatre movement' (Favorini 33). Describing documentary theatre as a 'movement', though, involves a kind of undervaluation regarding its post-Piscator manifestations. Derek Paget argues: 'The term "Documentary Theatre" can be conveniently given capital letters, because it is much easier to establish as a coherent (and self-defining) signifying practice' (Paget 1990, 42). Paget's claim is supported by the recurrences of this theatrical 'practice' in the 1960s and 2000s, both of which are influenced by socio-political and cultural aspects.

From the beginning, documentary theatre was highly influenced by historical circumstances, which suggests an inseparable linkage between social matters and arts, including theatre. Markus Nowatzki argues:

After World War I it seemed no longer possible to win the strongly diverse public with the utopian concepts of the late expressionists. [...] In opposition of [sic] this late expressionism a new style became stronger – *Neue Sachlichkeit* [The New Realism]. [...] Thus writers of the whole political spectrum of Weimar could be found among the group. [...] Common for all of them was either to condemn the technology cult around America or to follow the inherent excitement of the public for Americanization. (Nowatzki 17)

Despite Piscator's belief in Marxism, he does not 'condemn' technology, which was a sign of American cultural domination. In contrast, highlighting Piscator's dependence on technological devices is a common feature of all definitions of his theatre in particular and

⁷⁵ For more information about the history and structural features of the *sotties*, see Ross.

all the practice of documentary theatre in general. Paget argues: ‘I would describe documentary dramas as plays with a close relationship to their factual base – a twentieth-century extension of the historical drama or the *pièce à thèse*.⁷⁶ [...] [T]he ‘extension’ is inherent in the technological means of presentation’ (Paget 1998, 110). As Paget’s claim suggests, the use of these technological methods seems to be the essential difference between documentary theatre and all previous ways of imposing factual material within plays.

In this respect, Piscator’s use of technology accords with German spectators’ preferences. However, he exploits these technological methods in order to express his political beliefs, which not only opposed the ‘Americanisation’ of German society in the 1920s, but also contradicted the capitalist commercial vision of theatre as a method of mere entertainment. Nowatzki claims that ‘Piscator used theatre for his social criticism, showing social and economic hardships’ (Nowatzki 17). Mel Gordon explains Piscator’s theatrical utilisation of technology, arguing:

Piscator relied on the new technologies – especially film and print journalism – to mount Marxist interpretations of the classics and kaleidoscopic historical enactments. Projections, movie clips, archival recordings, and symbolic, flying stage architecture surrounded his actors like a media gale. [...] Here was political drama aided by layers of scientific expertise and the new spectator’s thirst for anti-illusionist entertainment. (Gordon 158)

Thus, it seems that Piscator lures his spectators into the temptation of watching new technological methods in order to confront them with political and economic problems in their society. Gordon’s mention of the audience’s ‘thirst for anti-illusionist entertainment’ recalls the state of the Western theatre in the first three decades of the twentieth century, where both directors and playwrights were in search of an alternative aesthetic to naturalistic plays.⁷⁷ In addition, while the emergence of cinema as a new art form was seen

⁷⁶ The term refers to a nineteenth-century type of play, in which the playwright discusses controversial social matters. Each point of view on a particular matter is raised and adopted by a specific dramatic character. Usually, contemporary critics use the term as a derogatory description of plays’ lack of vitality, especially when playwrights use their characters as mouthpieces.

⁷⁷ While playwrights’ opposition to Naturalism was materialised in the expressionist theatre, as can be found in the works of German playwrights such as Reinhard Sorge, Georg Kaiser, and Ernst Toller, directors insisted that visual elements are the essence that distinguishes theatre from literature. One of the most revolutionary opinions was introduced in 1938 by Antonin Artaud. In *The Theatre and its Double*, the French theorist and director calls for neglecting the written text, or considering it a marginal factor in the

by theatre practitioners as a threat to theatre's popularity, Piscator managed to include this new art within his plays. In other words, documentary theatre seems to be Piscator's answer to the crisis of theatre in the early twentieth century as well as an appropriate method of raising political matters.

In terms of challenging naturalistic plays and illusionist theatre, the significant role of technological devices in delivering political messages extends beyond being a container of documented information. Apart from their political contents, the successive display of 'projections', 'movie clips' and 'archival recordings' prevents the audience from escaping the problems of their real life to a fictional realm. In contrast, the interventions of technological methods in the fictional plot urge spectators to use their critical mind in order to recognise and conclude from the facts they receive, which are intrinsically related to their real life. Integrated into the whole unity of the performance, technological methods enabled Piscator's plays to 'relay facts to an audience and to signify a dramatic methodology that diverged from the dominant naturalism/social realism to include two-dimensional 'characters' who could represent abstractions (rather like the creations of medieval religious drama)' (Paget 1998, 109). Unlike naturalistic characters, the 'two-dimensional' characters in documentary theatre are more of a device to state facts/thoughts/opinions/claims rather than a depiction of a human being. The most striking point of Paget's note is that it indirectly refers to the fact that Piscator's documentary theatre demands that actors take a new approach to their roles other than the dominant Stanislavski system of acting.⁷⁸ Put differently, actors in documentary theatre are usually as utilitarian as technological devices; sources for information rather than emotive imaginary characters.

Because of his influence on European and American practitioners, Piscator is seen as a pioneer of documentary practice alongside the revolutionary director, playwright, and theorist Bertolt Brecht. Gordon argues: 'Piscator's Epic Theatre shared many qualities associated with his German comrade Bertolt Brecht' (Gordon 158).⁷⁹ However, despite

performance. Artaud's claim of the ability of theatre to write its own nonverbal poetry influenced the trend of creating visual metaphors on stage in the French avant-garde theatre by the middle of the twentieth century.

⁷⁸ A group of training methods, instructions and advice – known as the Method – was suggested by the Russian director, actor and theorist Konstantin Stanislavski (1863–1938). Stanislavskian techniques help actors to use their psychological and physical qualities in order to acquire those of the dramatic characters to the extent that actors may identify themselves with the characters at specific moments. Stanislavsky's system is respectively introduced and investigated in Stanislavski and Whyman.

⁷⁹ For more information about Marxist documentary plays in Britain and the US in the 1930s, see Gray (1976, 182-207), and Watson.

Piscator's vital role in contradicting illusionist traditions by creating the 'Epic Theatre', the latter is sometimes described as a Brechtian invention. The word 'Epic' itself, which challenges Aristotelian differentiation between narrative and dramatic representations, is usually linked to Brecht's theatre. Peter Brooker claims:

'Epic' is the description most commonly applied to Brecht's theatre. We should realise that the term was in use in German debates before Brecht adapted it, however, and that for Brecht too it had several sources: the political theatre of Erwin Piscator and German agitprop; the cabaret of Frank Wedekind and the work of the music hall comedian Karl Valentin; Charlie Chaplin and American silent film; Asian and revolutionary Soviet theatre; as well as Shakespeare and Elizabethan chronicle plays. (Brooker 211)

On the one hand, as a theorist, the origins of the vast majority of Brecht's suggestions can be found in many sources, including Piscator. On the other hand, as a playwright and a director, Brecht had the ability to materialise and improve his own theory of Epic Theatre with didactic goals, which are influenced by the thoughts of Marx and Hegel.⁸⁰

During his experiments, Brecht recruited all these borrowed thoughts from different sources in order to formulate a consistent totality that includes all the elements of the performance. It can be useful to explain how Brecht modifies others' thoughts in order to build his theory of theatre. Brecht's notion of alienation⁸¹ is a good example because it is considered one of the cornerstones of Brecht's epic Theatre. Moreover, alienation is usually mentioned as the element that distinguishes Brecht from Piscator. When Christopher Innes claims that '[t]he most obvious difference between their work [sic] is that Brecht replaced Piscator's principle of direct confrontation with his own concept of alienation' (Innes 1972, 199), I can realise how Brecht's Epic Theatre depends on alienation, which was originally mentioned in the studies of Russian Formalism.

As Brooker argues: 'The new narrative content signalled by the term 'epic' was to be communicated in a dialectical, non-illusionist and nonlinear manner, declaring its own artifice as it hoped also to reveal the workings of ideology' (Brooker 215). Underscoring the aspect of 'declaring its own artifice' as the essence of Brecht's theatre, Brooker

⁸⁰ For a detailed analysis of Brecht's attempts to compose a combination of Marxism and the Hegelian dialectic, see Robinson (2008, 167-234).

⁸¹ Brecht's German term 'Verfremdungseffekt' is sometimes translated by scholars as 'estrangement', the 'making-strange effect', or the 'V-effect'.

indirectly refers to the influence of Russian Formalism. Gerd Bjørhovde explains: ‘The term *defamiliarization* (*ostranenie*: “make strange”) is of course, generally associated with Russian Formalism and perhaps above all the name Victor Shklovsky’ (Bjørhovde 129).⁸²

However, Brecht extends Shklovsky’s narrow formalist understanding of ‘*ostranenie*’ to give it a political quality. Bjørhovde claims that ‘the formalists were primarily concerned with technical matters, while Brecht was above all interested in the political aspects – and effects – of the literary text or dramatic situation’ (Bjørhovde 129). Shklovsky’s apolitical focus on ‘technical matters’ can be understood on the grounds of the Russian Formalists’ interest in the essential features of literature that distinguish it from all other sorts of discourse. Susan Bennett claims that ‘Shklovsky discusses defamiliarization as the device by which literature is recognized as literature’ (Bennett2005, 28). In addition, the literary work, in/on which Shklovsky based his notion of defamiliarisation, utilised the ‘declaring [of] its own artifice’ for no political reasons. Raman Selden explains:

As Shklovsky’s essay on Sterne⁸³ reveals, the Formalists had a more revolutionary concept of plot than Aristotle. The plot of *Tristram Shandy* is not merely the arrangement of story-incidents but also all the ‘devices’ used to interrupt and delay the narration. Digressions, typographical games, displacement of parts of the book (preface, dedication, etc.) and extended descriptions are all devices to make us attend to the novel’s form. (Selden 2001, 34)

In this sense, by commenting on literary devices, Sterne’s novel intentionally reveals its fact as a novel rather than an imaginary realm, which can be described as the eighteenth-century narrative equivalent to the anti-illusionist theatre sought by Piscator and Brecht. The question is how Brechtian methods of alienation help in achieving his plays’ political function to the extent that they distinguish his work from Piscator’s? The importance of such a question relies on the fact that—regardless of the degree to which contemporary British and American political plays are influenced by the Piscatorian documentary practice—Brecht’s techniques are a common feature of the vast majority of these plays.

⁸² The influence of Russian Formalism on Brecht is mentioned in Holub (18-19) and Meyer-Dinkgräfe (2001, 65-6).

⁸³ Laurence Sterne (1713–1768) is a British writer, whose novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* was studied by Shklovsky as an example of the significance of the composition of the novel compared to the unimportance of the story it tells. The novel is full of the narrator’s interventions, as a writer, in the narrative by commenting on the techniques of writing and the arrangement of chapters.

In Brecht's Epic Theatre, alienation regulates all the elements. In other words, each visual and verbal component of the performance is intentionally 'declaring its own artifice', in its own way. Christopher Baugh describes the scenery of one of the productions of Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Baugh claims:

The performance imagery attains the power of dramatic utterance: harsh white lighting from exposed lighting instruments, stripped bare stage, undyed or 'earth' coloured hessian and canvas costumes, half stage-height curtains running on horizontal strainer wires across the stage and terse, combative 'literary' captions painted or projected onto screens which straddle the stage. (Baugh 272)

The importance of Baugh's observation is its underscoring of the cooperative work of all the visual elements in raising the audience's awareness of the artificiality of the performance as a work of art, by revealing the theatrical devices of the make-believe. For instance, reducing the use of theatrical lighting to the practical function that enables the audience to watch is emphasised by the self-reflexivity of revealing lighting equipment.

The actor, whose practice combines both verbal and nonverbal qualities, has a central function in the process of alienation.⁸⁴ Brecht explains: 'To achieve the V-effect the actor must give up his complete conversion into the stage character. He *shows* the character, he *quotes* his lines, he *repeats* a real-life incident' (qtd. in Eddershaw 279). Here, Brecht takes a further step than the 'two-dimensional' characters in documentary theatre, as explained by Paget, in terms of challenging Stanislavskian illusionist acting and the effect on spectators. Unlike two-dimensional characters in documentary theatre, Brecht's plays are full of profoundly sophisticated and lively characters such as, to give only a tiny example, Mother Courage and Azdak.⁸⁵ However, these characters are contextualised in a specific form of representation. Philip Auslander argues:

Brecht privileges the actor over the character, but for a different reason than Stanislavsky: in order that the actor's commentary on the character be [sic] meaningful to the audience, the actor must be

⁸⁴ Songs, which also combine both verbal and nonverbal theatrical language, are utilised by Brecht to achieve the alienation effect when they interrupt, comment, and even mock the dramatic situation or characters.

⁸⁵ Respectively in *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1939), and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1944). Neither Brecht's plays nor his characters can be thoroughly analysed in this thesis.

present as herself as well as in character and her persona must carry greater authority than the role.⁸⁶ (Auslander2002, 56)

Auslander stresses the ‘role’ of the Brechtian actor, which includes, but is not limited to, representing dramatic characters. As they are aware of their own identity as actors, they distinguish themselves from the imaginary characters. This dual existence enables actors to comment on the characters’ feelings or actions. In this respect, actors can assume the position of critics, whose opinions prevent spectators from identifying with imaginary characters. Put differently, the acting style in Brecht’s theatre motivates the audience’s critical sense regarding both dramatic characters and situations.

In this respect, as Paget explains: ‘the means of production is granted to an audience expected not to consume passively, but engage actively with the material being presented’ (Paget 1990, 42). However, unlike the formalist lack of social function of revealing the artifice, alienation is Brecht’s way of engaging his spectators with the political matter the play raises. Paget claims that ‘all this is done with a polemical purpose, the company and/or writer(s) wishing to argue a case forcefully, which generally opposes an established point of view’ (Paget 1998, 110). Paget’s note suggests that Brecht’s model of theatre has become an inspiration for theatre practitioners, not only in his work as a theorist, but also as a playwright, whose texts are a crucial factor in giving his work its coherence; not only because of the political messages they include, but also due to the way in which the structure of the plays helps in delivering and underlining these messages.

Brecht’s play *The Exception and the Rule*, which was mentioned in the first chapter, can be a good example of how Brecht’s text works politically. In the prologue to the play, *The Players* directly addresses the audience, with no pretence of a fourth wall that distinguishes the real world of spectators from the imaginary realm of the play:

Examine carefully the behavior [sic] of these people:
 Find it surprising though not unusual
 Inexplicable though normal
 Incomprehensible though it is the rule.
 Consider even the most insignificant, seemingly simple
 Action with distrust. Ask yourselves whether it is necessary
 Especially if it is usual.
 We ask you expressly to discover
 That what happens all the time is not natural. (qtd. in Drain 110)

⁸⁶ Stanislavsky is another form of writing the name of the Russian director in some English studies.

By this kind of instruction, spectators seem to be in a mission as they are asked by the actors to be alert and skeptical. Therefore, when spectators watch the Merchant while he is humiliating and beating the Coolie throughout their journey, Brecht does not need them to fear by identifying themselves with the servant, or even to pity him. Spectators are demanded by the Players to think; to realise the unjust situation, which should lead them to anger. Although Margaret Eddershaw describes the effect of the relationship between the Brechtian actor and the dramatic character on the audience in general, her explanation seems to apply to *The Exception and the Rule*. She claims:

[W]hile not eliminating emotion altogether in his or her performance, the actor would stimulate the audience to feel emotions that were not the same as those ‘felt’ by the character. For example, if the character were [sic] ‘sad’, the audience might experience ‘anger’ at the circumstances which made the character feel that way. (Eddershaw 279)

To protect spectators from the feelings of fear or pettiness, Brecht utilises the theatrical trick of asides, wherein both the Coolie and the Merchant comment on their own actions. At these moments, the distance between the actor and the imaginary character can be revealed by, for example, the actor’s use of his own voice.

Moreover, during the court scene, where the Merchant is tried for killing the Coolie, spectators will scrutinise the Judge’s verdict of claiming the Merchant’s innocence on the grounds of the exceptional circumstances of his crime. At this moment the political function of the play, which was initiated by the prologue, can be read in the context of Brecht’s Marxist critique of capitalism. The arrogant and brutal Merchant, as an individual capitalist, kills his servant, who belongs to the working class—just like the vast majority of Brecht’s targeted audience. Then, the institution of the law, which is represented by the Judge, exempts the capitalist murderer from punishment. By depicting the crimes of capitalism, the play comments on the harmful consequences of the dominant capitalist system in the society. In this respect, Brecht’s goal extends beyond the mere confrontation between his spectators and the economic and political problems in their society. Brecht seeks ‘to jar audiences out of their passive acceptance of modern capitalist society as a natural way of life, into an attitude not only [...] of critical understanding of capitalist shortcomings, but active cooperation with the forces of change’ (Abrams 183). In other

words, Brecht's political theatre not only defines and reveals the problems of the ruling political system, but suggests the alternative, which is communism.

Both Piscator and Brecht are perfect examples of Holderness' firm rule that political theatre cannot achieve an 'objective perspective'. Their Marxist beliefs define their points of view on both theatre and society, which are expressed in their harsh and continuous attack on capitalism. Although their techniques are widely utilised by the vast majority of contemporary British and American playwrights who comment on the events of the War on Terror, there is an obvious discrepancy in terms of the goal of political theatre. Ryan Reynolds argues:

The most influential political theatres, of Brecht and Piscator, were contingent upon the existence of and belief in alternative social structure to capitalism – in this case socialism and communism. These clear and tangible utilitarian aims seem impossible today in a society with no revolutionary context or belief in such alternative social ideals. (Reynolds 19)

Apart from utopian dreams of a more reasonable and peaceful world in a few of the plays studied in this thesis, there is no suggestion of a political or ideological 'alternative' to the disastrous aftermath of the bloody confrontations. Moreover, a large number of the plays do not even allude to such a dream of a better world. In contrast, their messages seem to be a warning of worse to come. In addition, by relating the ongoing conflicts to similar historical events in the three locations of conflict, some plays seem to suggest that humanity never learns from its mistakes. Furthermore, many plays literally contradict Holderness' opinion on political theatre by adopting an 'objective perspective'. As Derek Paget argues:

Politics domestically (even internationally after the collapse of the USSR and the end of Cold War negative certainties) has mutated into a depthless, programme-less form that has over time increasingly privileged the figure of the *witness* as the last best hope of opposition. (Paget 2009, 234)

A big sector of contemporary Anglo-American political theatre opposes the Anglo-American coalition's military adventures by being an 'objective' *witness*, although ultimately objectivity seems impossible, as the reading of the plays will suggest later.

In all these cases, whether the plays tend to be dreams of peace and tolerance, warnings of more atrocities or unbiased displays of specific happenings, all these dramatic comments on the conflicts are in opposition to dominant discourses within which all exceptions are justified: wars are described as an inescapable inevitability in which Muslim civilian and Western soldier victims are forgivable mistakes of smart weapons. Avraham Oz argues:

[T]he political theatre uses the conventions of a chosen theatrical form to emphasize, reveal, and criticize the ideology serving as the social background of human actions or situations, to locate alternative discourses to the one preferred by the ruling ideology, and to liberate human consciousness from its circular binding to mythical formations. (Oz 30)

According to Oz's definition of political theatre, the collective message of these plays can be considered an 'alternative discourse' to the dominant discourses, insisting that many aspects of the violent conflicts are always avoidable, usually unnecessary, and sometimes unethical. Recognising the difference between adopting documentary techniques in political theatre as a device and the purpose of this adoption is crucial, not only to differentiate contemporary documentary plays from Piscator/Brecht theatre, but also to distinguish between the latter's agitprop goals and the function of the first revival of documentary theatre in the 1960s.

The revival of Documentary Theatre: Weiss and his comrades

With Rolf Hochhuth's *The Representative* (1963),⁸⁷ Heinar Kipphardt's *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer* (1964), and Peter Weiss' *The Investigation* (1965), documentary theatre was revitalised in the 1960s. Hochhuth's play wonders about the silence of the Catholic Church, represented by Pope Pius XII, about the Nazi crimes against the Jews in the first half of the 1940s. Kipphardt's play depicts the 1954 inquiry, in which the American scientist Oppenheimer was blamed for his regretful statements about his early contribution in developing nuclear bombs. In *The Investigation*, Weiss reconstructs the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials of German officials and civilians for their role in the murder of Jews.

⁸⁷ *The Deputy* is another translation of the German title of the play: *Der Stellvertreter*.

On the one hand, the original events on which the three plays comment—the hearing and the Nazi crimes—belong to the near history rather than the present. On the other hand, the increasing debate about the threat of nuclear weapons and the Frankfurt Trials in the middle of the 1960s brought back, or raised, the Germans’ interest in the two matters. Put differently, the topicality of these plays relies on the public’s concern rather than the actual date of the original event. This observation can help us to recognise the topicality of some contemporary British and American plays, which comment on one of the three ongoing conflicts—in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine—by depicting historical incidents. However, regardless of the difference between the factual event and the trial or inquiry, this type of documentary theatre considers the documented material of the investigation. Therefore it is called tribunal theatre. Paget explains:

In tribunal theatre, the ‘plays’ are edited transcripts (‘redactions’) of trials, tribunals and public inquiries. These constitute the basis for theatrical representation. [...] Where tribunal theatre is concerned, *mise-en-scène* and acting style alike must be realist and ‘authentic’ in that sense. (Paget 2009, 233-4)

Paget’s note about the ‘theatrical representation’ is crucial to distinguish tribunal plays from the rest of contemporary documentary theatre. The ‘realist’ and ‘authentic’ representation that involves each single element of the play indicates the playwright’s loyalty not only to the documented material, but also to the context of the actual trial. Such loyalty, though, seems impossible because the documented material of the trial is usually too huge to fit the limited time of a theatrical performance. Commenting on Kipphardt’s play, Ivo Schneider argues:

Kipphardt used the 300 pages of the minutes of the hearing as the main source of this play. Since only 1% or 2% of this text would have sufficed to fill the time available for a play he had to shorten and condense the hearing considerably. Whereas in the real hearing which lasted about a month 40 witnesses were heard, in Kipphardt’s play only six show up, three of them defending Oppenheimer and other three being convinced of his guilt. (Schneider 131)

On the one hand, this problem indicates the playwright’s big effort to condense documented material in order to fit theatre demands. On the other, this process of editing will always be

accused of inadequacy, especially if the topic is controversial, which is usually the case with trials and inquiries.

The most striking feature of this resurgence of documentary theatre is its political goal. Thomas Irmer argues:

The political agenda of the 1920s, as shown in Piscator's productions of the time, was the class struggle; the context was the unstable economic and political situation of Weimar Germany [...] In contrast, the political agenda in West Germany during the early 1960s was unified in its desire to put the Nazi past literally on trial and to find out about the forces behind this historical process that had led to Nazism. (Irmer 17)

In this sense, years after the fall of 'Nazism', neither *The Investigation* nor *The Representative* contradicts a dominant political system. Even if *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer* can be considered as an indirect critique of the American capitalist eagerness to obtain nuclear weapons, such criticism does not suggest communism as an alternative because the former Soviet Union was as keen as the US to win the arms race during the heyday of the Cold War in the 1960s. When Irmer uses the verb 'find out' as the goal of these plays, he suggests that documentary theatre in the 1960s was an attempt to involve the audience in a process of raising questions about the near past and searching for answers in order to avoid the disastrous mistakes of this history. In this respect, both Piscatorian and Brechtian techniques are utilised without their political agitprop narrative.

Paget suggests that all documentary forms, including theatre, whether they deal with communal, national or international matters, usually seek to achieve one or more of four goals: to re-evaluate histories, to respect and focus on the past and the ambitions of suppressed sectors of society, to scrutinise controversial events, and to distribute information as a method of convincing the audience (Paget 2009, 227-28). Reading documentary plays of the 1960s with Paget's four functions in mind suggests, for instance, that *The Representative* indicates Hochhuth's desire to reconsider history by examining its controversial events in order to raise the audience's awareness of them. In this respect, the informative purpose seems to be the common aspect of all the functions of documentary theatre. In its turn, informing spectators is a method of social change, which is the ultimate goal that *The Representative*, *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer*, and *The Investigation* seek to accomplish. This feeling of the need for change is what these political

plays of the 1960s share with Piscator and Brecht, regardless of the difference about the means of reforming society. Weiss argues: 'Brecht is the one who has helped me most, because he never wrote anything just for the sake of the dramatic event but rather to show how the world is and find out how to change it. [...] Brecht is so alive, so much more alive than most contemporary playwrights' (Weiss 1966, 112). This vision of theatre as a method of enlightening the public seems to define contemporary British and American plays in their response to the War on Terror.

Weiss' insistence on the significance of Brecht's theory and practice generates two observations. Firstly, just like Piscator and Brecht, Weiss believes that documentary theatre in the 1960s was a reform of both society and theatre. Weiss justifies the choosing of the documentary form as a matter of necessity, as he argues:

[T]he traditional theatre [...] is lost, as petrified as the bourgeois audience which goes to it. But there are new possibilities for a theatre which can take up the reality in and around each human life, and a renaissance is coming for theatre from vastly different and unexpected directions—at one side, the theatre of Happenings, and on the other extreme the theatre of documentation (Weiss 1966, 108).

Although documentary theatre in the 1960s does not suggest communism as an ideological alternative, Weiss condemns 'bourgeois' spectators, whose preferences cause the crisis of the German theatre. Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe argues that during the 1950s and the 1960s, boulevard comedies were at their peak in Germany, where spectators were paying money to watch trivial, shallow, and pointless entertainment (Meyer-Dinkgräfe 2005, 3-4). In this respect, the resurgence of documentary theatre in the 1960s, similar to its birth in the 1920s, was a result of historical – social and artistic – circumstances in Germany. Put differently, if political theatre with documentary techniques was Piscator's revolt against what Nowatzki calls 'the utopian concepts of the late expressionists', Weiss' contradicted the 'petrified', merely entertaining theatre by 'the theatre of documentation'. In addition to the prosperity of the bourgeois commercial plays, the 1950s was the heyday of the Theatre of the Absurd. The latter based its apolitical nature on more philosophical rather than commercial bases. In their introduction to Weiss' play *The New Trial*, James Rolleston and Kai Evers argue that documentary theatre 'revolts against a drama that turns its own despair and anger into its main theme and that clings to the concept of a hopeless and absurd world'

(Rolleston 11).⁸⁸ At the end of this chapter, I will extend my comparison between the two booms in political theatre in the twentieth century to suggest that the utilisation of documentary techniques as a challenge of dominant apolitical forms of theatre seems to be repeated with the second revival of documentary theatre in the twenty-first century.

My second observation on Weiss' comment on Brecht is that it can explain the continuity of the latter's twofold influence on contemporary political theatre. This influence comes not only through Brecht's own works but also from the presence of Brechtian theory and techniques within the works of a large number of playwrights and directors. Weiss is just one of several German dramatists who followed Brecht, at least for a while; others include as Heiner Müller and Peter Handke. Mary Luckhurst argues that:

Brecht was the most radical theorist and practitioner of twentieth-century theatre. His methods of writing and developing plays, his training for writers, actors and directors, his interrogation of design and stage lighting, and his collaborations with composers, singers and musicians defined a particular kind of political theatre – and practitioners the world over continue to modify and rework Brecht's theory and praxis to make interventionist theatres of their own. (Luckhurst 2006, 193)

When Luckhurst uses the phrase 'of their own' she reminds us of the flexibility of employing Brechtian techniques for completely different ideological reasons.⁸⁹

In addition, the insistence on extending Brecht's practice to include nonverbal elements of the performance explains his influence on both directors and playwrights. Commenting on the American playwright Arthur Miller's stage directions, Arnold Aronson claims that 'Miller's scenographic combination of realistic detail with heightened theatricality makes him sound amazingly like Bertolt Brecht' (Aronson 84). In Britain, the effect of Brecht's thoughts can be seen within political plays in the 1970s and 1980s, which were written by playwrights such as Caryl Churchill, David Hare, Howard Brenton, and David Edgar. Janelle Reinelt explains:

⁸⁸ For more information about the influence of the Theatre of the Absurd on German theatre in the 1850s, see Lehmann (52-3), and Castein (195).

⁸⁹ The effect of Brecht on Western theatre is a huge topic that this thesis cannot thoroughly explore. It may be useful to mention that Brechtian influences on both Egyptian and Syrian theatre can be traced back to the 1960s, when political theatre reached its peak. In addition, Brecht's techniques are widely utilised as the intentional exposing of theatrical artifice, regardless of its political goal, seems to amuse Arabic spectators.

Brecht's dramaturgy was able to [...] become a "legacy," because the postwar situation in Britain was hospitable to, or compatible with, epic theatre practice, accommodating a space for political opposition in theatrical representation that produced a hybrid British form of recognizably Brechtian theatre—sometimes when the relationship to Brecht was unconscious or even hotly contested (Reinelt 1999, 1).

Although Reinelt's observation underscores the importance of social circumstances in encouraging playwrights to borrow from 'epic theatre practice', she also refers to playwrights' involuntarily utilisation of Brechtian techniques, which indicates the latter's huge effect. In this respect, it can be understood why the vast majority of the plays studied in this thesis, even those whose playwrights do not choose the documentary form, recruit Brechtian techniques such as minimal scenes and props, and actors' playing of different characters within the same play. Alongside the influence of documentary theatre, whether of Piscator or Weiss, contemporary British and American playwrights make political theatre 'of their own'. However, with some similarities and discrepancies, the revitalisation of 'political' documentary theatre since the 1990s, especially in Britain, seems to be much more complicated than its ancestors in the 1920s and its renewal in the 1960s. The vast majority of contemporary documentary theatre belongs to one of two types: tribunal or verbatim theatre.⁹⁰

Tribunal plays: Is it theatre or journalism?

In the footsteps of the documentary theatre of the 1960s, political documentary theatre in Britain began a new era. As David Lane explains:

In June 1994 the Tricycle Theatre in Kilburn, North London, produced a play constructed from nearly 400 hours of evidence given at the Scott Inquiry, the investigation concerning the sale of arms to Iraq under the Thatcher government. As well as condensing the material into two and a half hours of stage time, almost all of *Half The Picture: the Scott Arms to Iraq Inquiry*, edited by journalist Richard Norton-Taylor, was constructed from words spoken by the lawyers and by those who had given evidence. (Lane 58)

⁹⁰ Although the differences between the two forms are supposed to be obvious, there is a noticeable mistake of using the two terms as if they are identical, whether by practitioners or critics. The reasons for this conflation will be discussed later in this chapter.

The most prominent difference from the 1960s, though, is that the text of *Half the Picture* is edited by a journalist, not a playwright, something which will be repeated with more tribunal plays in the following years. Chris Megson argues:

Half the Picture was the first of the so-called Tribunal plays to be staged at the Tricycle, and this model of testimonial theatre, with its roots in the European documentary tradition, has been adopted or adapted by a great many practitioners and companies in the ensuing period (Megson 2006, 530).

Critics' claims about the linkage between *Half the Picture* and German documentary theatre in the 1960s is usually limited to mentioning Weiss's *The Investigation*, which was preceded by the two plays of Hochhuth and Kipphardt. When Paget claims that 'documentation [within Hochhuth's play] was mainly achieved via lengthy published 'stage directions' (which were in effect footnotes)' (Paget 1998, 109), it seems that Paget indirectly suggests that *The Representative* is more suitable to be read rather than represented in theatre. In addition, although *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer* is a good example of a tribunal play, Kipphardt's play did not get the popularity Weiss's play remarkably obtained.

The Investigation 'was first presented as a play simultaneously in thirteen theatres in both East and West Germany on October 19th 1965 and had a public midnight reading by the Royal Shakespeare Company under the direction of Peter Brook that same night at the Aldwych Theatre, London' (Weiss 2010, 8). Such international interest in Weiss's play can be understood on the grounds of the significance of its topic. In addition, apart from documentary theatre, Weiss is better known as a playwright than his comrades, especially with his utilisation of Brecht's devices, as can be seen, for instance, in *Marat/Sade* (1963).⁹¹

Being a journalist, Norton-Taylor had to discover the difficulty of turning long hours of factual testimonies into a tribunal play, the same problem that faced German playwrights in the 1960s. Norton-Taylor explains the difficulties of writing what he calls 'courtroom drama'. He argues:

⁹¹ Weiss' most translated and reproduced play. Its complete title: *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade*, is probably the longest in the history of theatre.

[H]ow to boil down six weeks of oral evidence into a little over two hours. The problem was not what to put in, but what to take out. Despite past experience I seriously underestimated the difference between writing for a newspaper and writing for the stage, even though we were dealing with precisely the same raw material, precisely the same words. (Norton-Taylor *The Guardian*, A6)

It seems that Norton-Taylor raises our awareness to the big task of turning the documents of a trial into a play, which demands long hours of work. Such a tremendous process of editing is appreciated by Luckhurst, who comments on Norton-Taylor's turning of different inquiries into plays. She claims:

Editing seems an insufficient term to describe the stringent selection and dramatic shaping that he has to do: for the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials over 50 million pages of documents were produced; the Lawrence Inquiry lasted for 69 days, the Saville Inquiry took 2,500 witness statements and heard evidence from 921 witnesses, and the Hutton Inquiry sat for 25 days. (Luckhurst 2008, 206)

But, if Norton-Taylor's work on tribunal plays makes him more than an editor, does this make him a playwright? This question draws our attention to Norton-Taylor's previous comment when he compares the work of playwrights and journalists, which hints at another matter of tribunal plays: the critique of their lack of art. Put differently, documentary theatre in general, and tribunal plays in particular are, to use Norton-Taylor's words, 'seriously underestimated'.

It is important to realise that Norton-Taylor has never claimed that he is a playwright. All the front covers of his published plays describe him as an editor. However, it seems important to discuss the constant devaluation of all documentary drama, including documentary movies and TV docudramas, on the grounds of their less artistic and more journalistic nature. Paget mentions the consistency of these accusations when he claims: 'The very event-specificity of the form (not to speak of its technical complexity, collective tradition, and oppositional left-wing history) has tended to militate against its construction as 'art' by those empowered to make such judgments' (Paget 1992, 173). First and foremost, establishing the claim of the less-theatrical/more-journalistic documentary plays on the utilisation of ready material would raise questions about all historical plays, whose dramatic actions and characters are borrowed, in different degrees, from factual incidents and real persons. Moreover, being based on factual contemporary stories does not prevent

Woyzeck or *Miss Julie* from becoming the most acclaimed dramatic work of Georg Büchner and August Strindberg respectively. Furthermore, the history of theatre is full of plays that re-create other works, which means that the process of composition itself gives the new play its uniqueness. For example, we cannot consider Jean Racine's *Phèdre* (1677) a less theatrical work than Euripides' *Hippolytus* (428 B.C.), which itself is a rewriting of the Greek mythical narrative. The same can be said about *Hamlet* and Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, and about Brecht's rewriting of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*.

Finally, and most importantly, even in the case of writing a completely 'imaginary' play, or a novel, is it really completely imagined? Whether in terms of dramatic characters or actions the process of writing is very complicated, as the writers themselves cannot differentiate between conscious and unconscious aspects of their own writing. What may seem, even to the playwright, to be his/her invented dramatic character can be a rewriting of a real person(s) or an old fictional character. There is no writer whose text does not include this kind of intertextuality. Paget insists that 'drama' and 'documentary' do not automatically map on to 'fiction' and 'fact'. [...] The 'fully-fashioned' version [...] is a thing of autobiographical fragments, of half-remembered and misremembered moments, of fantasy and imagination' (Paget 1998, 106-7). It is important to realise that the general debate about documentary drama's lack of validity as art becomes fiercer regarding tribunal plays because of the latter's 'realist' and 'authentic' representation/reconstruction of the trial or the inquiry.

Further debate about tribunal plays stems from the process of editing itself, during which as Norton-Taylor mentions, the editor has to decide 'what to take out' from the original documents. Several scholars and critics raise questions about the effect of editing on the accuracy of the original documentary material, part of which is excluded from the tribunal play. In 2005, Norton-Taylor turned the documents of the Saville Inquiry, which reinvestigated the death of thirteen Irish citizens by British bullets in 1972, into a tribunal play. *Bloody Sunday: Scenes from the Saville Inquiry* was premiered in April 2005 at the Tricycle Theatre in London. In her comment on the performance, Karen Fricker draws our attention to a potentially immoral aspect of the inevitable need for editing huge documented materials. According to her, this process 'raises serious ethical concerns. Editing is always subjective, but especially so in this type of theatre, where it is the primary creative tool' (Fricker 79). By considering that the spectator of a tribunal play builds his or her point of view on the available documents, I realise the significance of Fricker's observation.

In his study of *Half the Picture*, Megson argues that the tribunal play's 'overall effect draws attention to the evasive circumlocutions, sophistic indirections and rhetorical gymnastics of politicians and other public officials' (Megson 2009, 196). The question is: do Norton-Taylor's editing interventions lead spectators to a specific opinion? The editor's own preferences can be expressed through selecting what documentary material is to be included within, or excluded from, the play. Secondly, the rearrangement of the chosen material can hint at a particular message within the play. But does the editor have this right to express his own opinion, even indirectly?

This gap between the raw documents and the tribunal play, in which these documents are processed, seems inevitable not only because of the practical limit of time in theatre, but also, and most importantly, because the editor has his own point of view, because of which he has chosen to transmit this documentary material to a play in the first place. Without the editor's efforts, any tribunal play will be reduced to a mere copying of the real inquiry, an abridged version of its large number of documents. It can be argued that the main, perhaps only, rationale of a tribunal play should be to inform the public about the inquiry itself. This claim ignores the relationship between the original documents and the play as a work of art, where the latter is a representation of the former.

The original, precise, and chronological record of the inquiry—including its verdict, if there is such a decision—can be obtained by the readers. However, Fricker's note about the ethical factors seems reasonable since the tribunal play was performed before the publication of the inquiry's documents. Put differently, until the original documents of the inquiry become available for the public, the tribunal play is the only source of information.

In her comment on *Bloody Sunday*, Claire Shannon claims:

Perhaps this is the best way to do politics, and make important decisions in our complicated fractious world, condense our events and catastrophes into cool, calm presentations, and allow the audience to become a jury, as it seemed to do here. **The Saville Inquiry will not be published until late this year or early 2006[sic].** (Shannon 2005, 20)

Ending her review with this notice in bold, Shannon seems to encourage the readers to watch the play as the only method of information about the Inquiry, especially with her indirect promise to spectators that they will be unofficial members of the 'jury'.

The insistence on the informative goal of the tribunal play can be seen by considering that the vast majority of Norton-Taylor's plays were produced before the public

declaration of the inquiries they represent. The only exception is *Tactical Questioning: Scenes from the Baha Mousa inquiry*, whose premiere at the Tricycle Theatre coincided with the release of the inquiry outcome in the summer of 2011. Without spectators' awareness of the representative nature of any documentary play, the latter can be conceived as an imperfect and unethical replica of the factual event. *Half the Picture* specifically goes further in contradicting the demand of objectivity. When Megson mentions that the play 'is unique amongst Norton-Taylor's tribunal plays in featuring interpolated monologues written by the socialist playwright and director [...] John McGrath (Megson 2009, 196), we cannot decisively consider whether the absence of such an addition from Norton-Taylor's next plays constitutes a kind of retreat or not. The effect of McGrath's speeches on the play as an 'authentic' representation of the trial extends the influence of omitting some of the original testimonies or the rearrangement of those which were chosen. These added speeches shape an independent discourse that must create a dialectical relationship with the rest of the play. Not only do McGrath's speeches suggest a specific message, they also create a tension between their literary language and the practical nature of testimonies. The ethics of the tribunal play seem to be a controversial matter. However, it is hard to ignore the editor's own opinion on the topic of his/her play. Moreover, this opinion may be what some members of the audience want to know, considering the credibility of the editor whether as a writer or a journalist. These debates about the tribunal plays were repeated on a wider scale about the Verbatim Theatre, the second form of documentary theatre, which proved to be more popular than tribunal plays, especially amongst practitioners and playwrights.

'Verbatim' versus 'verbatim': The chaos of terminology

In 1987, Paget coined the term 'Verbatim Theatre' to describe a specific type of documentary theatre, which he uses to describe a group of performances in Britain between 1971 and 1987. He suggests a list of twenty-three titles of Verbatim plays, which were performed in twenty-four productions (Paget 1987, 23). Just like Paget's suggestion about using capital letters in writing the term Documentary Theatre, Michael Anderson and Linden Wilkinson argue that they 'capitalise 'Verbatim Theatre' to distinguish it as a theatrical form' (Anderson 168). I will follow their suggestion to avoid the confusion between the literal meaning of the word 'verbatim' and the form of Verbatim Theatre. This

confusion seems one of the reasons for Paget's insistence on distinguishing Verbatim Theatre from tribunal play, twenty-two years after he suggested his term. Paget explains:

In verbatim theatre, the 'plays' are edited [...] interviews with individuals. Sometimes these interviews are taped and transcribed, sometimes actors work directly with the tapes themselves. Whatever the variants, aural testimony constitutes the basis for theatrical representation'. (Paget 2009, 233-4)

In this sense, there are two essential differences between Verbatim Theatre and tribunal plays regarding both the documentary material and theatrical representation. As the subtitle of his 1987 article 'Oral history and Documentary Techniques' (Paget 1987, 317) denotes, the material of a Verbatim play is 'oral' speeches collected through 'interviews', not a documented log of a tribunal or inquiry. In terms of the performance, instead of the strict 'realist' and 'authentic' representation in tribunal plays, Verbatim plays, according to Paget, 'have closer connection with documentary theatre of the past in terms of their more fluid use of stage space and more flexible expectations of actors' (Paget 2009, 234). In this respect, Piscatorian/Brechtian techniques can be utilised to give the performances of Verbatim plays much more vitality compared to the rigidity of tribunal plays. In addition, while tribunal plays are thoroughly based upon the original documented tribunals, Paget claims that:

'Collage' [...] is frequently the key descriptive term for practitioners of Verbatim Theatre. As with most variants of documentary theatre, the essential difficulty in the working process is the reduction of mass of source material to some sort of viable theatrical shape, producing a very real uncertainty at the outset, when a company initially assembles with no material at all beyond a basic subject area. (Paget 1987, 323)

The most striking feature of Paget's observation is that the Verbatim play sometimes starts with a suggested theme, which consequently defines the people who are going to be interviewed, rather than the editors' commitment to the strict record of the trial.

In his 1987 article, Paget defines two different types of Verbatim Theatre: 'Celebratory' play and a play whose topic is 'Controversy'. In addition to their theatrical differences, Paget's categorisation describes these Verbatim plays in terms of their topics. According to Paget, 'Celebratory' Verbatim plays are more like "human interest" stories in

journalism: in celebrating locality, and in seeking out discourse not normally privileged by either the journalistic or the entertainment media' (Paget 1987, 322). Unlike the individual or communal nature of the 'Celebratory', Verbatim plays of 'Controversy', as Paget explains, investigate, or raise national controversial matters that concern the entire country at the moment (Paget 1987, 22). The difference between the two types seems to be at the root of Paget's conception of the four general functions of documentary drama (Paget 1990, 68-9), which he has elaborated upon (Paget 2009, 227-8). According to these functions, Celebratory documentary plays '*celebrate* repressed or marginalised communities and groups, bringing to light their histories and aspirations' (Paget 2009, 227). I am wondering if I might take the risk of suggesting that the word 'Celebratory' perhaps seems relevant to describe documentary autobiographies in terms of their similarity with 'human interest stories in journalism'.

By including international matters, many of the plays studied in this thesis can be considered Verbatim theatre of 'Controversy', which '*investigate* contentious events and issues in local, national and international contexts' (Paget 2009, 227). I claim that both the topic and message of most political drama are intrinsically controversial. In this respect, plays such as *Guantánamo: Honour Bound to Defend Freedom*, and *Talking to Terrorists* – both were mentioned in the first chapter – are Verbatim plays of Controversy because both plays comprise 'interviews with individuals'. However, in the latter play, Soans does not stick to the veracity of the statements. In contrast, Brittain and Slovo commit themselves to a high degree of objectivity, which extends to the published text. They adopt the strict rules of academic writing by placing their few descriptive interventions in square brackets to distinguish them from the citations from documented testimonies. While stage directions can be translated to visual aspects of the performance, these notes address the reader rather than spectators.

Similarly to Soans, Hare has been criticised for his alterations of the statements in his Verbatim plays such as *The Permanent Way*, which premiered in November 2003 at the Theatre Royal in York. The topic of Hare's play is a controversial as he addresses a national matter, which is the crisis in the British railway system. Reinelt argues:

While it is true that plays like *The Permanent Way* or *Talking to Terrorists* (2005) are composed of such materials, their authors (David Hare and Robin Soans, respectively) freely admit they sometimes combine material from more than one source within one

speech, or even provide generically representative dialogue in places. I dislike the term ‘verbatim’ because it needlessly ups the ante on the promise of documentary. (Reinelt 2009, 13)

On the one hand, it seems that the critique of playwrights’ interpositions extends to the form itself. Moreover, the ‘expectations’ of the word ‘verbatim’ seem to ignore the origin of the term ‘Verbatim’, which describes the way in which the material is collected and represented without any insistence on the ultimate commitment to the precision of the speeches given by the interviewees. In contrast, according to Paget, Verbatim shows during the 1970s and 1980s freely edited these statements. Therefore, Paget does not exclude Hare from Verbatim Theatre. Instead, the former describes the latter’s Verbatim plays as ‘transmutations’ of the factual statements (Paget 2009, 233). On the other hand, Reinelt’s argument can be understood on the grounds of her awareness of the misuse of the word ‘verbatim’ by a large number of practitioners and critics, when they mean documentary theatre in general, or tribunal plays in particular.

Demanding Verbatim theatre to be precise seems to recall the strict conditions of the 1960s, in which Clas Zilliacus claims that the ‘conscientious adherence to the letter of the material used was, to a much higher degree than before, regarded as a *sine qua non*’ (Zilliacus 224). The insistence on such a demand can indicate an unconscious upholding of the 1960s prototype. Paget gives an example of what he claims as an ‘apparent determination of theatre journalism to conflate verbatim and tribunal theatre’ (Paget 2009, 233). To give an example of the confusion between the two different forms, Kate Kellaway argues:

Several of the most successful verbatim (relying on actual testimony) plays have been written by journalists. *The Colour of Justice*, the 1999 recreation of the Stephen Lawrence inquiry by Richard Norton-Taylor, led the way. He went on to produce *Justifying War: Scenes from the Hutton Enquiry*. Then came *Guantanamo*, by Victoria Brittain and Gillian Slovo (neither of them playwrights) about the treatment of prisoners at Camp Delta’. (Kellaway, web)

Although Kellaway’s observation on the fact that there is a larger number of documentary plays written by journalists and even actors, she uses the word ‘verbatim’ to describe three plays, including two tribunal plays.

The conflation between tribunal and Verbatim Theatre extends to the writing of both critics and academics. For instance, Aleks Sierz argues that:

Plays such as David Hare's *Stuff Happens*, Robin Soans's *Talking to Terrorists* and *Bloody Sunday: scenes from the Saville Inquiry* are interesting in content but, being verbatim theatre, somewhat unexciting in form. What is missing is a wilder, more off-the-wall engagement. Instead of mimicking journalism, theatre needs to use metaphor and imagery to awaken our imaginations. (Sierz *New Statesman*, 26)

Confusing '[V]erbatim [T]heatre' with Norton-Taylor's tribunal play leads Sierz to contradict the common critique of Hare and Soans regarding their dramatic alterations of the factual material. Instead, Sierz blames their plays for the lack of imagination. Such a critical judgment is based on Sierz's negative opinion on using documentary material in theatre in general. Sierz claims:

If all plays, no matter how domestic, are political, then no plays are political. A better way of defining a political play might be to insist that it should offer both explicit political ideas and some hope of change. By this definition, the problem with verbatim theatre is that it merely reflects reality, when the point, surely, is to change it. (Sierz *PAJ*, 59)

Apart from using the phrase 'verbatim theatre' to describe documentary theatre, Sierz's objection to the claim that all plays belong to political theatre can be understood in the context of the discussion at the beginning of this chapter. Moreover, suggesting the 'hope of change' as a function of political plays fits the nature of contemporary political theatre. However, Sierz's supposition that documentary theatre is not able to achieve this goal ignores the effective role of the informative function, which itself includes the hope of change not only in Verbatim Theatre, but also in tribunal plays. Even when the play 'merely reflects reality', the disastrous facts that shock the audience involve a 'hope of change'.

Commenting on Paget's distinguishing between 'celebratory' and 'controversy', Jenny Hughes suggests an alternative classification of [V]erbatim plays in the contemporary British theatre. She declares that 'three categories of verbatim theatre are offered, each of which denotes distinct dramatisations of the voice: the 'forensic', the

‘exceptional’ and the ‘composed’ (Hughes 2011, 93). When Hughes starts to explain what she means by these three categories, she argues:

The ‘forensic’ refers to Tricycle Theatre’s ‘Tribunal plays’, a form of verbatim theatre that stages edited transcripts of Public Inquiries and draws on precise, legalistic framings of the voice’. [...] My discussion here focuses on *Half the Picture* (1994), *Justifying War* (2003) and *Called to Account* (2007). (Hughes 2011, 93)

Apart from considering Norton-Taylor’s tribunal plays a category under ‘verbatim theatre’, which here means documentary theatre, Hughes’ description of the tribunal play as ‘forensic’ is not new.⁹² Moreover, although using such descriptions is useful in terms of explaining the nature of tribunal theatre, it seems confusing to replace the well-known term by another one.

The two other ‘categories’ suggested by Hughes include Verbatim plays, which means that we can exclude the first category and consider these two categories a development of Paget’s 1987 term in order to suite Verbatim plays in 2000s. She claims:

The second category, the ‘exceptional’, refers to the staging of testimony from spaces of exception, and the discussion here focuses on Victoria Brittain and Gillian Slovo’s *Guantánamo: Honour Bound to Defend Freedom* (2004, originally staged at the Tricycle Theatre), Robin Soans’ *Talking to Terrorists* and Alan Rickman and Katharine Viner’s *My Name is Rachel Corrie* (both originally staged at the Royal Court Theatre in 2005). (Hughes 2011, 93)

The phrase ‘spaces of exceptions’, which figuratively refers to the unjust breach of law, ethics, or human rights, can describe most Norton-Taylor’s tribunal plays, which Hughes separates as ‘forensic’. The death of Dr David Kelly in the context of inventing reasons for invading Iraq is an exceptional space in *Justifying War*. Likewise, questioning Tony Blair’s role in the War in Iraq is related to ‘spaces of exceptions’ visited by *Called to Account*. Similar aspects can be found within many of tribunal plays, including the exceptional atrocity of the Holocaust in Auschwitz as Weiss’ *The Investigation* represents.

Moreover, even if what Hughes means by ‘spaces of exceptions’ is literally based on geographical criteria, because the events on which these plays comment take place in

⁹² For example, four years before Hughes’ book, Michael Billington described tribunal plays as ‘forensic’ in his review of *Called to Account* in *The Guardian*, 24 April 2007.

different locations of the world, Verbatim Theatre of ‘controversy’ extends to include international matters. Put differently, why do we need a new terminology? When Hughes explains the third category, this question seems to be necessary. She claims: ‘The third category, the ‘composed’, refers to plays that combine ‘found’ speech drawn from documented records and ‘made’ speech devised by playwrights, and this section focuses on David Hare’s *Stuff Happens* (produced by the National Theatre in 2004)’ (Hughes 2011, 93). After basing the first two categories on thematic features, Hughes builds the distinction of *Stuff Happens* on technical grounds because the play is ‘composed’ of documentary statements and imaginary characters’ speeches written by Hare. On these technical grounds, Soans’ play should belong to this third category, not the second. However, is not the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq as Hare portrays in *Stuff Happens* one of the ‘spaces of exceptions’? Here, the contradiction between subject matter and theatrical composition as a base for classification becomes clear.

Another variation of confusing use of terms is to distinguish both Verbatim and Tribunal plays from documentary theatre. Lib Taylor argues:

In recent times this [Fact-based theatre] has taken three predominant forms, though these forms are tendencies, not always distinct from one another. First, verbatim theatre, like *Black Watch* (2007) and *Guantánamo* (2004), is based in the representation of the actual words of real people collected through, for example, interviews or letters. Second, tribunal theatre, like *The Colour of Justice* (1999) and *Justifying War* (2003), is based on court and public enquiry transcripts and also uses actual words, but they are collected from formal documents and court records. (Taylor 2011, 227)

So far, Taylor’s classification seems to be relevant to the differences between the two forms of the ‘fact-based theatre’, which is understood to be a description of documentary theatre. However, when Taylor argues: ‘Third, documentary plays, such as David Hare’s *The Power of Yes* (2009) and *The Permanent Way* (2003) and Robin Soans’s *Talking to Terrorists* (2005)’ (Taylor 2011, 227), she excludes the plays of Hare and Soans from her first category: Verbatim theatre.

One reason for such confusion can be the fact that there is a wide spectrum of utilising documentary material within plays, which are neither Verbatim nor tribunal. Moreover some of these plays include testimonies. Forsyth explains: ‘During the last two

decades there has been a marked multiplication of dramatic works which utilize testimony (verbatim theatre, Tribunal plays, documentary theatre)' (Forsyth 2013, 1). Such an observation is significant to realise that some testimonies are not collected through interviews or strictly edited from official statements given in a courtroom.

This excessive misuse of the word 'verbatim' by British critics may explain why the American academic Carol Martin argues: 'In the United Kingdom, documentary theatre is known as "verbatim theatre" because of its penchant for direct quotation. However, verbatim theatre does not necessarily display its quotation marks, its exact sources' (Martin, 'Bodies of Evidence' 23). Moreover, in her introduction to the anthology *Dramaturgy of the Real on the World Stage*, she extends the terminological connotations by declaring: 'Theatre of the real, also known as documentary theatre as well as docudrama, verbatim theatre, reality-based theatre, theatre of witness, tribunal theatre, nonfiction theatre, and theatre of fact, has long been important for the subjects it presents' (Martin, 'Introduction' 1). On one hand, describing documentary theatre as 'Theatre of the real' and 'reality-based theatre' is as accepted, to some extent, as calling tribunal plays 'theatre of witness'. On the other hand, the generalisation of considering both tribunal and Verbatim as synonyms to documentary leads to another simplistic description of documentary theatre as 'nonfiction'.

These discrepant examples of defining the utilisation of documentary material in theatre suggests that the insistence on using the term '[V]erbatim [T]heatre' as an alternative to documentary theatre partly relies on the comparison between the documented discourse within tribunal and Verbatim plays because speeches are literally much more verbatim in the former than the latter, which is supposed to be called Verbatim theatre. Even with the awareness of the difference between Verbatim and tribunal plays, the former is sometimes criticised because it does not apply the rules of on the former. Deirdre Heddon argues that 'Verbatim plays do not, typically, provide us with the contextual information of the interviewing process itself; speech is lifted out of context and used within a different context' (Heddon 118).

In addition, the Verbatim plays of both Soans and Hare seems to be repeatedly compared to the veracity of documented speeches within the Verbatim play *Guantánamo: Honour Bound to Defend Freedom*. Therefore, when Sara Brady refers to Hare's *Stuff Happens*, she claims that '*Guantánamo* was performed with an authority more closely aligned with strict verbatim' (Brady 28). In contrast, Maurya Wickstrom uses the phrase

‘nearly verbatim’ (Wickstrom 190) to describe Ariane Mnouchkine's Verbatim play *Le Dernier Caravansérail: (Odyssées)*, premiered at the Cartoucherie, Paris in April 2003.⁹³ On one hand, descriptions such as strict, nearly, quasi, more, or less *verbatim* seem to mistakenly use the literal meaning of the word, which is more suitable to describe tribunal plays. On the other hand, as Mnouchkine's play suggests, the revival of documentary theatre in general, and its Verbatim form in particular is not limited to contemporary political theatre in Britain and the US. Put differently, all over the world, documentary theatre became a method of informing the public about specific political or social matters, and a means of opposing the dominant authoritative discourses about such matters.⁹⁴

While many practitioners and critics extend the term verbatim to include all forms of documentary theatre, some of them do not mention Paget. As editors of the anthology *Verbatim Verbatim: Contemporary Documentary Theatre* (2008), Will Hammond and Dan Steward combine comments of Norton-Taylor and the director of his tribunal plays Nicolas Kent with testimonies of Soans and Hare. In addition to this baffling adjacency of the two documentary forms, the term ‘verbatim’ is repeatedly and loosely used to denote documentary theatre in general or tribunal plays in particular. Moreover, Christopher Innes mistakenly argues that ‘Alecky Blythe (artistic director of the Recorded Delivery theatre company) has labelled this style of documentary drama, at its most extreme, “verbatim” theatre’ (Innes 2007, 436). Innes’s description of ‘[V]erbatim theatre’ seems more suitable to fit tribunal plays, within which the strict adherence to the veracity of documents reaches ‘its most extreme’.

It seems necessary to mention that the importance of Paget’s explanation of Verbatim Theatre as a British phenomenon in the 1970s and 1980s does not mean that he suggests a break with the traditions of neither the 1920s nor the 1960s. In her comment on Paget’s 1987 article, Luckhurst argues: ‘While acknowledging that the German documentary tradition has been a major influence, Paget focuses on tracing a domestic lineage of documentary theatre’ (Luckhurst 2008, 201). Considering such continuity is important to realise that documentary theatre does not appear suddenly in the 2000s. In this

⁹³ The play turns letters and testimonies of refugees from turbulent countries such as Afghanistan, Kurdistan, Iran, and Iraq—collected and edited by Mnouchkine and some actors of her company—to a five-hour dramatisation of the suffering of asylum seekers. For more information, see Turk (297-8).

⁹⁴ The same subject matter of Mnouchkine’s play was the topic of several Verbatim plays produced by Australian practitioners since 2001. After the 2011 Revolution in Egypt, there has been a noticeable trend for writing documentary plays, most of which were performed in fringe theatres.

respect, I can understand how British and American old forms of documentary theatre were as influential as their German ancestorson contemporary playwrights.

Realising these various roots of the current revival of political theatre helps me to understand why many contemporary British and American Plays, which employ documentary material to comment on the ongoing conflicts, are neither Verbatim nor tribunal. Within these plays, documentary material is represented in different ways. Even dream-like plays tend to include some documentary materials, which are utilised to achieve the informative purpose. However, to describe such plays as documentary seems imprecise. Therefore, I focus on their topicality, which is the common feature of all the examples of plays studied in this thesis, and underline the employment of these plays' documentary content.

An explanation of this phenomenon can be suggested by recognising that, just like the 1920s, the popularity of both political and documentary plays in Germany in the sixties had echoes in Britain and the US. Paget claims:

Theatre Workshop's *Oh What a Lovely War* (1963) [...] Peter Brook about the Vietnam war, *U.S.* (1965), were sometimes called 'theatre of fact' at the time, as were American plays like Father Daniel Berrigan's 1968 *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine* (about Vietnam 'draft dodgers') and Donald Freed's 1970 *Inquest* (about the Rosenberg trial). (Paget 1998, 109)

Such prosperity started to fade with the 1970s appearance of postmodernism raising a group of philosophical and social calls against dominant, traditional thoughts. The postmodernist denial of the essential notion of representation fogged the relationship between the factual world and theatrical performance, in which dramatic texts are seen as a burden on the sought dominance of visual elements. Secondly, the vast majority of theorists deal with the non-political aspect of postmodernism as if it is, by nature, an essential feature.⁹⁵

Whether influenced by the postdramatic foregrounding of visual elements of the performance, a specific type of play emerged in British theatre during the 1990s: the so-called In-ye-face. The most striking aspect of these plays is their dramatic characters' adherence to excessive verbal and physical violence. Although without a specific political

⁹⁵ For more information about the apolitical nature of postmodernist theatre in the 1970s and 1980s, see Connor (142), Grant (13), Auslander (2004, 2), Lehmann (179), Hughes (2011, 18), and Hughes (2007, 133).

message, took two steps toward political theatre, firstly, by its reconsidering of dramatic text. When ‘cruelty’ reached its peak, it was a sign of more reasonable expression of opposition to emerge. Put differently, In-yer-face plays can be considered more political than postdramatic theatre. Both, nevertheless, are far from political theatre. In-yer-face plays were more of raucous cries rather than clear critical messages.⁹⁶

As with the emergence of documentary theatre in the 1920s and its revitalisation in the 1960s, the boom in political drama with documentary techniques on the two sides of the Atlantic in the twenty-first century followed a period during which apolitical theatre prevailed. Hansen’s model of ‘metaphorical parallelism’ might help in illustrating this resemblance. While different historical circumstances and fundamental philosophies distinguish the motivation and function of political theatre in each period from the others, a cycle of neglecting and adopting documentary techniques is respectively correlated with the marginalisation and prosperity of political drama.

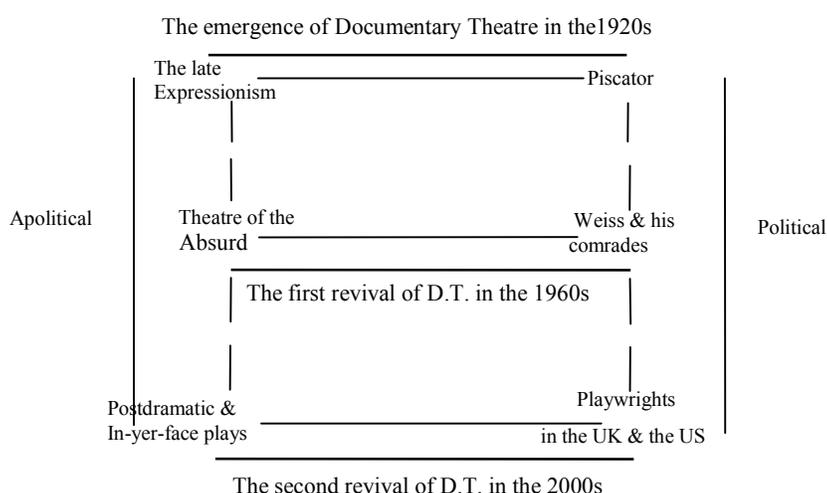


Figure (4)

The Cycle of Apolitical and Political Theatre

As figure (4) depicts, I highlight such sequential occurrence of apolitical and political forms of theatre in order to suggest the effect of both postmodernism and In-yer-face plays on the

⁹⁶ The term ‘In-yer-face’ was suggested by Aleks Sierz as he traces the common features of the British theatre in the 1990s. More information about this type of theatre can be found in Sierz (2001), Kritzer (28), Urban (43), Bottoms (56), and Reinelt (2006, 81).

contemporary revival of political theatre. Such influence can be realised in a large number of political plays, wherein marginal documentary lines are pronounced by fictional characters. In addition to the adjacency of documentary and imaginary aspects, the political themes within many plays I study in this thesis are woven with dreamlike plots.⁹⁷

Furthermore, Piscator's documentary theatre was stylistically influenced by anti-naturalistic features of the avant-garde movements in the early decades of the twentieth century, including Expressionism itself, whose apolitical nature was contradicted by the ideological orientation of Piscator's theatre. Likewise, and apart from the tribunal plays of the 1960s, Weiss mingled documentary material with surrealistic and even absurd, verbal and visual elements in the imaginary plots of his plays *Song of the Lusitanian Bogey* (1967), *Discourse on Vietnam* (1968), and *Mara/Sade*.⁹⁸

Thus, dreamlike aspects of many contemporary political plays might indicate traces of postdramatic and In-yer-face plays, the documentary drama of the 1920s, and/or Weiss documentary but not tribunal plays. In addition, while contemporary tribunal plays seems to draw on their German ancestors of the 1960s, the free utilisation of documentary materials within contemporary Verbatim Theatre suggests the influence of Piscator's plays as well as a linkage with what Paget calls 'Controversy' Verbatim plays whose responses to 'local, national and international' events in the 1970s and 1980s highlight their political aspect.

Whether one or more of these historical practices influenced contemporary political theatre, the inclusion of documentary material, which varies from regulating the entire play, in the case of tribunal to few, but significant scattered lines or facts within the imaginary realms of other plays, raises the question: why documentary material seems to be a common feature of most responses of contemporary political theatre to the violent conflicts?

The simple answer to this question can be suggested by the history of documentary practice, which flourished during the two prominent periods of political theatre in the 1920s and 1960s. Put differently, the factual events that led to and accompanied the War on Terror encouraged playwrights to adopt documentary forms, whose emergence and revival

⁹⁷ For scholars' focus on the dreamlike feature of postdramatic theatre and In-yer-face plays, see Carroll (21), McConachie (167), Law (429), and Peacock (272).

⁹⁸ For claims of the inclusion of aspects of Expressionism within Piscator's plays, see Warden (81), and Allain (2006, 142). For more information about Weiss' employing of anti-naturalistic techniques alongside documentary material, see the studies of Beggs, Niemi, and Kamla.

in the twentieth century were pertinent to political theatre. Reinelt claims: ‘Documentary theatre is often politically engaged; although its effects may not match its intentions, it does summon public consideration of aspects of reality in spirit of critical reasoning’ (Reinelt2009, 12). Moreover, the capability of responding quickly to public interest in topical matters is the virtue of documentary plays, especially with the rapidly-unfolding events of the conflicts. Gerwin Strobl argues that ‘immediacy’ is what distinguishes topical plays from the vast majority of conventional theatre (Strobl 59). Similarly, Stuart Little links topical theatre with what he calls the play’s ‘Immediate meaning’ (Little 45). I suggest that describing imaginary plays as ‘conventional theatre’ is confusing because the term has been utilised by several artistic and theatrical reformers as a negative description of earlier trends, movements, or doctrines.⁹⁹

For contemporary topical plays, this ‘immediacy’ relies on the long history of documentary theatre of Piscator and Weiss alongside Brechtian techniques offers a model for both playwrights and directors to apply. Paget claims: ‘The theatre has one ready-made technique for treating immediate events in an overtly political way – factually-based, non-naturalistic documentary theatre in the European tradition established by the likes of Piscator and Brecht’ (Paget 1992, 173). In addition to offering ‘ready-made technique[s]’ to contemporary playwrights, the ‘non-naturalistic’ and minimal scenery seems crucial in accelerating the process of production and reducing the cost of the performance.¹⁰⁰ As the following three chapters suggest, despite the propagandistic purpose of Piscatorian and Brechtian political theatre, the latter’s formalist aspects are manifested in contemporary American and British political plays.

The need for a quick response to the events can explain a trend to reproduce classic plays to hint at the ongoing conflicts. This tendency is obvious in the case of the invasion of Iraq. Ilka Saal argues:

Compared to fiction or film, theatre tends to react fairly swiftly to contemporary geopolitical crises such as the wars in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, and Iraq, for instance, by alluding to them in the *mise-*

⁹⁹ In the late nineteenth century, the Romanticist plays were condemningly called conventional by Émile Zola. In turn, the term was utilised by the avant-garde movements in the early decades of the twentieth century to denounce the forms of popular theatre, including Naturalism. Later, the callers for postmodernist since the early 1970s described modern drama as conventional. For examples of such use of the term, see Garner Jr. (2003, 72), Saddik (19), Jannarone (499), Birringer (130), Abbotson (303), and Watt (1998, 113).

¹⁰⁰ This financial aspect could be one of the reasons for adopting documentary forms by the low-budget productions of local communities, amateur groups, and educational institutions.

en-scène of a production or by promptly reviving classic war dramas such as *The Persians*, *Lysistrata*, and *The Trojan Women*. (Saal 65)

Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (411 BC) was utilised as a method of opposing the War in Iraq in a way that proves the role of alternative media in shaping and mobilising public opinion in an international sense. On 3 March 2003, nearly two weeks before the invasion, according to earlier arrangements among professional and amateur practitioners via emails, *Lysistrata* was read by thousands of groups all over the world, including many American cities.¹⁰¹ Aristophanes' mocking of men's eagerness for wars did not prevent the Anglo-American coalition from invading Iraq, but it does what theatre is entitled, and needed, to do: profoundly protest.

Chris Megson gives two examples of using old dramatic texts to comment on the topical events. In the first, theatrical direction plays the big role in creating the metaphorical linkage between the production and the events of the War on Terror. In the second example, the original text is freely adapted to match the current events. Megson argues:

The conflict has also functioned as a resonant intertext perhaps most notably in a range of productions at the National Theatre. [...] Simon McBurney's *Measure for Measure* (May 2004) featured projections of President Bush and prisoners wearing the orange uniforms of Camp Delta whereas David Farr's adaptation from Gogol, *The UN Inspector* (June 2005), partly drew on the provenance of the Iraqi conflict in its focus on the anxiety caused to a former Soviet republic by a (presumed) visiting UN official (Megson 2005, 369)

The most prominent point of Megson's observation is mentioning McBurney's employing of 'projections' in order to raise his audience's awareness of the suggested relationship between the misuse of power in *Measure for Measure* and its similar in the real world. Put differently, the director's utilisation of one of documentary techniques enabled Shakespeare's play to be relevant to comment on Guantánamo.

In contrast, the topicality seems to be one of the reasons for which documentary drama is criticised; the immediate response to ongoing events makes most documentary plays look like a temporary type of theatre. In his comment on the British theatrical

¹⁰¹ Many readings were arranged in Egypt on the same day.

representation of the Falklands War, Paget claims: ‘The ‘provisional’ nature of all documentary plays makes them vulnerable’ (Paget 1992, 173). Commenting on the tribunal theatre in the 1960s Germany, Lane claims: ‘The context of recent history demanded a response: theatre’s was to remove the mediating hand of creativity and lay the facts bare. Quantifying widespread human atrocity was deemed beyond the capabilities of dramatic fiction’ (Lane 60). The word ‘capability’, though can be understood in two different ways. Firstly, it can refer to the instant response, and precise representation offered by documentary theatre. In contrast, if Lane suggests that comments on the factual events within imaginary plots cannot be as effective on the audience as tribunal plays, many of the plays studied in this thesis contradict this claim, not only by being more emotive, but also by achieving the informative goal. In either case, Lane’s comment suggests that tribunal plays lacks ‘the mediating hand of creativity’.

Joel Schechter goes further by defining all ‘topical’ plays as opposed to ‘innovative’ theatre (Schechter 38). This dichotomy seems to ignore the fact that documentary theatre, at least Verbatim plays, can be ‘innovative’. Moreover, imaginary plots can be topical. In other words, although the vast majority of documentary plays are topical, not all topical plays are documentary, as many of the plays explored in the next three chapters suggest. With a more balanced standpoint, Johnny Saldaña claims that some topical plays are excellent works of art, which are appreciated by spectators as well as critics. Saldaña explains:

[T]opical theatre can sometimes, if not most of the time, be short of art. There’s a reason that titles such as *The Laramie Project*, *The Exonerated*, and *The Vagina Monologues* have become so well known, and the play *I Am My Own Wife* won the Tony Award and Pulitzer Prize for best Drama. Yes, they are all socially conscious works, but they are also *excellent artistic products*. (Saldaña 203)

As Saldaña’s observation suggests, when the topic on which a documentary play comments loses the public interest, this play has little chance to attract an audience. In contrast, a ‘human interest story’—to use Paget’s expression—can attract spectators any time and/or place. Put differently, some topical plays can extend their messages beyond the limited

comment on specific incidents or factual happenings to generate various post-facto readings/viewings.¹⁰²

All the examples of what Saldaña calls ‘*excellent artistic products*’ are based on interviews, which means that they are Verbatim plays, which are considered by many critics as more artistic than tribunal plays. Nevertheless, it seems that both playwrights of Verbatim Theatre and editors of tribunal plays feel the need to defend their works from the accusations of being less artistic than fictional plots. Soans argues:

How is this any different from a well-written and well-constructed imagined play? The answer is: it isn't. [...] Verbatim plays are far more like conventional plays than is generally acknowledged – and, in fact, I think conventional plays are far more like verbatim than most people realise (Soans 2008, 18).

Soans’ last line in his comment draws my attention to the fact that while playwrights are working on their ‘imagined plays’, they practice some of the pre-writing research, each in his own way. Perhaps because of this kind of effort in research, Hare goes further by claiming that:

Dramatising history and the movement of society is mistakenly thought to be an activity more akin to journalism than to art. [...] The creation of a great political play will demand exactly the same measure of genius, torture and art as the creation of any other. And maybe more. (Hare 2005, 23-4)

As a journalist, Norton-Taylor cannot compare the tough mission of editing to playwrights’ efforts. Similarly, Norton-Taylor’s journalistic qualities cannot be claimed by all playwrights. Sometimes, the harsh critique of tribunal and verbatim plays seems to underestimate the effort of both editors and playwrights.

Yet, the critique of documentary theatre seems to be unable to prevent either dramatists or journalists from writing Verbatim theatre and tribunal plays in order to

¹⁰² *The Vagina Monologues* was performed at the theatre of the American University in Cairo to mostly elite spectators for three nights in February 2004. In 2008, three amateur actresses made their own Verbatim play *Kalam fi Serri (My Unspoken Speech)*, which frankly comments on Egyptian women’s suffering from social discrimination and political marginalisation. With minimal production, the play was noticeably acclaimed by most Egyptian critics and a large number of spectators. Because of such a success the play was chosen to participate in Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre (CIFET). Consequently, an inquiry in the Egyptian Parliament blamed the Minister of Culture for encouraging the imitation of *Western* moral decay.

comment on successive events of the War on Terror. Documents about these events are abundantly offered by the media coverage; historical, socio-political, and cultural studies; and official reports and speeches. Although turning this raw material into a documentary play could be very tough mission, it is usually much faster than writing an imaginary plot. Commenting on the theatrical production of Eliot Weinberger's *What I Heard About Iraq*, premiered in August 2005 at the Fountain Theatre, Los Angeles, Claire Allfree asks: 'Why bother writing a play about the invasion of Iraq when you can let the facts speak for themselves? That notion is certainly justified by this stark, powerful piece, that dramatises Eliot Weinberger's blog and book' (Allfree, web). The alternative media is crucial in enriching sources for documentary material such as blogs and online videos. For instance, the Culture Project in New York City had a unique attempt to bring Iraqis' own voices up by commissioning Kim Kefgen and Loren Noveck to adapt a blog of an unknown person to a dramatic text. The blog: *Baghdad Burning* is allegedly written by an anonymous Iraqi young woman in the shape of diary that documents the suffering of her country since 8 Jan 2003. The production, *Baghdad Burning: Girl Blog from Iraq 2003* was performed in 2005.¹⁰³

It seems important to realise that the flourish of documentary theatre is not limited to theatrical responses to political or comments on the War on Terror, in Particular. Stuart Young argues:

[W]ithin the space of three months in the first half of 2007 alone there were at least four productions of documentary-style plays in London: *Aalst* by the National Theatre of Scotland; *Called to Account: the Indictment of Anthony Charles Lynton Blair for the Crime of Aggression Against Iraq – a Hearing* at the Tricycle Theatre; Ilium Productions' and the ICA's *Fallujah*; and *The Gay Man's Guide* at the Drill Hall. (Young 2009, 73)

Out of the four examples given by Young, only two are related to the war in Iraq. While *Aalst* uses the documentary material of the trial of two parents who killed their children in Belgium in 1999, *The Gay Man's Guide* can be called a 'celebratory' Verbatim, based on interviews with more than fifty homosexual men. Moreover, theatre is not the only field of this documentary prosperity; all sorts of media increasingly adopt the documentary form. Paget states: 'The proliferation of documentary modes in a variety of media can be

¹⁰³ The blog website is <http://riverbendblog.blogspot.co.uk/>

regarded as part of cultural response to changed circumstances nationally and globally – a response in which distrust is the default position’ (Paget 2009, 235).¹⁰⁴ This ‘distrust’ seems to shape one of the most significant features of contemporary British and American political theatre regarding playwrights’ utilisation of the documents.

Documentary material in the age of uncertainty

The wide spectrum of comments on the three conflicts introduced by the media is a rich source of information for both playwrights and the public. This source, nevertheless, sometimes becomes baffling. Luke Howie argues ‘In the twenty-first century the media is ubiquitous and ambivalent’ (Howie 42). This bafflement increases due to political vindictory discourses, ignoring the complex influence of historical events on the current conflicts, and some Western misapprehensions about the socio-cultural nature of the three locations, where violent confrontations take place. Furthermore, for different reasons on the two sides of the Atlantic, there are claims that the media coverage of the events is biased. For instance, Hare argues:

It is certainly true that the recent much-publicised flush of British drama on factual subjects is taken by many to be a response to the failures of the press [...] Everyone is aware that television and newspapers have decisively disillusioned us, in a way which seems beyond repair, by their trivial and partial coverage of seismic issues of war and peace. (Hare 2005, 28)

Hare’s opinion seems unfair not because the British media coverage of the conflicts is completely unbiased, but because such ultimate objectivity cannot exist, especially during wars. Regardless of the British public opinion on the credibility of these wars, there is a de facto presence of British soldiers on the battlefields. For instance, it is not predictable that when a group of Iraqi youths, who are against the occupation, attack British soldiers, the BBC, for example, might describe the former as fighters for freedom, especially if one soldier is killed or even injured. However, especially compared to the American media, it is hard to accept Hare’s judgment, which indirectly suggests that the popularity of topical

¹⁰⁴ The boom in all sorts of factual-based presentation can be linked with the hugely increasing popularity of Reality TV. For more information, see Murray and Ouellette, wherein seventeen articles explore Reality TV as a genre, industry, and a manifestation of cultural and political factors. A large number of case-studies with examination of the link between Reality TV and non-fiction genres can be found in Holmes (2004) and Hill (2007).

plays is a result of the distrust in the media. Despite the complaints of British people about the media, I agree with Bottoms when he claims that ‘most Britons still believe (somewhat gullibly?) in the underlying truth/reality of the news as mediated by the BBC and by newspapers such as the *Guardian*’ (Bottoms 57). For instance, as far as my observation on the British media is concerned, I disagree with Hare’s claim about what he calls ‘partial coverage of seismic issues of war’. The British media critique of American and British politicians, especially regarding the reasons for the invasion of Iraq and its aftermath, is too regular and objective to be overlooked. In particular, I argue that most British media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is biased towards the Arabic side.¹⁰⁵

In the US, it seems different not only because the War on Terror was framed as a fair revenge for the terrorist attack of 9/11, but also due to the dominance of zealous patriotic discourses. Therefore, Bottoms argues that ‘distortions and biases [sic] paraded as fact not only by explicitly conservative broadcasters but by hitherto trusted sources like the *New York Times*’ (Bottoms 57). In the context of this overriding sense of patriotism, several American Verbatim plays responded to 9/11 with different goals. As the title of Annie Thoms’s *With Their Eyes: September 11th, the View from a High School at Ground Zero* (2002) suggests, the play attempts to give a close image of the catastrophe through statements given by eyewitnesses. Thoms, who edited these statements explains that, because ‘Stuyvesant High School is four blocks north of the World Trade Center, [...] hundreds of Stuyvesant students saw the planes hit, saw people jumping from their office windows, saw the towers fall’ (Thoms 1–2). This kind of reproduction of the terrifying moments of the attack resembles what the American media did for years since 9/11: highlighting the immensity of the disaster. In addition to reminding the American people of the undisputed reason for the War on Terror, the reminiscence of the scenes of the calamity might be meant to function as a justification for the large number of the victims of this war.

Similarly, Anne Nelson’s *The Guys* was an immediate response to 9/11. The play was first performed in December 2001 at the Fela Theatre in New York, and ‘ran to sold-out houses for 13 months’ (Cherry 160). However, *The Guys* takes a further step beyond the mere representation of the factual disaster. Nelson’s play seems to encourage its audience to realise how both politicians and the media exploit the disaster, by drawing fake

¹⁰⁵ In Phillips (197–202), British media, especially the BBC and the *Guardian*, is harshly accused of favouring Palestinians, including Hamas, over Israel. For the comparison between the American and British media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, see Dunsky (293–9). In Evensen, the intrinsic difficulty of reporting the Middle-East conflict is analysed from a subjective and academic perspectives.

images of the victims as heroes, in order to insist on jingoism. In the play, Nelson rewrites her conversations with Nick, a fireman who is supposed to make a speech about Bill, one of his colleagues who died while he was fighting the fire on 9/11. Joan, an academic who represents Nelson, is surprised by how it is hard for Nick to say things about Bill. Nick explains:

I keep hearing all these speeches from the politicians on tv. [sic] The pictures in the papers. Hero this, hero that. I don't even recognize them. [...] Bill. Yeah, Bill. Well, see that's the problem. There's just not much to say. This hero stuff, like they were some guys in a movie (qtd. in Nelson 2003, 54).

However, because of this dominant heroic and patriotic discourse in the US, the play turned into what Nick criticizes. Nelson claims that 'some productions of *The Guys* imposed nationalist elements such as flags and anthems, which ran contrary to my intent' (Nelson 2013, email).

In contrast to American playwrights' preferences of Verbatim Theatre to comment on 9/11, most of their plays that represent the events of the War on Terror tend to avoid documentary forms. In his comment on the large number of British documentary plays that respond to the War on Terror, Bottoms argues:

It is less clear why no similar [documentary] trend has been apparent in the U.S., beyond an initial spate of documentary plays about the events of 9/11 itself. [...] American theatrical responses to recent world events have often taken the form of grotesque satire rather than any attempt at "accurate" documentary reflection. (Bottoms 57)

This observation though does not suggest that all contemporary British political plays adopt an 'accurate documentary reflection', whether Bottoms' words describe tribunal plays, or the less 'accurate' documentary form of Verbatim Theatre.

It is hard to define why American playwrights have chosen to avoid documentary forms in their responses to the War on Terror. However, perhaps the postmodernist cut with the traditions of political drama since the 1970s was more effective on the American than the British theatre, within which regional documentary plays flourished during the 1970s and 1980s. Further explanation can be related to the dominant thought over the bulk of the

American society since 2001: supporting our troops. In other words, the insistence on the priority of protecting American soldiers over revealing the facts of the aftermath of the War on Terror seems to be the common feature of the discourses of the American media and politicians. Therefore, while the vast majority of British ‘factually-based’ plays gratingly expose the defects of the American-led coalition by using documented events, most American playwrights metaphorically represent the conflicts through imaginary plots and characters rather than factual events or real politicians. In the following three chapters I will discuss this explanation through my reading of specific American plays, especially when the dramatic text doubts the credibility of the documentary material it includes.

In this respect, it seems important to conclude that, as with their forebears in the 1920s and 1960s, the vast majority of political plays of the twenty-first century critically represent factual events, in which public opinion interests. In 2006, Reinelt declared: ‘In accounting for the appearance and success of these [documentary] plays, the critical relationship to the contemporary events that sparked them is almost always central’ (Reinelt 81). However, the most striking feature of contemporary documentary drama, which distinguishes it from its ancestors of the twentieth century, is that documentary materials within a large number of Verbatim and imaginary documentary plays of the twenty-one century are usually introduced as doubtful claims rather than authoritative or credible facts.

Contemporary playwrights’ mistrust in documents is not limited to documentary material about the War on Terror. Although Carole-Anne Upton declares that documentary theatre usually establishes its argument on the trust in documentary material as an unassailable truth or factual reality, she refers to some contemporary documentary plays in Northern Ireland that expose their documentary sources just to contradict them as suspect official interpretations of the real event (Upton 179-94). On the two sides of the Atlantic, these ‘official interpretations’ of the events are usually adopted and documented by the media coverage of the events of the War on Terror. Therefore, documentary theatre in the 2000s seems to ‘suspect’ what Paget calls ‘the "official" media of newspaper, radio and television, subject as they all are to “spin” – that ubiquitous term describing the active manipulation of information by which all institutions (especially those under pressure) attempt to "manage communications"’ (Paget 2008, 130). In other words, while the informative function of the twentieth-century documentary drama was based on the

credibility of documentary materials, this credibility itself is usually scrutinised by the playwrights of contemporary dramatic representations of the War on Terror.

Paget's realisation of this phenomenon motivated him to add a fifth goal for all forms of documentary drama, including theatre. He explains: 'In the current age, where means of persuasion have come under increasing scrutiny, this function has led more and more to a fifth function of documentary forms: [...] They can interrogate the very notion *documentary*' (Paget 2009, 228). In this respect I can understand James Frieze when he claims:

Documentary' is often used as a genre term synonymous with 'nonfiction' and 'issue-based'. Stressing the non-fictive and issue-based qualities of 'documentary theatre', however, occludes the great extent to which documentary theatre, from the mid-1990s onwards, is increasingly *about documentary processes*, including those of theatre. (Frieze 131)

Writing plays '*about*' documents, rather than presenting these documents is supposed to be noticed within Verbatim Theatre, wherein playwrights do not adhere to the documents literally. Moreover, as many of the plays studied in the following chapters suggest, an imaginary plot can include a critical reading of historical or more recent documents.

Chapter Three

The representation of Iraqi conflict: Two decades of military confrontations and economic sanctions.

If the war in Afghanistan in 2001 was declared to punish Al-Qaeda for its actual crimes, the attack on Iraq was initially described as a pre-emptive measure to prevent the Iraqi regime from utilising its weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). Objections to the invasion were raised by people from everywhere in the world, including the leaders of many Western countries. Gradually, with the threat of Iraqi possession of WMDs revealed to be false, fiercer protests increased against the war, which began to be described as an occupation by a large number of both Western and Arabic scholars, journalists, and officials.¹⁰⁶

While supporting their army on the grounds of patriotism, citizens in the United States increasingly questioned the validity of the war, especially with the large number of casualties among Western soldiers and Iraqi civilians. For a big sector of British people, despite their resentment against Saddam's tyranny, the invasion of Iraq has never proved its legality, while rescuing the Iraqis from the atrocities of their regime was highlighted by the pro-war voices in some British media.¹⁰⁷

Years after Saddam Hussein's dictatorship was overthrown, neither had the suffering of Iraqis ended nor the American-led intervention in the troubled country become unnecessary, especially with the brutally violent operations of the newly established Sunni militant Islamic State (IS).¹⁰⁸ It is important to mention that although the current chaotic situation in Iraq suggests the failure of the American policies in the country since the invasion of 2003, the idea of founding an Islamic state has always been the kernel and ultimate goal of Islamists in general and militant groups in particular. Furthermore, these

¹⁰⁶ To give examples, see Bensahel, Schumacher, Allawi, and Cockburn.

¹⁰⁷ For detailed interpretations of the complicated aspects of shaping American public opinion on the 2003 War, see the studies of Holsti (2011), Holsti (2012), Berinsky, Gelpi, Gallup, Jr., and Dorman. Comprehensive analyses of the British media coverage of the invasion and its aftermath can be found in Robinson (2010). The split in the British public opinion on the 2003 War in Iraq is mentioned in Kuhn (99–100), and Gowland (158). For a comparison between responses of American and British media to the war in Iraq, see DiMaggio. In addition to the US and the UK, the anthology edited by Nikolaev and Hakanen extends its spectrum to include the coverage of the Iraq War by the media of Australia, Europe, and the Middle East.

¹⁰⁸ Formerly known as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), or Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL), the IS has chosen its victims on a religious, ethnic, and sectarian basis. However, the terroristic group also killed Sunni Iraqis, who did not abide with its rules.

troubles in 2010's Iraq must be read in the context of the consequences of the recent uprisings in several Arabic countries, especially in Syria.

Apart from such intersecting and controversial events, which need to be studied thoroughly, this chapter focuses on the dramatic responses of both British and American playwrights to the 2003 war in Iraq and its consequences until 2011. These plays shape the biggest sector of contemporary topical plays as part of the revival of political theatre in the US and the UK. In 2009, Nicolas Kent, the artistic director of the Tricycle Theatre, confirmed: 'For much of the last fifteen years Iraq has been the big story for the world's media. [...] Iraq was in the headlines almost every day, and artists, writers, film and theatre-makers produced much work about the invasion and its aftermath' (Kent 7). On one hand, when Kent refers to the international focus on the conflict in Iraq, I realise why the number of plays that comment on one or more of the events in Iraq is larger than those that respond to the War in Afghanistan. On the other hand, although Kent recognises that Western interest in the situation in Iraq goes back to the first half of the 1990s, he limits the effect of this interest to the plays written since 2003. Thus, Kent's observation neglects several plays, within which both British and American playwrights comment on the military conflict between the Anglo-American armies and the Iraqi regime in the First Gulf War in January 1991 and its aftermath.¹⁰⁹

The road to the 2003 invasion

The circumstances of the 2003 invasion are different from historical and geopolitical contexts of the 1991 War, wherein a coalition that included several Arabic countries, with the approval of the United Nations, was dedicated to ending the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. In addition, compared to the invasion of 2003, this war has been portrayed as more justifiable by mainstream Western media. Similarly, the vast majority of Arabic media identified with the standpoint of their governments by condemning the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait and supporting the international coalition against Saddam's regime. Nevertheless, before exploring the way in which British and American plays comment on the 2003 War in Iraq, this chapter investigates examples of the dramatic responses to the 1991 War and its consequences, which paved the road to the invasion.

¹⁰⁹ This war is also known as Operation Desert Storm, the Persian Gulf War, and the War of liberating Kuwait. This conflict was preceded by the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), whose episodes were part of a 'big story for the world's media', if I use Kent's description.

While Iraqi people were losing innocent civilian victims, their surviving dictator was not ashamed to declare his victory over Iran, Kuwait, and the international coalition. Then, Iraqis had to endure more than twelve years of comprehensive economic sanctions, which failed to deter Saddam's regime. Instead, the vast majority of the Iraqis had to suffer from the lack of food and medicine. After Saddam's useless ventures in Iran and Kuwait and the defeat in the 1991 Gulf War, even the exempted goods from sanctions were very expensive. While the vast majority of Iraqi people were unable to meet their basic needs, Saddam and his junta kept enjoying their luxurious life.

Moreover, because of Western fears of the Iraqi regime's attempts to produce chemical weapons, basic components of vital medicinal drugs, including those for treating cancer, were banned. In the Report of the United Nations' High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change, the international organisation declares:

As a result of growing concern over the humanitarian impact of comprehensive sanctions, the Security Council stopped imposing them after the cases of Iraq, former Yugoslavia and Haiti, and turned exclusively to the use of financial, diplomatic, arms, aviation, travel and commodity sanctions, targeting the belligerents and policy makers most directly responsible for reprehensible policies. (United Nations 32)

Compared to Iraq, sanctions were imposed on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Haiti for short periods, three and a half and three years, respectively. The agony of the sanctions was ended by the catastrophe of the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in 2003, which followed and preceded some of the most controversial episodes of the War on Terror.¹¹⁰

I claim that if the American-Arabic support for the Iraqi war against Iran increased the power of Saddam, the main factors responsible for the Iraqi people's struggle in successive decades are oppressive, aggressive, and evasive policies of the Iraqi's regime towards its own people, neighbouring countries and the UN, respectively. These three features of the Iraqi regime interactively intersect to shape the complex circumstances of many events of the confrontation between Iraq and the international community in general, and between Saddam and the US in particular. To give examples, Saddam's dictatorship

¹¹⁰ For the catastrophic impact of the sanctions on Iraqi people, especially children, see Addis (584), Farrall (108), Yaphe (128), Hechter (69–70), and Simons (2004, 382). For detailed explanations of the difference between comprehensive and selective sanctions, see Cortright.

forced a large number of Iraqi citizens, especially intellectuals, to live in exile. A big sector of these expats actively participated in the American-led preparations for the invasion.

Similarly, it is hard to discuss the harmful impact of the sanctions on Iraqi people, especially children, without considering that the tiny circle of Saddam's corrupt regime benefited from the Oil-for-Food Programme rather than enhancing the condition of life for the vast majority of the Iraqi population. Moreover, Saddam's reluctance to co-operate with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in the 1990s and early 2000s suggested that the dictator was able to produce WMDs, which were crucial in extending the sanctions to include chemical substances. Finally, and most importantly, the American and British discourse about a potential threat of Iraqi WMDs can be understood on the grounds of the Iraqi regime's resistance against the nuclear inspections by IAEA as well as the dropping of chemical weapons on the Kurdish town of Halabja in 1988. The latter was part of several attacks against the Kurds, known as the al-Anfal Campaign.¹¹¹

The most significant reason why this chapter examines examples of British and American plays about Iraq before 2003 is my observation that these plays are similar to the vast majority of representations of the 2003 invasion in terms of contradicting specific claims raised by Western politicians and media. Thus, in terms of subject matter, dramas by contemporary Anglo-American playwrights portraying the conflict in Iraq can be divided into two major groups that reflect the phases of the conflict. The first group consists of the plays in which the First Gulf War in 1991 and its consequences are depicted. The second group includes the dramatic works that respond to the 2003 invasion of Iraq and its aftermath. It is important to mention that, despite this thematic classification, this chapter highlights the way in which dramatic texts diversely represent political and military aspects of the Iraqi conflict with the international community in general and with the American-led coalitions in particular before and after 2003.

Representing the 1991 War and its aftermath

a. Anti-war or anti-America?

The first Gulf War showed the significant role of the media in offering an immediate coverage of the military actions. It was the first time in history when audiences were able to watch battlefields on their screens instantly. William O'Neill argues: 'As

¹¹¹ For more information about this massacre, see Mikaberidze (67) and Hardi (13-37). For the report of Human Rights Watch about the genocide of the Iraqi Kurds, see Black.

entertainment the war could not be surpassed, and it had the further advantage for media barons of being inexpensive compared to a prime-time series' (O'Neill 2009, 48). In addition to highlighting this drama-like nature of the media coverage of the war, Jeanne Colleran goes further by suggesting its effect on the audience. Colleran claims:

As one of the most spectacular struggles in recent history, with round-the-clock, globally transmitted coverage, the Gulf War's visibility made it a drama with an international audience. Yet this very visibility seems also to have ensured that no audience was left for critical reassessment or historical judgment. (Colleran 2003, 621 – 22)

The crucial point, which Colleran draws attention to, is the dominance of media, which can lead spectators to a state of immersion where their critical sense gives way to a kind of negative reception that cannot evaluate the perceived message in the terms of its sociopolitical conditions.

In addition, I argue that this astounding 'visibility' underscores the superiority of the US in terms of technology, which perhaps makes American officials' claims about the 'smart weapons' and 'clean war' believable. Promoted by the media, such slogans suggested that using advanced technology can guarantee weapons' high degree of precision to avoid mistakes. Thus, civilians are unlikely to be mistakenly killed by the coalition's bombing. On the ground, a large number of murdered and injured civilians were victims of these smart weapons.¹¹²

Such televised scenes of the explosions excluded any harmful effect on Iraqi civilians. Petra Rau argues: 'Intellectuals were highly disturbed less by the war itself than by the way in which it was presented to the world as a war without bodies in which superior technology and state power controlled the visibility of human cost' (Rau 12). In addition to displaying the American 'superior technology', the live broadcasting of the attack focuses on the work of the smart weapons rather than their harmful effect on the Iraqis. In a post-war comment, Ian Hargreaves argues that 'the public in Britain and in America will have had the impression that this was a war involving very little death and very little utter horror' (ctd. in Taylor 1992, 13). In this respect, the absence of the image of victims is more likely to support the claim of a clean war.

¹¹² An examination of the role of Western media in supporting the myth of clean war with smart weapons can be found in the studies of Lee and Stauber.

Furthermore, as with the ‘point of view shot’ in movies, most of these live scenes are taken from the cockpits of fighter aircrafts. By ‘metaphorical parallelism’, spectators might identify themselves with the pilots. In this respect, spectators not only support the war, they can feel that they are fighting in it. Perhaps this patriotic identification with the pilots/attackers accounts for the Americans’ eagerness to watch these live scenes, and vice versa. Colleran insists on the role of this footage in shaping the audience’s opinion of the war:

[T]he way in which the public simply watched the war on television also had something to do with the large degree of consensus in the United States about the appropriateness of American military action. The customary habits of millions of television viewers contributed to the high degree of support the war rallied. (Colleran2003, 619)

Here, Colleran goes further than the claims of both Stephen Bottoms and David Hare about Western media’s prejudicial coverage of the international conflicts. These scenes suggest how the ‘visibility’ – without any discourse – is able to generate several messages, which create and raise spectators’ support for the war.¹¹³

The two plays I select as examples of the representation of the 1991 war are *The Gulf between Us, or, The Truth and Other Fictions*, written by the British playwright Trevor Griffiths in 1991, and produced by the West Yorkshire Playhouse in January 1992, and the American playwright Naomi Wallace’s *In the Heart of America*, premiered in August 1994 at the Bush Theatre in London. Both plays give good examples of the gradual and marginal occurrence of documentary materials within topical plays.

In *The Gulf between Us*, Griffiths exploits one of these real televised scenes at the beginning of his play to define the place and the time of actions. The stage directions read: ‘*In the deep silence, mute cockpit-videos of famous strikes on bridges, buildings, installations replace the pre-dawn light on the sky-cyc*’ (Griffiths 1992, 2). This familiar scene is removed from the authority of the media to be planted in a new revealing context, wherein the discourse about the precision of ‘smart weapons’ and ‘clean war’ is strongly challenged by the death of innocents.

¹¹³ For more information about how the audience is more likely to identify with the beholder in the point of view shots, see Allen (238-40), Gaut (261-3), and Casetti (64).

The play represents a factual incident when American weapons mistakenly killed Iraqi civilians, most of them were children. Commenting on the disaster, Daniel Hallock declares: "Smart bombs" did nothing to save the 1,200 innocent women and children incinerated in the Al-Amariyah Shelter during the 1991 bombing of Baghdad' (Hallock 143). Thomas Rid argues that 'Iraqi sources accurately said that 200-300 civilians, including over 100 children, had died in the bunker' (Rid 85). It seems important to realise that, whether the Iraqi regime is responsible for allowing civilians to use a military shelter, this fact 'was not known to the pilot or the target planners before the attack (Rid 85). However, *The Gulf between Us* blames the Iraqi regime for enabling the catastrophe to happen; the play casts the incident as the responsibility of an excessive and intentional American use of power. In this respect, Griffiths' play extends its comment on the war beyond challenging the myth of 'smart' weapons, to criticising the US as a brutal and aggressive military power. I claim that this critique leads *The Gulf between Us* to suggest several polemic messages, which controversially link the topical theme of the play with different historical events.

Commenting on *The Gulf between Us*, Griffiths declares that 'it's not a documentary, it's not a journalistic piece. It's a kind of dreamplay' (Griffiths 1992, VIII). Whether this statement can be understood on the grounds of the derogatory image of documentary theatre as a less artistic theatre, the playwright precisely describes his play. As its subtitle –*The Truth and Other Fictions* – suggests, Griffiths' play weaves the factual incident within a fictional plot, which is introduced to the audience by Fanibar O'Toole as a narrator. Within his first speech, O'Toole seems to imitate traditional travelling storytellers in Arabic countries until the early decades of the twentieth century, when they used to introduce the narrative by praising God and the prophet Mohammed. In addition, O'Toole refers to the *Arabian Nights* as a source for 'fable and adventure' (Griffiths 1992, 1). In addition to hinting at the geographical frame of the play's action, this speech highlights the fictional aspects of the play.

According to O'Toole, the play represents 'the Tale of the Builder, the Gilder, the Minder and the Gulf between them' (Griffiths 1992, 1). Before he participates in shaping the dramatic action of the play as the character of an Irish gilder, O'Toole introduces the three main characters of the play, including himself. The builder, Ryder came from Swansea to Iraq searching for a chance to make a profit only to find himself in a war zone. In order get an exit visa and a ticket, Ryder is ordered by the Iraqi regime to rebuild the

wall of a shrine, which was destroyed by an American missile. Representing the Iraqi regime, Ismael is the minder, a teenager who observes the repairing of the building, which had been utilised as a secret store of weapons and a crèche. Moreover, in what seems to be an explanation of the play's title, O'Toole takes the word 'Gulf' further than its description of the location of the war to denote a cultural gap not only between the two British characters and the Muslim and Arabic character, but also between O'Toole and Ryder.¹¹⁴

It is hard to define whether Griffiths chooses to make the building a shrine in order to suggest that the Iraqi regime exploits places of worship for military purposes, or whether the play highlights Saddam's brutality against Shii children whose nursery is attached to a potential military target. In either case, Ismael himself was not aware of the fact that the children were victims of the American missile. At the end of the play, when Ismael is killed by another American attack, O'Toole mockingly addresses the former's corpse:

You didn't even know the babs [sic] were in there, did you, your Major told you they'd been washed away in the river, he had you execute the poor bloody driver for falling asleep at the wheel, [...] you took his lies for truth and now you're down to die for it, you poor ignorant bastard. (Griffiths 1992, 53)

The significance of O'Toole's revelation is his claim that Ismael, who died by American bombs, is a victim of the deceitful orders of the Iraqi Major. The latter 'failed to return from the brothel one afternoon, and was not on hand when the crèche supervisor rang in to say the bus had not arrived to take the kids over the river' (Griffiths 1992, 56). In this respect, the play reduces the Iraqi regime's responsibility for the catastrophe to an individual mistake made by the Iraqi official.

The information offered by O'Toole explains one of the earliest scenes of the play, when Ismael kills the innocent bus-driver as the stage directions read:

Two armed People's Militia arrive, pushing a middle-aged man in bus-driver's uniform ahead of them. [...] One of the militiamen hands ISMAEL a document, [...] ISMAEL reads out the document aloud over the weeping driver, fold it, pockets it, walks behind the man, draws his pistol, lays it to the man's head, fires. The driver

¹¹⁴ For the Shii sect, the shrine is a place for worship, equivalent to the Sunni mosque. Every shrine is associated with a sacred person, whose grave is usually attached to the building.

flops forward in a spray of blood. The militiamen move impassively in to drag him off face down across the rubble. (Griffiths 1992, 3)

Physical violence was an aspect of many of In-yer-face plays in the 1990s, whose writers saw Griffiths as an old model of leftist playwrights. Leslie Wade argues that In-yer-face playwrights ‘rejected the socialist platforms and platitudes of the left, the politics espoused by such writers as Howard Brenton and Trevor Griffiths’ (Wade 284).¹¹⁵

Whether Griffiths was influenced by the increasing popularity of the violence on stage or he simply insists on the bloody nature of the Iraqi regime, Ismael’s brutality contradicts his initial image as he appears with ‘*a kid’s football balanced on his raised right foot*’ (Griffiths 1992, 2). Such a discrepancy is one of several examples of the deliberate challenge of naturalism in *The Gulf between Us*. Garner Jr. explains: ‘Griffiths deploys stage devices, technical as well as conventionally theatrical, to heighten the play’s nonnaturalistic effects’ (Garner Jr. 1999, 232–33). For instance, the process of building the wall is represented in real time, while the action in front of this naturalistic background occurs through extended dramatic time, which includes many temporal and spatial gaps.

The characterisation of O’Toole is a good example of Griffiths’ utilisation of different theatrical techniques that avoid the naturalistic presentation of the incident. As a narrator, O’Toole has the authority of knowing what other characters, and the members of the audience, cannot realise. Theatrically, O’Toole is distinguished from other characters by moving onstage in ‘a tight golden spot’ (Griffiths 1992, 1). As one of the characters who participate in the play’s action, his identity is vaguely described by a series of his discrepant statements. Although O’Toole claims that he participates in building Saddam’s Monument by applying ‘gold on the President’s shoulders’ (Griffiths 1992, 16–7), the Irish gilder declares that he is an undercover reporter for the *Sun* (Griffiths 1992, 14). This enables different interpretations of Griffiths’ character and play. For instance, Janelle Reinelt claims that ‘most likely he [O’Toole] is a British government operative, an agent of some sort who gilds as his cover (Reinelt 1999, 172). Reinelt’s suggestion gives the Irish character a political aspect, which urges me to ask whether this British agent, who participated in building the President’s Monument, was secretly supporting the Iraqi dictatorship? Moreover, with the consideration of O’Toole’s speech to Ismael, when the

¹¹⁵ As a committed socialist author, Griffiths’ style in the 1970s and 1980s is usually described as ‘critical naturalism’ or ‘critical realism’. For more information, see Clark (77–80), Bignell (51–2), Rabey (235), and Harris (2006, 9–11).

former declares: 'I was in this place before you were born, son' (Griffiths 1992, 12), does Griffiths's play hint at the historical role played by the British Empire in Iraq?

The play does not include clear answers to these questions. What *The Gulf between Us* insists on is the critique of the West in general and the US in particular. After seeing the building damaged by the American missile, even before knowing about the dead children, Ryder apologetically declares: 'Ismael, you have every right to be angry at what the white ... at what the West is doing to your people and your country' (Griffiths 1992, 6). Later, the play suggests that Ryder's identification with 'the white' and/or 'the West' entails his superior self-image. For the Welsh builder, the Indian man who is brought to help him is a 'Paki' (Griffiths 1992, 38), and O'Toole is a 'thick Irish [...] Paddy' (Griffiths 1992, 12). Commenting on the relationship between the two British characters, Jonathan Bignell argues that 'the uneasy relationship of Irishness to Britishness enabled Griffiths to use his characterization to challenge the simple nationalism of skinhead culture' (Bignell 51). On one hand, I agree with Bignell's observation, which draws attention to the fact that there are usually subtle differences between dramatic characters who are classified under the same category of culture, nationality, or religion. I claim that realising such differences is one of the difficulties faced by the reader/audiences of political dramas, which comment on multi-cultural conflicts.

On the other hand, despite their belonging to, and representing the same *Western* culture and *British* nationality, each character has a specific combination of physical, social, and psychological attributes, some of which may, or may not, make him distinguishable from others. Put differently, characters in political plays simultaneously are able to represent an abstract concept and a unique human existence. For example, Ryder may portray the economic aspect of the declining imperial project in Iraq. He can also be seen as a critique of Western Capitalism in general. In either case, Ryder is a white Westerner who, similar to the Iraqi Muslim Ismael, is driven by his self-interest. In contrast, O'Toole seems more similar to Dr Fadia Aziz, the Christian Iraqi woman who investigates the crèche in order to check on the safety of the children. Before she discovers the disaster, Dr Aziz utilises the last four lines of *Ozymandias* to describe the rubble. To her surprise, the Irish gilder recognises that she cites Shelley (Griffiths 1992, 16). Put differently, perhaps the gulf between O'Toole and Ryder is wider than the gap between the former and Aziz.

I argue that the ambiguously complicated identity of O'Toole is essential in Griffiths' comment on the factual incident, which the play imposes in a broader context, neglecting the specific circumstances of the 1991 War. After the introductory video of Baghdad, the audience listens to overlapping voices and sounds of different urban and military sources including '*a moral litany from First World Leaders justifying the punitive use of force against Third World intransigents*' (Griffiths 1992, 2). Griffiths' intention of generalising the conflict, as a confrontation between 'First World' powers and 'Third World' countries neglects the specific circumstances of the 1991 War. In this respect I understand Stanton Jr., when he claims that Griffiths 'positions the military conflict between West and East in a broader historical and literary landscape' (Garner Jr., 1999, 233). In creating this 'broader historical and literary landscape', the character of O'Toole is the main factor.

If the action of both Ryder and Ismael is justified by specific reasons pertinent to the present dramatic time and place, O'Toole's existence seems to be transcendental as he witnessed historical events. O'Toole remembers: 'Outside the besieged city, the massed ranks of the Christian host from the north pitilessly prepare the next assault, cold in their resolve to render life impossible for the unfortunate citizenry huddled within and so bring the Caliph to his knees' (Griffiths 1992, 15). In this respect, O'Toole suggests a resemblance between the 1991 War and what seems to describe the historical Crusades. Insisting on such an alleged similarity, O'Toole proceeds:

And down in the Caliph's courtyard, so recently despoiled by enemy fire, our heroes scheme and plot their survival in a tiny war-play of their own, The Builder smells advantage on the poisoned air; the youthful minder searches for manhood on the sticky paths of duty; and Fanibar [O'Toole], our Wandering Gilder, his plans deep laid and all but ready to spring, struggles to recall the details of his tale from the wearing darkness that engulfs him. (Griffiths 1992, 15)

While defining the main attribute of Ryder, Ismael, and O'Toole, the latter imposes their story with the historical scene of the religiously-oriented conflict. Put differently, O'Toole suggests the following *fictitious* 'metaphorical parallelism':

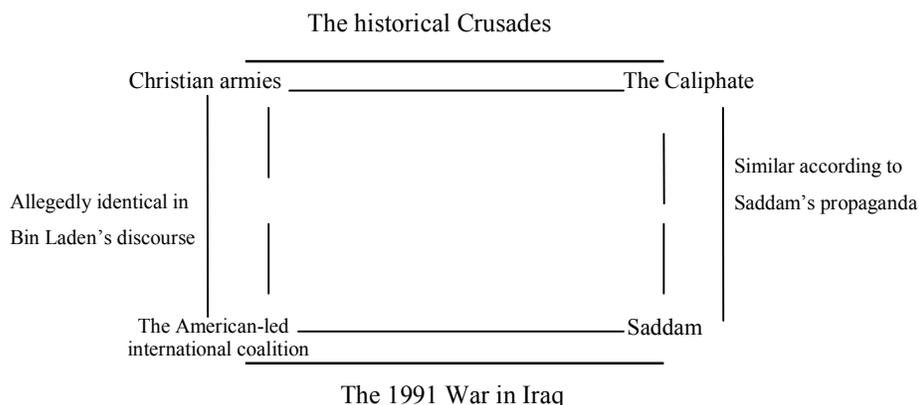


Figure (5)

Alleged similarity between the Crusades and the First Gulf War

As figure (5) suggests, when O’Toole conflates the Crusades and the liberation of Kuwait, he ignores both the reasons for the First Gulf War and the international backing for the coalition, including the support of several Muslim and Arabic countries. Moreover, and most controversially, the play seems to identify with both Bin Laden’s claims and Saddam’s propaganda.¹¹⁶

At the heart of this generalised and polemic image of the conflict, *The Gulf between Us* represents the death of the children as a result of an intentional attack. Within his last speech, O’Toole sums up the story by accusing the Americans. The narrator argues that ‘they could see it [the shrine] was being used for military purposes but managed to overlook – or at least overcome – the fact that it was used as a nursery, oh come on, Lord, these men know *exactly* [sic] what they’re doing, the rest is teasing’ (Griffiths 1992, 15). O’Toole’s statement affirms Dr Aziz’s claim about the American’s awareness that children were inside the target of the missile.

Looking at the sky, Dr Aziz gives vent to her anger by addressing the President of the US. Her final words are: ‘We have a holy place, a place of worship, a place your cameras tell everyday is filled with children. And you send a missile, not a wayward falling bomb, to burn it up’ (Griffiths 1992, 49). In Brechtian style, Dr Aziz’s speech interrupts a very emotive moment that provokes sadness and upset when Iraqi mothers desperately call

¹¹⁶ Assuming the role of the heroic defender of Palestinians, the Iraqi dictator was identified by his media with Saladin (Salah el-Deen), who reconquered Jerusalem from the Christians in the twelfth century. Examples of British and American journalists, who highlighted such a phenomenon, include MacAskill (2003), Brooks, Hirst, and Woollacott.

their murdered children. Although these mothers do not appear on stage, their voices increase the tension of the action, wherein burnt remains of the children, collected in Dr Aziz's shawl, are being revealed to the audience.

The most striking aspect of Dr Aziz's speech is her suggestion of a constant and an inseparable relationship between American advancement and the excessive use of power against unequal enemies, including civilians. Dr Aziz declares:

I have seen you, Mr President, with your sensitive expression and sorrowing eyes on my television screen ... And I had forgotten, what you will not acknowledge but the world knows, that yours is a country forged and shaped in brutal genocide, the destruction of whole people, lives, customs, beliefs, men, women and children who had learned respect for the place that nourished them, who had learned to tread gently on this good earth. (Griffiths 1992, 48–9)

As with O'Toole's reference to the Crusades, Dr Aziz mentions the disaster of the indigenous people of America. By suggesting such a *false* 'metaphorical parallelism' between the 'brutal genocide' and what Dr Aziz claims as a designed murder of Iraqi children, *The Gulf between Us* seems to be an anti-America play, rather than being a dramatic response to the internationally-supported 1991 War in general, and the attack on the Al-Amariyah Shelter in particular. The most significant consequence of neglecting the intersecting circumstances of both events is distracting the play's focus on the fact that civilians are always victims of all wars, regardless of any allegation about faultless weapons.

Extending the comment on the First Gulf War to include historical atrocities committed by the US is one of the main aspects of Wallace's *In the Heart of America*, wherein the narrative about the conflict in Iraq is interrupted by regular references to the Vietnam War. But if *In the Heart of America* was written after the end of the First Gulf War, why does Wallace criticise the US military intervention in the Arabic-Arabic conflict by reminding the American public of the notorious prolonged presence in Vietnam?

In both wars, American armies were protecting US geopolitical interests in the Far and Middle East against the former Soviet Union and the Iraqi dictator, respectively. On the other hand, the two cases are completely different, whether in terms of the standpoint of both American society and the international community, or regarding the outcome of each war. Therefore, it is hard to decide whether Wallace's play predicts that the American

intervention in the Gulf will turn into an occupation of Iraq in the 2000s, or whether the playwright expresses pacifistic beliefs by addressing the so-called Vietnam Syndrome. What Wallace's play suggests is that the atrocious activities of American soldiers against civilians are a common feature of the two wars.¹¹⁷

Lue Ming is a ghost of a Vietnamese woman whose regular recalling of the killing and raping of her compatriots is conflated with other characters' discourse about the 1991 War. In one of her dialogues with Craver, the American soldier, Ming wonders:

LUE MING: How can they fight in Vietnam and the Gulf at the same time?

CRAVER: We're not fighting in Vietnam.

LUE MING: Of course you are. [...] How many gooks have you killed?

CRAVER: I don't kill gooks; I kill Arabs. (Wallace 2001, 85–6)

In addition to Ming, the character of Boxler is described by Wallace as 'the soul of Lieutenant Calley' (Wallace 2001, 101), who was tried for his responsibility for killing Vietnamese civilians, in what is known as the My Lai Massacre, in March 1968. Colleran argues that Ming is one of Calley's victims (Colleran 2012, 30). In this respect, Wallace's dream-like play is a fierce critique of the US as an aggressive and excessive military power whose leaders do not care about the victims of American foreign policy.

Moreover, *In the Heart of America* blames the US for the struggle of the Palestinians. Remzi is a Palestinian-American soldier who fights against the Iraqi army in the desert of Saudi Arabia during the First Gulf War. Throughout the play his sister, Fairouz insists on comparing the discrepant reaction of the American-led international community towards Iraq and Israel. Remzi refuses the 'metaphorical parallelism' his sister draws between the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the Israeli actions in Palestine. He argues

REMZI: Iraq invaded a sovereign country. That's against international law.

¹¹⁷ Sam Shepard's *States of Shock*, which was premiered in May 1991 at New York City's American Place Theatre, was one of the first American plays to oppose the First Gulf War by linking it with Vietnam as an infamous chapter of National memory. Detailed analysis of the origin and effect of the so-called Vietnam Syndrome on American foreign policy can be found in the studies of Simons (1997), McCrisken (369–71), Martini (162–3), and Klare.

FAIROUZ: International law? Ha! Your own land is overrun, occupied, slowly eaten [...] And no one's ever smacked a Desert Shield on those bastards!

REMZI: There's just no parallel. (Wallace 2001, 93)

Unlike Griffiths' play, *In the Heart of America* does not ignore the legitimate reasons for the 1991 War. However, Fairouz's argument repeats the discourse of a large number of both Arabic Islamists and liberals, including those who contradicted Saddam's aggression against Kuwait. The comparison between Iraq and Israel shapes the core of Norman Finkelstein's 'Israel and Iraq: A Double Standard' (1991). But why does the play insist on weaving the matter of Palestine within the discourse of the war in Iraq? The answer can be found in the consequences of Arafat's political support for the invasion of Kuwait, when the vast majority of Palestinians believed that Saddam was the new Saladin.¹¹⁸

The two Palestinian characters though are more complicated than representing opposite opinions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the First Gulf War. While Fairouz is politically committed to her homeland, she knows that the traditions of her people cast her as a disgraceful woman, because she lost her virginity before marriage. Therefore, she cannot even think of going back to Palestine. Remzi, on the other hand, is concerned about his home land and dreams of Palestinian sovereignty. Nevertheless, he is aware that his homosexuality is disgraceful according to the social norms of his home country. Therefore, he seeks security under the mask of American identity by concealing his political preferences.

Although Wallace highlights the freedom of sexual orientation as one of the Western values, which distinguishes life in the US from Arabic countries, the play criticises American society. Remzi declares: 'On the streets of Atlanta I've been called every name you can think of: pimp, terrorist, half-nigger, mongrel, spic, wop, even Jew-bastard' (Wallace 2001, 108). The significance of this speech is that it suggests that these incidents of intolerance, which confuse Arabic Muslims and Jews, can be traced back to the early 1990s, years before 9/11.

¹¹⁸ The bombing of Tel Aviv and Haifa by Iraqi missiles during the war was seen by most historians as Saddam's attempt to identify with the Palestinians in order to gain the support of Arabic populations against their leaders who condemned the Iraqi President. The American administration played a crucial role in preventing Israel from responding to the Iraqi attacks. For more information, see O'Neill (2009, 64-5), and Reich (161-2).

The discrimination against the Palestinian young man is not limited to his ethnic background. Ironically, he is humiliated because of his sexual orientation by one of the American lieutenants as the following confrontation suggests:

BOXLER: (*Whispers*): Faggot. Shit-fucker.

REMZI: Stop it! Get off of me.

BOXLER: Sodomite. Fairy. (*Beat*) Feel it? Feel it inside you, Mr. perry? Now grab hold of it. (Wallace 2001, 101)

Although this homophobic incident takes place in Saudi Arabia, the aggression occurs in one of the American military premises. Thus, when the play condemns this assault against freedom, which is at the heart of American values, in general, Wallace seems to focus on the discrimination against homosexuals as a phenomenon inside the American military system. Such focus explains why Wallace includes Randy Shilts' 1993 book *Conduct Unbecoming: Gays and Lesbians in the Us Military*, in the afterword 'Select Bibliography' (Wallace 2001, 141–2). Stressing her defence of the freedom of Remzi and his colleague/partner Craver, Wallace make them units after the assault of their Boss in order to mention different sorts of specialist weapons in a very long monologue (Wallace 2001, 113). While they grotesquely describe parts of weapons as sexual objects, their conversation indirectly highlights the massive power of the US compared to that of the Iraqi army. Moreover, by mentioning the manufacturers of these weapons, such as 'Boeing', and 'General Electric', Wallace hints at the controversial role of military-industrial complex that may influence politicians' decisions about waging wars. Eventually, Remzi's death by Iraqi soldiers seems to mock Saddam's claims of being the defender of Palestinians and Remzi's unlimited pride over the superiority of American weapons.

As with *The Gulf between Us*, Wallace's play utilises nonnaturalistic techniques by establishing its plot on fragmented actions. These fragments, nevertheless, are distinguished from postdramatic theatre by direct political discourses. In terms of the topicality, Griffiths' play is based on a factual incident whose representation contradicts some of its factual circumstances. In contrast, while Wallace constructed a fictional situation, her play included several references to factual aspects of the 1991 War. Although *In the Heart of America* focuses more on the responsibility of Saddam for the war, both plays mainly blame the US for the excessive use of power against unequal enemies by referring to

historical events, whose geopolitical circumstances are different from the First Gulf War, on which both plays comment.

Within both plays dramatic characters utilise discriminatory slurs, which reflect Western feelings of superiority not only aimed at other cultures, but also directed at their compatriots, especially minorities. In order to highlight the uniqueness of Arabic characters in the two plays, the playwrights have them speak a few scattered Arabic phrases. Although the gist of these few lines is supposed to be easily understood by the audience, especially with the aid of characters' gestures, I argue that these occasional moments function as Brechtian techniques meant to activate spectators' critical thinking by interrupting the familiarity of English discourse.

Wallace and Griffiths maintained their interest in commenting on the conflict in Iraq in the early decades of the 2000s, when Iraq was mentioned by Western media for two reasons: the consequences of the economic sanctions and Saddam's challenging of the work of the IAEA. Wallace's monodrama *The Retreating World* was written in 2000 and premiered at the Cambridge New Writing Festival in July 2002, while Griffiths' *Camel Station* was written in 2001 for The Artists Network of Refuse and Resist in New York, as part of an evening of staged readings under the collective title: *Imagine: Iraq*. Each play focuses on the suffering of an individual Iraqi after the 1991 War. While Wallace's play refers to a factual incident, the fictional plot portrays the disastrous effect of the economic sanctions on an Iraqi youngman. The imaginary plot of Griffiths' play, which was inspired by a joke about Saddam, blames the US for the death of an Iraqi child.

b. Portraying the protector as an aggressor: *Camel Station* contradicts facts

In Griffiths' play, Tarek is a thirteen-year old shepherd, who lives in 'a Northern No-Fly Zone, Iraq' (Griffiths 2007, 261). As these stage directions suggest, Tarek is Kurdish. Put differently, the boy belongs to the Iraqi ethnic minority, whose members were victims of Saddam's brutality on different occasions. In this respect, enforcing this No-Fly Zone in Iraqi Kurdistan was an American-led international measure to protect the Kurds from Saddam's attacks. Paradoxically, in Griffiths' play the Kurdish boy becomes a victim of a needless American military action. However, not only is this paradox concealed from

the audience of the play, which does not read Griffiths' stage directions, but the finale of *Camel Station* itself misses the connotation of the dramatic place of the action.¹¹⁹

Tarek regularly moves his eyes between watching wolves and reconnaissance drones. Meanwhile, he is busy with his writing pad, revising a story he is writing in order to attend the 'Hakawati School'.¹²⁰ In the largest part of the play, we listen to his story while he tells it to his female cousin Suriya, a sixteen-year old. The story is originally a joke about Saddam, which was extended by Griffiths to become a short story.¹²¹

Griffiths adds some mythological aspects to the joke, which are derived from traditional Arabic literature such as *The Arabian Nights*. Suddenly, just as Tarek finishes his story, the plane returns and shoots him. On one hand, Tarek is portrayed as bright and peaceful which are the same qualities hoped for in the future of Iraq after decades of dictatorship, which specifically harmed the boy's ethnic minority. Therefore, his death can be seen, in a more figurative way, as a symbol of the gap between declared goals of American policies and the disastrous consequences of their military and political interventions in Iraq.

On the other hand, spectators who link Tarek's single comment that the plane has 'no pilot' (Griffiths 2007, 261), and the factual circumstances of the Northern No-Fly Zone, will see his death as an unintentional fallout from the noble mission of protecting the Kurds from Saddam. Nevertheless, even these spectators are more likely to be baffled by Tarek's speech while he is dying:

Tarek: (*His voice strangely altered, as if disembodied*) [...] With these acts you demand your own destruction, we have no choice but to oblige. [...] Call it not revenge but justice. We will chase you down the days until you are no longer. [...] (*He draws the Yankees cap from his tunic*). (Griffiths 2007, 265–6)

It seems that Tarek has already turned into a ghost, which not only justifies the mature tone of his final words, but also gives his character a shadow of transcendental existence.

¹¹⁹ For more information about Saddam's 1991 attacks on the Kurds and the enforcement of a no-fly zone in Northern Iraq, see Shareef (148–52).

¹²⁰ Hakawati School literally means the school of the storyteller, where, as the play suggests, children are supposed to learn the art of telling stories.

¹²¹ While Saddam was travelling in the desert his camel collapsed. While he was desperate and thinking of his death Saddam suddenly saw a camel station. When the camel was brought to the station, the Camel-Mechanic strongly hit the camel's testicles with two stones. Crying from pain, the camel flies in the air before running away. Blaming the Camel-Mechanic Saddam agitatedly wonders: 'how can I catch him now?'. The Camel-Mechanic replied: 'The same way he went'.

Therefore, instead of pledging that he will take ‘revenge’ for his own death, he insists on seeking unlimited ‘justice’. The pronoun ‘we’ moves the individual story into a broader societal context, whether his words mean that the retaliation for the American violence will be undertaken by the live Iraqi people or by the ghosts of dead victims. In this sense, Tarek’s death in the play can be seen as a representation of a large number of similar cases not only during the years of sanctions, but also in the more recent ongoing occupation.

I am aware that it is polemic to suggest how the audience, especially British and American spectators might receive a play. However, I argue that, without the awareness of Tarek’s identity as a Kurdish Iraqi, who is supposed to be protected by the drone that killed him, the *Camel Station*’s comment on the conflict might be distracted from factual aspects of the post-1991 Iraq. I support my claim by Michael Billington’s review of the British premiere of the play.¹²² Without any reference to Tarek’s ethnicity, Billington argues: ‘The final dream-image of the boy brandishing a rifle and crying "No more Yankees, no more stories" carries its own powerful prophetic charge’ (Billington *To the Mountain*, web). Describing Griffiths’ 2001 play as ‘prophetic’, suggests that the performance in 2006 is more likely meant by its director to be perceived as a comment on Iraq post-2003.

c. Is it a crime to punish Iraqis for Saddam’s crimes?

Ali, the Iraqi young man in *The Retreating World*, is forced because of the sanctions to sell his entire collection of books, including his favourites, Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, and Hemingway’s *The Sun also Rises*, to continue his habit of tending pigeons. Then, he sells his pigeons as well in order to survive. As with Dr. Aziz in *The Gulf between US*; and Remzi and Fairouz in *In the Heart of America*, Ali is secular. He tells the audience ‘My father, he loved movies and so my mother named my sister Greta, after Garbo. We were secular, our family’ (Wallace, 2003, 38).¹²³

Moreover, Ali explains how much he hated Saddam, and still hates him. However, he had no choice but to fight against the coalition in the First Gulf War, where he lost his close friend Samir. Here, the mutual responsibility of both the US and the Iraqi dictator is suggested by Wallace. Ali remembers:

¹²² Along with Griffiths’ *Thermidor* and *Apricots*, *Camel Station* was performed under the collective title *To the Mountain* in April 2006 at the Studio Theatre in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

¹²³ Because Saddam belongs to the minor religious sect, he encouraged some aspects of secularity except for any gesture of individuality that may contradict his socialist dictatorial regime. For more information, see Hechter (69).

And then we walked towards the American unit to surrender, our arms raised beside seven hundred other men. [...] As we walked towards them—this is documented—the commander of the U.S. unit fired, at one man, an anti-tank missile. A missile meant to pierce armor. At one man. [...] I remember. I could not. I could not recognize. My friend Samir. A piece of his spine stuck upright in the sand. (Wallace, 2003, 40)

Although the bulk of Ali's speech is dedicated to revealing his agony during the time of the comprehensive economic sanctions, Wallace insists on linking his individual situation with the previous war. And Samir's death is part of a factual event as Ali asserts: 'European Parliament, 1991. Members of the committee recorded the testimony, drinking cups of cold coffee: the defeated troops were surrendering. We, a nation of "unpeople," were surrendering' (Wallace, 2003, 40). Like his close friend, Samir did not support Saddam, but had to fight in the war to be killed while he was surrounded.

Wallace's play revisits the war by utilising this documented incident about the mistaken death of Iraqi soldiers in order to deepen the misery of Ali, the imaginary character of the play. In addition, weaving this factual disaster with the fictional realm of the play enables Wallace to insist on the continuity of the suffering of Iraqi people. In addition this fact-based story increases the emotional effect on the audience by highlighting Ali's solitude after years of losing all who/what used to shape his world.

Ali, at the very end of the play, asks spectators to catch the bones of his dead pigeons to keep them safe: '*He roughly throws the contents of the bucket at the audience. Instead of bones, into the air and across the audience, spill hundreds of white feathers*' (Wallace 2003, 40). While this finale literally suggests that the content of the bucket is just the remains of Ali's dead pigeons, the audience are also invited to conceive them figuratively as a symbol of innocent Iraqis, including Samir, the victims of an inescapable punishment for their dictator's mistakes. In both cases, it seems that *The Retreating World* intends to raise the awareness of the audience; by comparing their own shock at a potential mess of feathers with the death of Ali's friend by 'a missile meant to pierce armor', viewers may realise the mighty gap between their secure life and the struggle of Iraqi people. When I watched the play at the Exeter Northcott in February 2010, I cowardly avoided sitting in the potential range of the feathers, and I still regret doing that, especially because it turned out that the bucket was empty.

Similar to Tarek in *Camel Station*, Ali denounces the Iraqi dictator. However, Wallace's play does not mention Saddam's manoeuvres to evade the inspection of the IAEA, and his regime's misuse of the Oil-For-Food-Programme. Ignoring the mighty role of Saddam's elusive policies in toughening the effect of the economic sanctions turns *The Retreating World* into a critique of the international community in general and the US in particular, especially with Ali's referral to the killing of unarmed soldiers. I suggest that Western media coverage of Iraq through the 1990s had drawn Saddam's image as an anti-international law dictator. Relying on such established and well-known attributes, most British and American playwrights, including Wallace, occasionally refer to Saddam. In contrast, these playwrights focus on the harm caused by American-led political and military activities. In other words, I argue that what really concerns British and American dramatists is exposing the way in which their political leaders and media contradict Western values and humanitarian principles. Playwrights' critique of their own countries might explain why these plays neglect the international support for the 1991 War as a response to the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait.

The Gulf between American and British theatres: same wars, different responses

It is remarkable that Wallace's two plays were premiered in the UK. When Scott Cummings claims that: '[t]he American theatre was slower and more ambivalent in its embrace of Wallace's heightened, sensual, and frank political work' (Cummings 4), it seems important to ask if American theatre was reluctant to produce political theatre in general and plays that criticise the First Gulf War and its aftermath in particular? The answer can be found in the tepid reaction of both American spectators and critics towards *States of Shock*. Frank Rich argues that Shepard's play is 'written with the earnest—one might even say quaint—conviction that the stage is still an effective platform for political dissent and mobilizing public opinion' (Rich c1). It is hard to define whether Rich's doubts about the ability of political theatre to make social changes are merely based on the dominance of apolitical postmodern drama in the late 1980s, or if the critic also expresses his opposition to the critique of the war.

In either case, Rich's negative opinion of *States of Shock* represents the vast majority of critical responses to the debut of *States of Shock*. In his comment on Rich's harsh critique of Shepard's play, Professor David DeRose argues:

I am not suggesting that *States of Shock* is a great play, or even a particularly good play. But [...] Shepard was one of the few members of the American theater community to take a stance on the Persian Gulf war [sic]. His reward was to be treated with absolutely no comprehension by the New York press. (DeRose 122)

I link DeRose's avoidance of giving a verdict about the play's dramatic quality with Colleran's claim that the play's 'brevity and savage images, even its lack of depth, are the marks of a work written in a passionate hurry in order to make a passionate point' (Colleran 2012, 44–5). Moreover, in his review of the British debut of *States of Shock* in June 1993 at the Salisbury Playhouse, Irving Wardle claims that 'there is no hiding the falseness of the ending' (Wardle, web).¹²⁴

Did the anti-war message of *States of Shock* not appeal to the majority of the American public in 1991? It is possible, but hard to prove. However, I argue that the play was shocking because not only does Shepard remind its audience of the Vietnamese War, but Stubbs in *States of Shock* represents an American veteran with physical and psychological wounds, which might identify him with many characters portrayed by a large number of the literary works about the Vietnam War. Put differently, Shepard's play indirectly accuses its audience of supporting a new Vietnam.¹²⁵

I have mentioned Shepard's play more for the purpose of suggesting a reason for Wallace's plays being premiered in the UK. Although I am not going to analyse *States of Shock*, I will selectively highlight the way in which Stubbs's behaviour is conceived by other characters, which extends the scope of Shepard's political opposition of the war to include social critique of America in the 1990s. Sitting in his wheelchair at a café, Stubbs blows a whistle hanging around his neck, and starts to describe how he conceded his serious injury. Addressing the White couple, who keep staring at him without any sign of sympathy, Stubbs recalls: 'When I was hit— It went straight through me. Out the other side. [...] When I was hit—I never saw it coming. I never heard a sound. The sky went white' (Shepard 9). Obsessed with getting a meal, the couple is distracted from the young veteran's speech by nagging about the poor service. Colleran claims that 'the juxtaposition of war's victims and voyeurs implicates the audience as well as the on-stage diners and

¹²⁴ For more examples of the harsh, and sometimes scornful, reception of the play by several critics, see Willadt (147-8).

¹²⁵ Polls of American public opinion on the 1991 War can be found in Gallup, Jr. (13), and Clymer (A 12). Examples of stereotyped disabled and psychopathic Vietnam veterans within American literature are mentioned in Boyle (2009, 100–43), and Wittmann.

makes explicit connections between consumerism, nationalism, and political isolationism (Colleran 2012, 45). The most significant point of Colleran's observation is her suggestion of identification between the couple and the real spectators of Shepard's play, as both are witnessing the victim of a war, supported by the vast majority of the American public.

Moreover, moving his attention to Glory Bee, the waitress, Stubbs tells her about his injury while he is holding his shirt up to expose a huge scar. Glory Bee is too busy to care about Stubbs's wounds or words. She ignores him by seeking more food orders (Shepard 10–11). Later, Glory Bee declares: 'I worshipped the menu. To me it held a life. An unthreatened life. Better than the Bible' (Shepard 41). Both the working-class waitress and the bourgeois white couple are driven by self-centred, materialistic motives.

I am focusing on these extracted lines in order to highlight two aspects of *States of Shock*, both of which are represented in several plays about Iraq and Afghanistan after 2001. Firstly, the anti-war message is contextualised, or even overshadowed by fierce criticism of the playwright's own society and culture. Johan Callens argues that 'the play enacts a cultural critique which far exceeds its immediate circumstances' (Callens, 291). Secondly, the play bitterly portrays soldiers' disappointment at the public lack of appreciation for the former's sacrifices.

In contrast to the few plays about the First Gulf War and its consequences, the 2003 invasion of Iraq and its aftermath have prompted a large number of British and American playwrights to respond. Before exploring the following group of plays, which includes examples of the noticeable trend of contemporary political theatre on both sides of the Atlantic, it is important to mention two general observations. Firstly, the number of British plays that comment on the war is larger than that of American plays. In May 2005, Zinoman argued that 'Americans may be doing the lion's share of the fighting in the Iraq war, but the British are shouldering the responsibility for writing plays about it' (Zinoman E10). In addition to the American motto of 'Supporting our soldiers', such a phenomenon can be explained by the fact that most American people were convinced that the War on Iraq was part of the War on Terror because of the allegations about concealed connections between Saddam's regime and al-Qaeda. In contrast, the reasons for the war have been doubted by a large sector of the British public.

My second observation is that a remarkable increase in the inclusion of documentary material is evident within the topical plays of both British and American playwrights. However, while the vast majority of British plays adopt the forms of tribunal

theatre and Verbatim plays, most American playwrights respond to the conflict by imaginary plots, usually in dreamlike plays. The latter does not incorporate documentary material directly but draws from aspects of the war nevertheless.

a. Fake warning of a potential danger: *Justifying War*

Iraq's ability to attack by using WMDs, which was the main reason for the invasion of Iraq, was represented by *Justifying War: Scenes from the Hutton Inquiry*. Edited by Richard Norton-Taylor, and premiered at The Tricycle Theatre in October 2003, *Justifying War* is one of the most controversial examples of British tribunal theatre. The play traces part of 'Lord Hutton's Inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the death of Dr David Kelly' (Norton-Taylor 2003, 7). Dr Kelly's controversial comments on the British Government's dossier raised crucial doubts about Saddam's ability to activate alleged Iraqi chemical weapons in forty-five minutes.¹²⁶

According to Andrew Gilligan, Dr Kelly implied to him that the dossier 'was transformed [by Alastair Campbell] in the week before it was published, to make it sexier' (Norton-Taylor 2003, 12). Susan Watts, who did not tell Dr Kelly that she was taping their conversation, argues that the latter told her that he did not say that it was Campbell who made the claim that Iraqi WMDs could be activated in 45 minutes (Norton-Taylor 2003, 27).¹²⁷ Apart from the person(s) who 'exaggerated' the threat of Saddam, and whether this exaggeration was based on honest concerns or it was an intentional attempt to deceive the British public, Dr Kelly, according to his widow's statement, was turned into a target of 'a kind of continuation of a kind of reprimand into the public domain' (Norton-Taylor 2003, 89). As Mrs Kelly declares, after a 'very grim' and 'extremely tense' period, within which her husband appeared before the Foreign Affairs Committee, she was informed that he was found dead near their house (Norton-Taylor 2003, 86–94).¹²⁸

In the published text of his tribunal play, Norton-Taylor adheres to such a high degree of objectivity that he puts his few intervening lines into square brackets to

¹²⁶ Published on 24 September 2002, the dossier's title is *Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction*.

¹²⁷ As they describe themselves at the time of the inquiry, Gilligan was a correspondent of Radio 4, Watts was a BBC reporter, and Campbell was the Prime Minister's Director of Communications and Strategy.

¹²⁸ Although the circumstances of Dr Kelly's death indicate that it was a suicide wherein he utilised his knife along with his wife's medicine, most journalistic speculations have doubted this official story claiming that Dr Kelly was murdered. For more information about these polemic allegations, see Dodd, Goslett, and Glover. In Baker (2007), a detailed reading of the circumstances of Dr Kelly's death is contextualised, and sometimes driven, by a systematic and harsh critique of the Labour Party.

distinguish them from the citations from documented testimonies. However, by considering that Norton-Taylor deliberately foregrounds the phrase '*Justifying War*' in the play's title, it seems that the British political manoeuvres that preceded the invasion of Iraq are turned from being a background concerning the matter of Dr Kelly to acting as the main topic of the play. In addition to choosing the parts of the Inquiry that highlight the feeble reasons for the war, Norton-Taylor employed the title of his play as an indicator of the play's focus on the Iraqi matter.

Norton-Taylor's most striking intervention is underlining the factual testimony of Dr Kelly's wife by making it the finale. Jenny Hughes argues that 'in valorising the final testimony of Mrs Kelly, the play frames the war as an individual tragedy and further narrows the terms of reference of the original Inquiry as well as constructs a debilitating and gendered personification of victimhood' (Hughes 2011, 99). I partly disagree with Hughes because Janice Kelly's testimony is intrinsically emotional, which means that changing its location may increase, but not invent its effect on the audience. In addition, and most importantly, the first line of Lord Hutton affirms: 'This Inquiry relates to a very tragic death' (Norton-Taylor 2003, 9). In other words, the Inquiry is neither about 'the war' nor the misconduct in the British political world and press, although both are investigated as by-products of tracing the reasons for Dr Kelly's 'tragic death'.

Highlighting Mrs Kelly's painful loss of her husband suggests that perhaps they are the first victims of the invasion. Megson explains: 'Norton-Taylor's editorial decision to alter the chronology of the Hutton inquiry by relocating, to the end of the play, Janice Kelly's heartbreaking testimony about her husband's suicide, placed the emphasis on the human cost of the whole WMD debacle' (Megson 2005, 370). I argue that, as long as any 'editorial decision' does not change the content of the original testimonies, the editor of a tribunal play can utilise his journalistic skills to encourage spectators to adopt a specific point of view.

In the footsteps of the original Inquiry, the play doubts the British Government's claim about the instant danger of Iraqi WMDs. In addition, *Justifying War* scorns Blair's plagiarisation from a PhD thesis in order to claim Saddam's link with al-Qaeda. Gilligan argues that 'Marishi [Ibrahim al-Marashi] wrote the Iraqi Mukhabarat [Iraqi Intelligence Service] had a role in aiding opposition groups in hostile regimes, and that was changed in the February dossier to supporting terrorist organisations in hostile regimes, which is quite a substantial change' (Norton-Taylor 2003, 17). Nevertheless, and apart from highlighting

British manoeuvres to justify the invasion, I argue that *Justifying War* does not deny, or affirm, the possibility of Iraq's obtaining of WMDs or of having connections with al-Qaeda.

Regardless of the debate about the time needed for preparing these weapons for attack, references to Iraq's potential acquiring of biological and chemical weapons are made by journalists, politicians, and allegedly Dr Kelly himself. Even the claim of the forty-five minutes seems to be based on Dr Kelly's speculation. Watts argues:

He [Dr Kelly] said that he was – he made clear that he, in his word, was guessing; but he said that in 1991 the Iraqis were, and I quote, 'playing around with multibarrel launches and that these take 45 minutes to fill'. So that was his best guess, if you like, as to where that figure had come from. (Norton-Taylor 2003, 26)

By mentioning the year 1991, Watts' statement indirectly recalls the international coalition against Saddam, which indirectly highlights the Iraqi regime's aggression against Kuwait. In addition, the incident mentioned by Dr Kelly may suggest that Saddam was preparing to use WMDs against the Kurds, as he did in the late 1980s, which urged the international community to impose a No-Fly Zone in Northern Iraq. In either case, the aggressive history of the Iraqi regime is implied.

Finally, and most significantly, when *Justifying War* was performed, a few months after the invasion, the audience had no factual evidence that decisively proved or rebutted the allegations that Saddam was able to utilise WMDs. Furthermore, with the consideration that ending the suffering of Iraqi people from their dictatorial regime was one of the declared reasons for the Anglo-American intervention in Iraq, the play does not, actually cannot, claim that the invasion was unjustified altogether.

b. Initial failure in Iraq: a prophecy of a new Vietnam?

Going further in extending the investigation of the declared reasons for the war beyond the claims about Iraqi WMDs, Hare's *Stuff Happens* focuses on the factual situation in Iraq immediately after the invasion as evidence of more disasters to come. Written in 2004 and performed in September of the same year at the National Theatre in London, Hare's Verbatim play combines his invented dialogue with parts of factual documented speeches. He explains: 'Scenes of direct address quote people verbatim. When the doors

close on the world's leaders and on their entourages, then I have used my imagination' (Hare 2006, n.pag.). As with the introductory stage directions of *Camel Station*, spectators who do not read Hare's note might assume every dialogue amongst the officials is a precise record of a factual meeting, while these spectators consider the five testimonies uttered by ordinary characters as though they are invented speeches by Hare.

I base my claim on the way in which Hare introduces all the characters of the British and American officials by a group of actors, who function as narrators without intervention in the play's action, as the overlapping speeches in the following quotation suggests:

Powell: In Vietnam I learned a certain attitude, a certain distrust ...

An Actor: Major Colin Powell is pulled out of Vietnam six years earlier. By his own description, a serving soldier, schooled in obedience ...

Powell: the army is the most democratic institution in America.

An Actor: November 1968: Powell is in a helicopter which falls to the ground, in his words, 'like an elevator with a snapped cable'. (Hare 2006, 4)

In his first appearance on stage, the play introduces the Secretary of State in Bush's administration as a Vietnam veteran, which will be an essential aspect of Powell's initial opposition of the invasion in the following scenes. In addition, both Powell and the Actor/narrator address the audience in a report-like language describing a factual incident during Powell's service in Vietnam, for which he was rewarded a medal by the army.¹²⁹

Similarly, Hare utilises these actors to introduce most of the officials' meetings with precise factual information. For instance, at the end of the sixth scene, an actor introduces the next dialogue by explaining: 'September 15th, the President assembles his war cabinet for a weekend at Camp David' (Hare 2006, 17-18). Therefore, I argue that without reading Hare's statement in the published text of the play, spectators are more likely to consider the dialogue in the seventh scene as factual as both actors and characters within the introductory scenes. In contrast, there is no actor's introduction to any of the five monologues, which are respectively stated by the following characters: an Angry Journalist, a New Labour Politician, a Palestinian Academic, a Brit in New York, and an Iraqi Exile.

¹²⁹ For more details about this incident, see Harari (5), Mihalkanin (408), and Hook (8).

Despite this matter of reception, Hare's play establishes its critique of the war by drawing his audience's attention to the link between his play and the factual situation in Iraq. In the first scene, one of the narrators addresses spectators: 'Stuff. Happens. The response of Donald Rumsfeld, when asked to comment on the widespread looting and pillage that followed the American conquest of Baghdad-Friday, April 11th 2003' (Hare 2006, 3). To highlight his critique of this controversial statement, Hare depicts the press conference in which the character of Rumsfeld pronounces it. Moreover, in the play's last scene, the Iraqi Exile declares 'Donald Rumsfeld said, "Stuff happens." It seemed to me the most racist remark I had ever heard' (Hare 2006, 119). As these two scenes suggest that the invasion is an American mistake, Hare's play utilises this disorderly state of Iraq as a frame, within which much of the narrative of *Stuff Happens* represents the political manoeuvres of both American and British leaders in inventing an excuse for waging the war.

In addition to suggesting that the chaos in Iraq is a result of an unjustified invasion, Hare utilises the imaginary dialogues to portray the docility of Blair towards American politics, especially compared to the French and Russian politicians' opposition to the invasion. Moreover, the play stresses the gap between Bush's aggressive standpoint and Powell's reluctance to lose European countries' support for the soon-to-occur invasion of Iraq. Powell's experience in the Vietnam War gives his opposition to the military option more credibility than his colleagues' reasons for opposing military intervention. For example, the Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz is introduced only to cite weak reasoning:

An Actor: [A] Yale professor, Paul Wolfowitz, spends the nineteen seventies chewing the implications of the involvement in Vietnam which he describes as:
 Wolfowitz: An [']over-expenditure of American power[?]. (Hare 2006, 7)

As with Powell's remark, Wolfowitz's negative description of the Vietnam War has become a famous quote.¹³⁰

Later in the play, Hare modifies this factual speech and weaves it with his imaginary dialogue, when Wolfowitz induces his colleagues to attack Iraq by claiming:

¹³⁰ Wolfowitz's quote is cited in Solomon (12) and Mann (53).

‘This is something we can do with very little effort. For a minimum expenditure of effort, we can get maximum result. Take out Saddam and we blow fresh air into the Middle East’ (Hare 2006, 20). In addition to highlighting the discrepant standpoints of Powell and Wolfowitz, the play’s comparison between the two wars contradicts Wolfowitz’s positive prediction for the American-led military intervention to achieve ‘maximum’ success by ‘minimum’ exertion. Basing its prediction on the early factual consequences of the invasion, the play suggests, especially in its first and last scenes, that the war in Iraq could be as disastrous as that in Vietnam. Since 2004, when the play was written, Bush’s administration has been blamed for a tremendous loss of soldiers, civilians and credibility.

Factual statements are utilised by Hare as if they are indirectly debating his play’s comment on the invasion as unjustified, disastrous war. However, it is important to realise that, although these speeches are supposed to be part of factual statements, Verbatim theatre does not follow the strict form of tribunal plays regarding the adherence to the precision of the documentary material. Moreover, Hare does not deny that he intervenes in factual statements. Commenting on such, Deirdre Heddon claims that ‘Hare’s formulation might more accurately be phrased as “voicing the voiceless,” since talking out is replaced in this act of ventriloquism by talking for or talking about’ (Heddon 116). Put differently, nothing could guarantee that Hare has not added to or excised from what his interviewees actually said.

The significance of this observation is that although the opinions included in each statement do not necessarily coincide with Hare’s own point of view on the invasion, these testimonies reflect the ways in which the playwright represents these interviewees as dramatic characters. For instance, the only voice given a chance to defend the war in the play is that of the Journalist. Although the latter can be seen as an individual, regardless of his profession, the character is also able to be read on the grounds of Hare’s hyperbolic claim about the bias of most Western media. The Journalist argues:

A country groaning under a dictator, its people oppressed, liberated at last from a twenty-five year tyranny- and freed. [...] How obscene it is, how decadent, to give your attention not to the now, not to the liberation, not to the people freed, but to the relentless archaic discussion of the *manner* [sic] of the liberation. Was it lawful? Was it not? (Hare 2006, 14)

As this statement suggests, despite the debate about the legitimacy of the war, the invasion should be supported because it liberated the Iraqis from Saddam's brutality. Remarkably, the first sentence nearly repeats Blair's phrase: 'Iraqi people groaning under years of dictatorship', which the Prime Minister used during his speech to the House of Commons on 18 March 2003.¹³¹

In contrast to the Journalist, the Iraqi Exile refers to the Iraqis' continued struggle even after the toppled dictator. The expat argues:

And now the American dead are counted, their numbers recorded, their coffins draped in flags. How many Iraqis have died? How many civilians? No figure is given. Our dead are uncounted. We opposed Saddam Hussein, many of us, because he harmed people, and anybody who harms innocent Iraqis I feel equally passionately and strongly about, and I will oppose them. And I will. (Hare 2006, 119–120)

Firstly, this speech exaggeratedly imposes a kind of equivalence between the American-led coalition and Saddam, where the latter's brutal dictatorship is allegedly replaced by the former's harm to civilians. Secondly, when the Iraqi Exile mentions the lack of information about the Iraqi casualties, he stresses a significant reason for the critique of the media coverage of the war. The most important point of this statement is that the Iraqi Exile does not express his opposition of the war. As a victim of Saddam's dictatorship, he might even be supportive of the invasion. Nevertheless, he is angry because of its aftermath.

Further opposition to the Journalist's argument can be found in the monologue of the Palestinian Academic, who is against the invasion. She wonders: 'Why was the only war in history ever to be based purely on intelligence – and doubtful intelligence at that – launched against a man who was ten years past his peak of belligerence?' (Hare 2006, 57). It is hard to decide whether this question conceals the Palestinian Academic's undeclared support for Saddam, or whether the Palestinian intellectual attempts to urge Hare's spectators to realise that Saddam should have been punished several years before, when he was continually perpetrating his big crimes against Iran, Kuwait, and his own people, especially the Kurds.

¹³¹Blair's phrase is cited in McGoldrick (303), Van Dijk (228), and Bayley (91).

The harshest critique of the War in Iraq comes from a Brit in New York, who goes further in criticising the US. Recalling his conversation with an American woman, who considered the invasion of Iraq revenge for 9/11, the British man argues:

I was in Saks Fifth Avenue the morning they bombed Baghdad. 'Isn't it wonderful?' says the saleswoman. 'At last we're hitting back.' 'Yes,' I reply. 'At the wrong people. Somebody steals your handbag, so you kill their second cousin, on the grounds they live close. Explain to me,' I say 'Saudi Arabia is financing Al Qaeda. Iran, Lebanon and Syria are known to shelter terrorists. North Korea is developing a nuclear weapons programme. All these you leave alone. (Hare 2006, 92)

The Brit exaggerates by suggesting that the US ignores the dangers of supporting Hamas and Hezbollah by Iran and Syria. The claim that 'Saudi Arabia is financing Al Qaeda' is very controversial. On one hand, it seems to conflate the possible support of many non-governmental organisations, whose members sympathise with the militant group and the Saudi regime which is one of the closest allies of the US. When the Saudi Kingdom openly supported Bin Laden, it was part of the American indirect confrontation with the Russians in Afghanistan, before the leader of al Qaeda antagonised his King. On the other hand, the complicated relationship between the strongly radical Wahhabists and the Saudi regime suggests that the latter may reluctantly overlook secret funds sent, or arranged, by the former to members of al Qaeda.¹³²

It is obvious that most factual testimonies within the play, which are selected and perhaps modified by Hare, criticise both the invasion and its declared reasons. However, despite Hare's opinion on the war, the most significant aspect of these testimonies is that they seem to echo contradictory readings of the invasion offered by a large number of public commentators, politicians, writers, and all sorts of media around the world. For instance, part of the critique of the saleswoman's standpoint within the statement of the Brit in New York can be read on the grounds of Roy's comment on the invasion, within which the French scholar argues: 'The American Leadership's resolve to invade Iraq was only hardened by 9/11. Instead of responding appropriately to the attack, it took advantage of the

¹³² For more information about the Saudi regime's relationships with radical Islamists in general and terrorist organisations in particular, see Gray (2014, 115–44), and Litwak (307–8).

American public's thirst for vengeance to impose its original objective: the overthrow of Saddam Hussein' (Roy 2008, 13–4).¹³³

The Palestinian Academic wonders: 'Why Iraq? The question has been asked a thousand times. And a thousand answers have been given. Why Iraq? Why now?' (Hare 2006, 57). As with all factual statements in *Stuff Happens*, these questions directly address spectators. Whether they have already shaped their opinions, or they come to the theatre with the same questions, the members of the audience are more likely engage in an unspoken debate with the answers expressed by the Palestinian Academic, when she proceeds:

Here comes the familiar list of explanations. Because an Arab democracy would serve as a model. Because it was unfinished business – 'He tried to kill my dad.' Because Osama bin Laden had served notice on the dictatorship in Saudi Arabia, and now America needed a new military base. Because Cheney worked for Halliburton. 'It was all about Oil!' (Hare 2006, 57)

As far as *Stuff Happens* reveals, it is hard to know whether Hare adopts one or none of these answers. Even throughout Hare's invented politicians' conversation behind closed doors, there is no reference to any concealed motive for the war. Was it too early or too difficult in 2004 to affirm that there is no evidence that Saddam was able to attack with WMDs? Perhaps, and it is also possible that Hare leaves it to the audience to decide, or to be baffled by these various speculations.

I argue that *Stuff Happens* illustrates its opposition to the war in two ways. Firstly, the chaos in Iraq is represented in the first and last scenes. Secondly, the fictional scenes of the politicians, within which the British government dishonestly attempts to justify the invasion, while all members of the American administration, except for Powell, have decided to invade Iraq regardless of any international opposition. Put differently, the 2003 War in Iraq will always be an unjustified aggression, despite its declared or allegedly hidden reasons. The same message is in the core of *The Vertical Hour*, within which Hare uses imaginary dialogue, characters, and plot to affirm his continuous opposition of the war.

¹³³ The removal of Saddam was advocated by several American politicians and intellectuals in 1998. For more information, see Meyer (169), Albanese (72), and Ohaegbulam (114).

Excessive political discourse within an imaginary plot

Unlike *Stuff Happens*, the comment on the invasion of Iraq in *The Vertical Hour* is merged with other themes. The play was premiered on Broadway at the Music Box Theatre in 2006. Later, in January 2008 it was staged in Britain at the Royal Court Theatre. The matter of Iraq is raised through political discussions between Nadia, an American professor of international relations and Oliver, the father of her English boyfriend, Philip. Nadia supports the American-led intervention in Iraq regardless of its controversial circumstances and against any public opposition of the war on the two sides of the Atlantic:

NADIA: I've taken a huge amount of flak. [...] In liberal Connecticut defending the war has not been a popular position.
OLIVER: It's not been big in Shropshire either. (Hare 2008, 35)

On one hand, this short dialogue might suggest that the opposition to the war in both Britain and the US are identical, which is imprecise. On the other hand, putting the word 'liberal' in such a negative context contradicts Nadia's intellectuality. Does she mock the anti-war public for their naïve understanding of liberalism? Most probably, as Hare's stage directions indicate that she is '*formal*' (Hare 2008, 34), Nadia's mention of her experience of being criticised for her support for the war is a sign sent to Oliver of her readiness to defend her opinion against his critique of the invasion of Iraq.

In their debate, Nadia starts by recalling her previous work as a war correspondent in the Balkans, wherein, according to her, the delayed Western intervention led to appalling consequences for hundreds of thousands of European victims. She argues: 'I've always supported human intervention in countries where terrible things are happening' (Hare 2008, 35). Then Nadia applies her belief to the War in Iraq. She proceeds, 'If you want me to pass my evening defending the right of Western countries to use their muscle to free Arabs from systematic murder, believe me, I'm up for it' (Hare 2008, 35). Not only does Nadia justify the invasion of Iraq, but she also considers the intervention to deter Saddam's brutality against his people as the duty of Western countries. Similar to *Stuff Happens*, rescuing the Iraqis from their tyrant is the main excuse for the war mentioned by the pro-war character.

In contrast to Nadia, Oliver expresses his opposition to the invasion. As a physician, he explains to Dina: 'Let's just say, I knew who the surgeon was going to be, so I had fair idea what the operation would look like' (Hare 2008, 35). Put differently, although he does not contradict Nadia's argument about the brutality of the Iraqi dictator, Oliver seems to

doubt both the intention and the ability of the American-led coalition to enhance the situation of the Iraqi people. The discrepant standpoints of Oliver and Nadia are represented when he uses the word 'invasion' and she insists on calling it 'liberation' (Hare 2008, 30).

Despite their disagreement, Nadia becomes deeply stunned by Oliver's persuasive and seductive personality. She returns to the United States with both her political beliefs and emotions profoundly shaken. Then she moves to a kind of self-awareness; she no longer loves her boyfriend and she does not believe in the rightness of the invasion any more. Eventually, she decides to work as a war correspondent again, but this time in Iraq. The play neither suggests that everyone has to go to Iraq in order to understand everything about the war nor that this kind of thorough understanding is possible. However, what *The Vertical Hour* seems to claim is that an academic standpoint, even when it is backed by an empirical experience, might lack depth.

In what seems to be an allusion, which Hare's play draws between Nadia's private life and her political opinions, she tells Oliver about her initial feelings towards his son in a regretful tone. Nadia declares: 'You're not supposed to like men's looks, are you? Aren't looks meant to be a sign of shallowness? They say. 'He was good-looking, in a shallow sort of way.' They never say, 'He was good-looking and it was profound.' They never say that' (Hare 2008, 81). Does Nadia realise that what she thought as 'good-looking' reasons for the war in Iraq are 'shallow'? Or, despite the 'profound' reasons, the 'shallowness' was her suggesting a resemblance between the Yugoslavian victims of the Serbs and the Iraqi victims of Saddam's regime? When Nadia realises that neither her academic expertise nor her previous practical experience is enough to understand the conflict insightfully, the play indirectly suggests that some aspects of the war are too controversial to be comprehensively understood; though this might be a reasonable claim, I find it hard to believe that Nadia, whose writing about Iraq prompted an invite to the White House to advise Bush, needed to meet Oliver in order to have such a revelation.

Although the form of discussion enables Hare to display contradictory points of view, the play sometimes loses its dramatic vitality because the political discourse seems to burden the narrative with characters' lives. Therefore, it is understandable why Charles Spencer, who watched the British performance, argues that '*The Vertical Hour*, which often feels like a finger-wagging lecture, does the cause of serious drama few favours [...] It may be called *The Vertical Hour* but it is likely to leave many in the audience prone with boredom' (Spencer 2008, web). Moreover, characters engage in several debates about the

meaning of abstract notions such as capitalism, politics, modernity and patriotism. Writing about the American debut of the play, Billington observes: 'Hare's play, whatever its flaws, is about big ideas. Not just the tragic mess of Iraq. It also deals with the lawlessness of elected politicians, Anglo-American cultural differences, the dangers of denial, the futility of isolating politics from private life' (Billington 'A five-course meal' web). I mention these negative reviews of the play in order to highlight two observations. Firstly, the comparison between *Stuff Happens* and *The Vertical Hour* challenges the claim that documentary plays are intrinsically less artistic than – and by nature are not as amusing as – imaginary plots. Secondly, I underscore the difficulties of utilising imaginary characters to convey political discourse, which can lead to turning these characters into abstracted claims, losing the focus on political topic, or both.

I am borrowing Spencer's comment on *The Vertical Hour* to claim that If Hare's play 'does the cause of' political drama with fictional plots 'few favours', Martin Crimp's *Advice to Iraqi Women* is a unique example of how a political message can be delivered without direct political discourse.

Talking to Iraqi women, addressing Western public

Advice to Iraqi Women is a warning call against the invasion, but in a unique way. The Royal Court staged a reading of the play on 7 April 2003, less than a month after the invasion. Later, it was produced in February 2008 together with Churchill's *This is a Chair*, as two short acts under the title: *Welcome Stranger* at the New Ballroom, Trades Hall in Melbourne, Australia. *Advice to Iraqi Women* gives the director the authority to decide the number and features of the characters who utter the successive lines of speech, as all the lines of speech within the play are unrelated to specific characters. The play's title suggests that it is a warning that accompanies the Anglo-American invasion. Vicky Angelaki claims that 'Crimp's title, which raises certain expectations, dramatically clashes with content as any assumptions are very soon subverted' (Angelaki 122). The play does not mention the war at all; it is a series of instructions that warn imaginary and absent women about exposing their children to a variety of domestic dangers.

According to the play, a bike, roller-skates, mechanical toys, and loose eyes of teddy bears are just some examples of things that Iraqi women should protect their children from. Gradually, the gap between the world in which the absent dramaturgic receiver of the advice may live and the situation in Iraq becomes more obvious:

When driving in the country to see the country orchards, seat your child in the back and strap it down. Strap the child down hard and if you need to use your mobile, stop the car. Don't buy a car without rear airbags. Don't buy a car without side-impact protection. Don't let your child play under a car, or beside one, because a car is a minefield (Crimp, web).

Apart from the certain and constant dangers of the coalition's weapons, most of the unsafe things and situations mentioned within the play are a luxury for the vast majority of Iraqi people. Another example follows: 'Supervise all swimming. Make sure your child wears goggles because of the chemicals in the water. By all means inflate a paddling pool in your garden but bear in mind that your garden is a potential war zone' (Crimp, web). When the play refers to 'a potential war zone' while the entire country is actually being attacked, Crimp's ironic message is exposed. British and American parents who may watch the play would agree that such domestic accidents really can be dangerous. However, because warnings are addressed to Iraqi women whose continuous struggle lasted for decades, the words create a sorrowful irony.

For any Iraqi woman, Crimp's advice would be a chain of harsh jokes, especially if she lost a child because of the lack of food or medicine. However, the play is not intended to be read or watched by Iraqis. It is meant to be delivered to English-speaking spectators. The irony will be realised by the members of a Western audience as soon as they recall what they have been watching and reading about Iraq, whether in the near past throughout the years of sanctions, or at the time when the country was invaded. Angelaki argues that Crimp's play 'develops as a comprehensive manual for protecting children in countries at peace, in societies where war is difficult to conceptualize and its horrific images are confined to the mass media' (Angelaki 122). After years of deprivation, the shortage of food, medicine, and education becomes a daily agony for Iraqis; completely the opposite of what Crimp's play describes as a utopian world:

Avoid slippery floors and at the first sign of unremitting fever, do call a doctor, call a doctor straight away. The doctor will come straight away at the first sign of unremitting fever. She will have the latest drugs and the most up-to-date skills. If necessary she will intubate. Don't be frightened to call out your doctor: she is waiting for your call, she has spent her whole life waiting for it. (Crimp, web)

But why does the play address women rather than men or Iraqi people in general? Perhaps, the play suggests that Iraqi men have to continue their fate of fighting in senseless wars, including the recent invasion. Or, probably, it is a way of drawing the attention of Western audiences to the vulnerability of the vast majority of Iraqi women who live in a male-dominated society, where the safety of children is the responsibility of their mothers. Crimp's play also might hint at the fact that, because of Saddam's oppression and his successive wars since 1980, a large number of Iraqi mothers are widows, whose chances of a second marriage are noticeably limited; on the grounds of socially enforced traditions, which are ironically against Islam, not only does the Arabic widow's reluctance to get remarried allegedly prove her piousness, but also her loyalty to the dead husband and her protection of their children from a potentially cruel step-father.¹³⁴

Although *Advice to Iraqi Women* does not directly mention either the economic sanctions or the invasion, it forcefully urges its British or American spectators to recognise the Iraqi disaster by comparison. For Sierz, who is against documentary theatre altogether, the play 'is a perfect example of how resonance is achieved by indirection and metaphor' (Sierz *PAJ*, 60). This metaphor though is intrinsically and intentionally incompatible and the message of the play relies in highlighting this fact. The most important aspect of this discrepancy is that the comparison is not based on western privilege in general but on the long time that Iraqi people have suffered. Even for those who strictly believe in the military option, Crimp's piece of serious irony may invite them to realise that innocents are usually the ones who have to pay the high price of political and military confrontations. Finally, despite being written in 2003 to respond to the American-led invasion, *Advice to Iraqi Women* can be read as a retrospective comment on the economic sanctions.

So far, I have explored four examples of British topical plays, whose political comment on the 2003 Invasion of Iraq theatrically represent tribunal, Verbatim, and imaginary plots. The latter includes traditionally linear and fragmented structures. The question is where are American playwrights' comments on the disputation about the legality and the necessity of the war? As far as my search is concerned, the vast majority of American plays, which represent the War in Iraq in general, are written in the first half of the 2010s. I suggest that one of the reasons for such a phenomenon can be the jingoistic insistence on supporting soldiers, especially when the US army is fighting in Afghanistan

¹³⁴ For more information about the increasing number of Iraqi widows, see Al-Ali (72) and Kadhim.

as well. In addition, whether as part of the War on Terror, or for removing Saddam – as a strategic enemy of the US – the American majority supported an immediate or later invasion of Iraq. A gradual diversification in the American public opinion on the war was mainly influenced by the high human and monetary cost, especially with no guarantee for withdrawal in the near future.¹³⁵

The American writer, actor, and director Tim Robbins's unpublished play *Embedded: Live* is a rare and significant example, stylistically and thematically. The reaction this play received can partly explain why there are not many American plays that criticise the invasion.

Embedded: Live: documentary material within musical satire

Premiered in July 2003 at the Actor's Gang Theatre in Los Angeles, *Embedded: Live* is a harsh mockery of the American administration's eagerness to invade Iraq. Prominent members of the American regime are represented by masked characters. The exaggerated features of these masks make them a parody of the politicians rather than a realistic representation of them. Similarly, the dialogue consists of pieces of burlesque that suggest the politicians' obsession with making a war and inventing lies. The play scorns their radical belief in Leo Strauss as the God of new-conservatives, when they hold candles as if they are in a religious ritual. In another scene, while they excitedly talk about war, they reach sexual orgasm. In addition, the play gives these recognisable figures funny names such as Rum Rum, Gondola, Woof, Dick, and Covo, which respectively represent Rumsfeld, Condoleezza Rice, Wolfowitz, Dick Cheney, and Colin Powell. Nevertheless, the American President is not represented. Elyse Sommer argues: 'Perhaps the focus on the "Cabal" rather than the President is the author's way of saying that Mr. Bush is a puppet on these over the top strategists' string -- a common perception that helped Mr. Bush win two gubernatorial elections!' (Sommer, web). Put differently, because Bush himself is absent from this group of masks, it seems that the play hints at the mighty role of his administration in convincing him to take the decision to invade Iraq.

In contrast to the image of politicians, the play represents the vast majority of soldiers as loyal, brave and victims of unnecessary war. Through three imaginary characters, Sarge, Monk, and Jen, the play keeps an emotional line that contradicts the

¹³⁵ For reference to the American public's inclination to support the invasion, see Gallup, Jr. (34). For the change in this public opinion, see Holsti (2012, 69–72), and Mirra (17).

comic meetings of the masks. To insist on his sympathy with soldiers, Robbins creates three relationships that reveal the agony soldiers' families have to endure. Sarge's wife, Monk's girlfriend, and Jen's parents are introduced to the audience from the beginning in an emotional situation, at the moment the soldiers are ready for departure.

The play suggests that some soldiers choose military life for financial reasons as the conversation between Jen and her father reveals:

JEN's DAD: Honey, I feel as though I have failed you.

JEN: What do you mean daddy?

JEN's DAD: If I had a better job, then we would have the money to send you to the college. (*Embedded: Live DVD*)

One of these relationships will shape the finale when Monk reads a letter to his girlfriend, who is reading his letter simultaneously. In the letter Monk vents his feelings of guilt:

I can't sleep. That night still burns fresh in my eyes. I closed them hoping that darkness takes them away, but they're still there. I see the child's severed arm, the look on the dead mother's face, the blood. [...] I have killed a family in a moment I wish I could get back. [...] please forgive me. (*Embedded: Live DVD*)

Because Monk mistakenly kills this family, we sympathise with his regretful confession. Moreover, the circumstances of the incident suggest that he was afraid. He apologises to his girlfriend because neither tolerate the death of civilians. At the moment Monk killed his innocent victims, he becomes a victim of the war himself.

Between mocking US officials and appreciating soldiers, Robbins focuses on the role of embedded journalists in covering the events of the war. Laura Hitchcock defines 'embedded' as 'the term used for journalists authorized by the United States Government to cover the recent invasion of Iraq' (Hitchcock, web). Although the title of the play refers to them, the presence of these journalists is marginal compared to the characters of politicians or soldiers. However, the play insists on revealing the rules these journalists had to obey when they were accompanying the troops, which prevented any of them from sending any information about the war without the army's permission. By referring to this matter the play seems to comment on the huge critique of the lack of information about many events of the war.

Commenting on the embedded journalists' reports about the battle of Fallujah, Lisa Finnegan argues: 'What was happening in Fallujah? How many marines had been injured? How many insurgents were there? Who were they? There are dozens of questions that could have been asked' (Finnegan 91). As Finnegan's comment suggests, although the battle in Fallujah was one of the most disastrous events of the War in Iraq, these embedded journalists said almost nothing about it. In Jonathan Holmes's introduction to his play *Fallujah*, first performed in 2007 at the Truman Brewery, Brick Lane,¹³⁶ the playwright and director blame European countries, especially the UK, for ignoring the carnage. Such neglect, according to Holmes, can be partly attributed to '[t]he prevention of news broadcasts from the city' (Holmes 2007, xiii). The effect of these embedded journalists on preventing the American people from getting an accurate image of the war is represented by the play in two short successive scenes. On a hospital bed in Iraq, Jen is frustrated by seeing an Iraqi person, who does not appear on stage. As he introduces himself as an Iraqi doctor, Jen is surprised to learn that he studied in the UK. However, she does not believe that an Iraqi person might help her. In the next scene, at Jen's home, she tells her parents about her appreciation of the Iraqi doctor and his gesture of tolerance. However, the American soldier is shocked by the way in which the American media tells her story. As Jen's parents insist on repeating that she was beaten and tortured by the Iraqis, her shock turns into a hysterical weeping, which prompts her parents to declare that they believe her.

As a playwright and a director, Robbins weaves these three imaginary lines with documentary information mainly introduced through Piscatorian/Brechtian techniques. Each actor played two or more characters. In addition, there are two small screens on the black backdrop on which short videos and pictures were displayed at the beginning and the end of the show in addition to the moments between the scenes of the play. This footage displays demonstrations against the invasion of Iraq in several countries all over the world, including American and British cities. 'Metaphorical parallelism' can be realised in pictures and movies of demonstrations against the War in Vietnam, actions of combat from the War in Vietnam and the two World Wars. The most striking footage is the Nazi army moving. All these clips, which seem to suggest the illegality of the war, are accompanied by the song *Know Your Rights*.¹³⁷ While the words 'You have the right not to be killed' (qtd. in *Embedded: Live DVD*) contradict the scenes on screen, they affirm the overall message of

¹³⁶ A space was particularly arranged at the Brewery to perform the play.

¹³⁷ 1982 song by the English band *The Clash* in their album *Combat Rock*.

the play: the lives of both Iraqi civilians and American soldiers are the high price of the unjustified war.

Not only is *Embedded: Live* the only American play within which the invasion is portrayed as an illegal crime, the play also condemns the American media for overlooking the truth. Moreover, no other American playwright suggests a resemblance between the 2003 war and Vietnam. In contrast, Rajiv Joseph's *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* distinguishes between the two wars. Driven by boredom, the American soldier Kev complains to his colleague: 'I ain't seen shit. [...] Not one Iraqi did I get to kill! And I ain't got my dick wet neither! You know back in Vietnam, there was so many Vietnamese bitches all over the place, and everyone got a piece' (Joseph 153). The only rape in Joseph's play is committed by the ghost of Uday, Saddam's son.¹³⁸

Therefore, although *Embedded: Live* supports the American soldiers, both the play and Robbins himself were accused of being pro-Saddam and even traitorous. Such criticism in the mainstream media, though, was accompanied by public praise. Robbins declares: 'In L.A. we sold out an eight-week run in two days, which never happens. We wound up extending it for four more months. In New York we were lambasted by the critics. And people still came and we sold out for four months' (Robbins, web). Perhaps such harsh critique can help in answering the question about American playwrights' reluctance to comment on specific events, especially by using documentary material, even if this material was employed metaphorically.

Since the invasion became a de facto occupation, no incident caused an international debate, and was condemned by the vast majority of the Americans themselves more than the shocking revelation of the scandal of Abu Ghraib with the infamous scenes of the torture of civilians by American soldiers.

Soldiers in a wrong and long war: heroes, villains, or victims?

It is a fact that the celebration of torture in Abu Ghraib was an action of individuals, and it is not fair to blame the entire American army for some soldiers' crime. I agree with Peace when he claims that, 'instead of identifying with the guards' visual perspective, upon bearing witness to the prisoners' suffering, the spectatorial public protested against these obscene acts of state violence' (Pease, 185). Put differently, the revelation of the Abu

¹³⁸ Joseph's play was written in 2008 and premiered in May 2009 at the Kirk Douglas Theatre in California.

Ghraib scandal was an exceptional moment at which the American principle of an *ultimate* and *unconditional* support for the troops was challenged.¹³⁹

If all sorts of torture intrinsically contradict the international laws and the principles of human rights, both of which are at the heart of the so-called modern Western values, the War on Terror seems to demand an exception to these rules and values. While a group of American academics and specialists in law suggest that nonlethal practices of coercive interrogation, described as ‘torture lite’, could be partially considered acceptable to prevent possible terroristic operations, some Western academics and many journalists raised their claims that torture was accepted, or even ordered, by high-ranked American officials, as a method of interrogation.¹⁴⁰

The question is, did American theatre respond to Abu Ghraib in a way that reflects the enormity of the incident? I have found three American plays that address torture, all of which were written after the incident of Abu Ghraib: Anne Nelson’s *Savages* (2006), Eve Ensler’s *The Treatment* (2006) and Francis Cowhig’s *Lidless* (2010). Not only does Nelson’s play draw the strongest link with Abu Ghraib, but the play was also read, and criticised as a metaphoric representation of the recent incident.¹⁴¹

Savages, which premiered in April 2006 at the Lion Theatre in New York, does not include any mention of Iraq. However, it is a comment on Abu Ghraib. In a metaphorical way, different from Crimp’s contradictory analogy, *Savages* goes back to American history. Nelson’s play depicts fact-based events that occurred in 1902 during the American intervention in the Philippines. Cherry explains: ‘The plot is based on actual historical events — an American Marine named Littleton Waller, acting under orders, water-boarded and killed a large number of Filipino civilians in reprisal for an insurgent attack’ (Cherry 167). In contrast to the enthusiastic reaction to the Guys, *Savages* had to suffer from the reservations of both American critics and spectators. The reason for such a response could be the fact that the play was performed when the guards who committed the crimes in Abu

¹³⁹ There are few American journalists and politicians who expressed their sympathy with the guards, especially with the consideration of the tough circumstances these soldiers have to endure in Iraq. Examples of these rare voices are cited in Brown (2007, 308), and Babington (A18).

¹⁴⁰ For more information about advocating the so-called ‘torture lite’, see the studies of Dershowitz (2001) and Dershowitz (2002), Lingis (91–2), Saul, Homant, and Blakeley. Examples of claims that torture is tolerated by leaders of the army can be found in Pease (185) and Greenberg.

¹⁴¹ *Lidless* portrays a melodramatic meeting between an ex-prisoner of Guantánamo and the woman who used to be his brutal interrogator fifteen years ago. In an undefined place, *The Treatment* represents a soldier, who is lured by his female psychiatrist to admit practicing torture. Then he discovers that her only goal was to know and expose his crimes.

Ghraib were in court. Even before the play was performed, according to Robin Finn, Nelson had to accept the producer's advice to expunge twelve pages from the script of *Savages* (Finn A12). This kind of self-censorship might indicate how American society, including playwrights became hesitant to criticise their soldiers in general, and to press on the open wound of the scandal of Abu Ghraib in particular.

Commenting on its performance, the American critic Charles Isherwood argues that 'few will be entertained by a play that has too much information to impart and too many contemporary parallels to underscore to allow time for nuanced interpersonal drama to emerge' (Isherwood B11). I agree with Isherwood that *Savages* is full of historical information, which extends its dramatic function beyond contextualising Waller's cruel action. Rather, Nelson's play seems to give many details as if it seeks to provide a thorough record of the American presence in the Philippines. On one hand, I argue that this informative mission is too ambitious to be achieved by a single play. My claim could be supported by the fact that, in order to enable the reader of the published text to know more about historical circumstances than what the live performance might offer to its audience, Nelson included a seven-page afterward of a 'Historical Chronology' (Nelson 2007, 55-61). On the other hand, Nelson utilises Waller to address other characters about historical happenings or geographical facts. For instance, in order to underscore the American-Spanish competition to extend their dominance in the region, Nelson's protagonist refers to Magellan's arrival in the Philippines in the sixteenth century (Nelson 2007, 21). Such speeches seem to distract the focus of the play away from Waller's comment on his violent conduct against the innocent Filipinos, the incident to which *Savages* draws 'contemporary parallels'.

The resemblance between the historical incident of torture and the disgraceful scenes of Abu Ghraib suggests that the latter is a repeated behaviour of American soldiers rather than an occasional breach of the rights of prisoners of war. As figure (6) illustrates, if one American Marine is responsible for the brutality against the civilians in the Philippines, the torture and humiliation of the Iraqi prisoners are practiced by a small number of American soldiers. Nevertheless, the repetition of such brutality might cast doubt on it being an exceptional phenomenon. Perhaps, such a suggestion of repetition is what caused the American audience's reluctance to watch Nelson's play. Put differently, American spectators did not accept being asked whether the brutality of soldiers in Abu Ghraib is an exception or the rule.

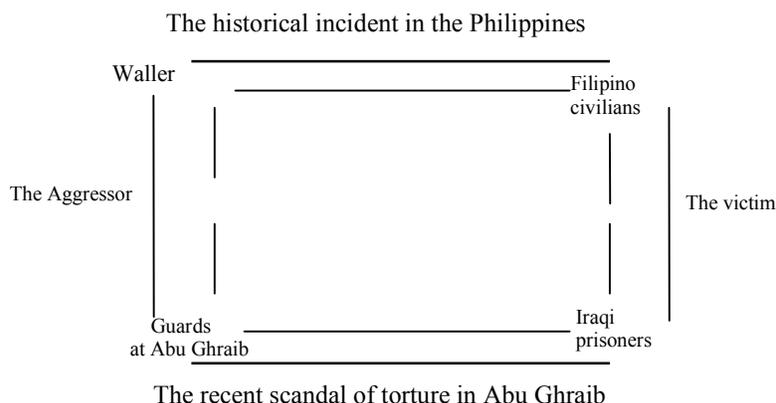


Figure (6)

Savages: The re-occurrence of an exceptional crime

Savages extends the parallel between the present and historical events to hint at one of the most controversial questions that accompanied the aftermath of Abu Ghraib: Who is really responsible for the embarrassing scandal? Within her play, which adheres to the records of the historical incident, not only does Waller oppose the orders of Jacob Smith, his higher officer, but the former also seems less brutal than his boss. Waller claims ‘Jake Smith told me — to kill anyone “*capable* of bearing arms against the United States.” (*Beat.*) This sounded ... excessive ... to me. So I said, “General, what is the limit of age to respect?” And he said — [...] Kill anyone over ten — years — old’ (Nelson 2007, 43). In this respect, Waller’s speech seems to repeat part of the discourse of the media, within which torture practiced by the guards at Abu Ghraib are claimed to be a manifestation of orders given by high officials of the army.

Moreover, considering the linking of historical and current incidents, when the character of Waller states such a defence, perhaps Nelson’s play attempts to portray the allegedly undeclared facts as if they are being pronounced by the tried guards. To illustrate my claim about this parallel between incidents, I have modified the previous diagram, turning it into the following figure: As figure (7) suggests, although both Waller and the group of guards at Abu Ghraib are obviously the direct aggressors, who are tried for the crime of torture, neither is really responsible as both were acting according to the their leaders’ orders or acceptance.

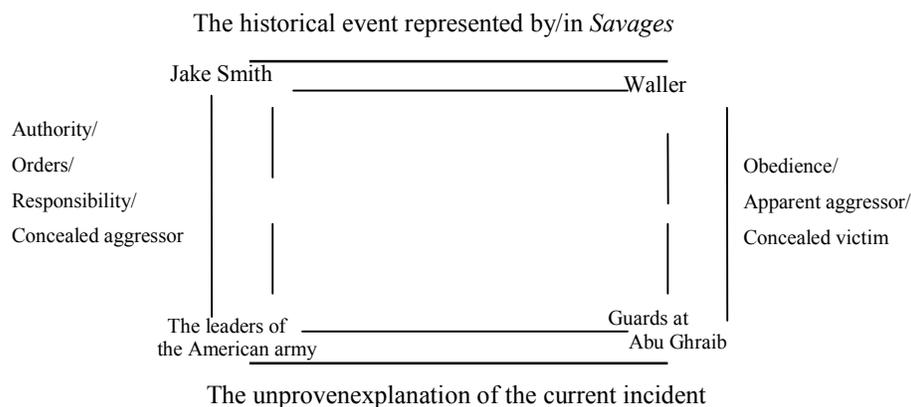


Figure (7)
Between the declared and real responsibility for torture

In its exploitation of the historical incident to comment on the aftermath of Abu Ghraib, Nelson's play goes further by highlighting the exceptional state of danger within which the brutal act was committed. Waller declares: 'Someone was goin' to die, and it wasn't gonna be my men. (*Quietly.*) [...] So now I'm a butcher? (*Beat. Louder.*) That makes me a butcher?' (Nelson 2007, 42). As with Monk in *Embedded: Live*, whose fear entices him to exterminate an entire Iraqi family, Waller's fear is the reason for killing the civilian victims. However, while Monk regrets his mistake, Waller justifies his intentional act.

In addition, Waller extends his defence beyond putting the burden of responsibility on the shoulders of Jake Smith—the higher authority—to insist on the exceptional state of danger wherein the violent act was to protect the American soldiers. Therefore, not only does Waller deny the accusation of being 'a butcher', he indirectly blames those who might claim that his act was out of brutality, including the American public opinion. Waller argues: 'I'm the "hot topic" at all the Washington dinner parties. [...] (*With consternation.*) They think their hands are clean?' (Nelson 2007, 40). As Waller's speech suggests, he extends his anger to include the vast majority of the American public, who condemn his violence, which was an obligatory act to save the lives of a group of American fighters, including Waller himself. In other words, because the American people accepted this war in the first place, they must share responsibility for what they see as a brutal act, especially because the latter was unavoidable. However, and apart from any parallel aspects between the brutal acts in the Philippines and Iraq, the latter would be always distinguished from the

former by the photos, which not only document the brutality of the guards, but these photos also represent torture as a pleasurable practice, which is not out of necessity. Put differently, some Americans might reluctantly understand the fact that nonfatal torture could be a ‘lesser evil’ than the loss of American civilians and soldiers. Nevertheless, the guards’ bragging about this brutality will always be denied as an unethical act. On the grounds of this observation, I partly understand why *Savages* was seen by the American audience as more of a shock than a defence of the guards, whose disrespectful behaviour was mainly conceived as an exception either to human values or to military rules.

A stark difference between the ways in which American and British plays portray the matter of torture can be realised by reading *Tactical Questioning: Scenes from the Baha Mousa Inquiry*, the tribunal play in which Norton-Taylor edited the investigations into the death of an Iraqi man as a result of British soldiers’ violent interrogations. On one hand, the play acknowledges the tough circumstances the soldiers endure in Iraq.

Elias, the council to the Inquiry, describes that soldiers ‘faced a very challenging operational environment in Iraq. As well as increasing disorder, looting, and the activities of insurgent groups. [...] The temperature in Iraq in September regularly exceeds 50 degrees centigrade’ (Norton-Taylor 2011, 15). However, as far as the tribunal form exposes the exact words of the testimonies, all brutal techniques utilised to humiliate, hurt, panic, and interrogate the Iraqi prisoners, including Baha Mousa, are mentioned through the play. In his overview of the Inquiry, Norton-Taylor declares:

Thousands of British soldiers took part in the US-invasion of Iraq, ill-prepared and badly-informed. [...] It became clear that British Soldiers had little or no idea of the legal, let alone moral, boundaries of behaviour. The case of Baha Mousa and others in Iraq led General Dannatt, the former Head of the Army, to suggest that many members of the Armed Forces lacked moral values when they joined. (Norton-Taylor 2011, 9)

The significance of such a statement relies, firstly, on the fact that the editor, who used to write very short introductions to his tribunal plays, most of which are usually descriptive of the Inquiry, gives his opinion. Is Norton-Taylor too angry at the soldiers’ behaviour to deter his comment? Or, does he assume the role of the playwright, rather than the objective editor? It is hard to know. Secondly, describing the war as a ‘US-invasion’ expresses Norton-Taylor’s opposition to Britain’s participation in the coalition. Finally, compared to

the insistence of most American media that the torture at Abu Ghraib was committed by a ‘few bad apples’, who do not represent the US army, Norton-Taylor harshly describes ‘British soldiers’ in general.

The critique of British soldiers can be found in imaginary plots such as Simon Stephens’ *Motortown* (2006) and Roy Williams’ *Days of Significance* (2007). In *Motortown*, Danny is a returned soldier from Iraq, who, as Stephens’ play suggests, was as mentally disturbed before the war as he is after his homecoming. *Days of Significance* harshly condemns the vulgarity, ignorance and shallowness of its characters of British young generations, whether in their urban life or on the battlefield in Iraq. Commenting on the 2007 premiere of Williams’ play, Quentin Letts argues that ‘British soldiers die in Iraq almost every week. But that has not stopped the Royal Shakespeare Company from premiering an anti-war play which depicts our squaddies as cowardly, rapacious, socially incontinent, selfish, feral losers’ (Letts 29).¹⁴²

In contrast, nearly six years after the invasion, including the scandal of Abu Ghraib, not only has the latter been ignored by American playwrights, but the slogan ‘supporting our soldiers’ has been turned into a play. Produced by the Two River Theatre Company in New Jersey, *Reentry* received its premiere in January 2009. Based on factual interviews, *Reentry* is a Verbatim play in which Emily Ackerman and KJ Sanchez give a group of American marines and some members of their family the chance to reflect on their memories about the war. The vast majority of the soldiers’ statements answer the question: what does it mean to be a Marine? The common feature of these testimonies is the description of their participation in the war as a profession: a job whose duties have to be done, regardless of the reasons for the invasion of Iraq, or even the American public opinion on the aftermath of the war. A mid-level enlisted Marine, Tommy recalls:

Northern California some lady called me a baby-killer. I was like in a bar and some lady asked me what I did. “I’m in the Marine Corps.” “Oh, you’re a baby killer.” And I kinda got offended at first. And then I was like, I’m not gonna let her ignorance get to me—not gonna let it ruin my day. So she’s, “You’re a baby killer” (*Shifts strategy*:) “Yeah, got any kids?” “AAAAH!” She went off. I’m like, “Look, I’m not a baby killer, okay? I just do what I gotta do.” (Ackerman 15)

¹⁴² Critical reviews of *Motortown* can be found in Spencer (2006), Gardner (2006), and Macaulay. For different opinions on *Days of Significance*, see Ledent and Cavendish.

It is important to realise that although Tommy does not need to be seen as a monster, he does not claim to be a hero either. As a Marine, he just needs to be appreciated as a man who properly commits himself to the obligations of his job.

Part of soldiers' responsibilities is to finish their military task as safely as they can. In his interview, Pete, who is a badly wounded sergeant, remembers:

When I first got back, [...] everybody cheered when they introduced me. A lot of people came up to me: "Thank you for your service." [...] And I used to be a little bit embarrassed, thinking, "The only reason you're doing this is because I got wounded." And to me getting wounded doesn't make you a hero—you know, that's the one gun fight I lost! (Ackerman 11)

As with Pete Tommy's speech, Pete insists that fighting in Iraq, as it is in any other war, is part of his unavoidably dangerous duty, which he accepts without any hint of regret or self-pity. The play indirectly criticises the way in which some American civilians see their soldiers. Tommy and Pete went to the same war, wherein their specific roles or deeds are unknown to the American people. Put differently, it is impossible to know whether both or neither mistakenly killed Iraqi babies. However, Tommy is described as a 'baby-killer', while Pete is seen as a hero only because he was seriously injured.

In this respect, *Reentry* supports the American soldiers by highlighting their modesty and sense of responsibility. However, as their statements repeatedly demonstrate, they see themselves as neither victims nor heroes of the war. They have to fight because this is what their duty demands. Even the statements of the members of these soldiers' families suggest that these civilians are as aware of their own obligations as the soldiers themselves. In her interview, a mother of three Marines—two sons and a daughter—declares:

When I think of my sons being in harm's way, that's—that's kind of incomprehensible. Because it's one thing to talk objectively about my kids' goals in life, [sic] but I *hate* this part of it. But it's a harsh reality, you know? I'm supporting my sons' decisions, and yet to them I would never show this part of me. I feel that's my responsibility to them—my service to them—to keep them from worrying about me. (Ackerman 17)

By using the word ‘service’, this mother seems to draw a metaphorical link between the role of soldiers on the battlefields and their families’ duty to support this role. The testimony of this mother suggests that the families might believe that they have to hide their fears in order to support the soldiers. Nevertheless, I claim that *Reentry*, although with a softer tone than *Embedded: Live*, indirectly makes this suffering recognisable.

Moreover, despite the soldiers’ brave and modest description of the intrinsic danger of their jobs, it is hard for any civilian in general and for American people in particular, not to commiserate with these soldiers when they are killed or even badly injured. However, as Tommy’s speech suggests, even American citizens cannot tolerate the murder of Iraqi civilians, especially children. Within the only statement that describes the catastrophic effect of the war on Iraqi people, a Commanding Officer recalls:

We passed by a boy on the side of the road—his nose and his jaw shot away. And he was gurgling this bloody pink froth as he lay in his mother’s arms. She was pleading with us to, uh, to stop, in a language you didn’t need to understand. And I looked at this woman, this scene, and I walked right by—and didn’t feel a single thing. The only thing I felt was a little bit of shock at my own indifference. And, uh, I was not the person I thought I was. [...] By that day my well of fortitude was about dry, and I had nothing left. (Ackerman 19)

Not only does this testimony indicate the high price Iraqi civilians have to pay for a war thought by a large number of them to be their last hope to get rid of their dictator, but it also demonstrates the high-ranking Marine’s deeply wounded soul. This wound, though, is different from Monk’s feeling of guilt in his mistaken killing of innocent civilians. Rather, the Commanding Officer is deprived of being able to regret or even to sympathise with the tragedy of this boy and his mother. While such a state of ‘indifference’ could be an inescapable result of being a professional soldier, the Commanding Officer is a leader whose sense of duty towards his men demands him to be strong enough to take the responsibility for all the victims of the young soldiers. The high-ranking Marine argues:

We had already asked God to forgive us for what we were about to do. I tell my men: “When we kill, we kill as a unit, we kill as a team, we kill as a pack. [sic] We don’t kill as an individual.” For that reason, those deaths are on me. And I’ll answer to my maker. It’s important for leaders to do that. [...] I should have more

emotional shock absorbers, more inoculations in my system, than an eighteen-year-old-last year's high school senior. (Ackerman 13)

For this Commanding Officer, the war in Iraq is similar to any war, a de facto event wherein he willingly claims the sins of his men. On one hand, the statements included within the play highlight the strength of these soldiers and underscore their respect for their duty. On the other hand, the overall message of *Reentry* indirectly suggests that these soldiers are partly victims, not of the war in Iraq specifically, but victims of the brutality of any war as such.

Ironically, the toughness showed by this high-ranking Marine is represented with a shadow of heroism. His heroic image increases because of his sacrifices as a savior of young soldiers. He is probably what Monks needs as a leader, if I imagine characters might move between plays. Similarly, the dignity with which Pete reacts to his serious injury is the opposite of Stubbs' humility in *States of Shock*. Does *Reentry* suggest an end to 'Vietnam Syndrome', or is the play filled with a denial of a newly shaped 'Iraq Syndrome'? It is hard to decide. Perhaps more plays in the following years may answer.

Finally, and in contrast to Pete, Dai in the British playwright Jonathan Lichtenstein's *The Pull of Negative Gravity* is more like Stubbs, but Dai even lacks the latter's insistence on making his voice heard. Premiered at the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh in August 2004, the war in Iraq is initially seen by the members of a Welsh family as the last hope to rescue their heavily indebted farm. However, Dai, who joined the army only to get money, returns from Iraq with his body's right side paralysed. In spite of being upset at Dai's disability, his girlfriend Bethan marries him. This marriage ends up adding emotional wounds to his physical incompetence. On their wedding night, Bethan cannot hide her feeling of disgust and she vomits. In response to this, Dai disgraces himself by hitting his head on the floor and crawling. His humiliation reaches its peak when Bethan runs away, before she returns and tries to seduce Dai's brother, Rhys. As the latter embarrasses her by insisting on their ethical obligations towards Dai, Bethan commits suicide.

For Vi, Dai's mother, not only is her son proven unable to be the saviour of the farm, but he also becomes a burden. To gain a little amount of money, she spends long hours in stuffing envelopes with promotional scratch cards. In the very short eleventh scene, Dai ruins his mother's efforts; he accidentally drips beer into a box of stuffed

envelopes. Then he deliberately ruptures some of them and scratches the cards. Before Dai convinces his mother to help him to die, he answers some of her questions about the war:

VI. Did you kill people in Iraq? [...] Does it haunt you? [...] I suppose it was you or them. [...] If the crowds moved towards you, you shot at them. [...] Women, children. It was the only thing you could do. Afterwards, you saw their bodies swelling in the sun. There they are. No one, really. Just in the way. [...] You've seen things no one should see; done things no one should do? [...] (Lichtenstein 63)

Instead of declaring his regretted actions in the war, Dai's speeches are reduced to brief replies that repeatedly express his agreement with his mother's speculations about the situation in Iraq. The most striking feature of this dialogue is that Vi, who might represent thousands of wounded soldiers' mothers, is aware that her son was obliged to kill civilians, whether driven by fear or by mistake. Such stances of unwilling killing could be seen as an inevitable aspect of any occupation, wherein both soldiers and civilians have to endure daily encounters and confrontations with each other. As with these examples of dramatic responses to the war in Iraq, several plays that comment on the presence of the American-led coalition's in Afghanistan, of which I analyse some examples in the next chapter, highlight incidents of the unnecessary death of civilians as a result of soldiers' fear.

Chapter Four

Afghanistan: tracing misconceptions in three phases of conflict

Whether compared to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or the invasion of Iraq, the American-led War in Afghanistan was less controversial for the international community, especially before it turned out to be a sort of occupation. First and foremost, it was initially declared to punish Al-Qaeda for committing one of the most abominable terrorist crimes in human history on American soil. However, while there was a kind of international society quasi-consensus about the justifications of the American-led War on Terror, the increasing numbers of the murdered and injured soldiers in the battlefields of Afghanistan have raised questions not only about the feasibility of the war, but also about its real purpose. In 2007 David Loyn described the invasion of 2001 as ‘A New Great Game’ (Loyn 24). Later, John Pilger also identified the current occupation as an American Great Game when he declared his controversial argument:

The truth about the “good war” is to be found in compelling evidence that the 2001 invasion [...] was actually planned two months prior to 9/11 and that the most pressing problem for Washington was not the Taliban’s links with Osama Bin Laden, but the prospect of the Taliban mullahs losing control of Afghanistan to less reliable mujahedin factions, led by warlords who had been funded and armed by the CIA to fight America’s proxy war against the Soviet occupiers in the 1980s. (Pilger 28)

Such polemic claims, which suggest that the US reproduces the nineteenth-century colonial model of the British Empire, usually extend their justifications beyond the American-led War in Central Asia to include the war in Iraq and its chaotic consequences.¹⁴³

On one hand, although both Afghanistan and Iraq are battlefields of the War on Terror, it seems imprecise to neglect the unique geopolitical and historical features that distinguish the conflict in each country from the other. On the other hand, the metaphorical reading of the American-led interventions in the two countries as a new Great Game ignores the different circumstances of historical Imperialism in the complicated political

¹⁴³ An example of such journalistic claims can be found in Walberg, wherein the alleged ‘Zionist goals’ are controversially described as the dominant factor in the so-called American Great Game in Afghanistan and Iraq. For more scholarly utilisation of the term ‘new Great Game’, see Ahrari within which the author analyses the political, not colonial, competition over Central Asia in the second half of the twentieth century between the US, Russia, Turkey, and Iran.

scene in the twenty-first century. Three striking features distinguish the American-led presence in Afghanistan from both nineteenth-century British colonialism and twentieth-century Russian occupation. Firstly, the coalition includes a large number of countries, including NATO, Turkey, and Jordan. Therefore the military presence in Afghanistan cannot be described as a force of American colonialism. Secondly, and most importantly, these countries intervention in Afghanistan is out of necessity. Not only are these military forces protecting international NGO charities, which help the Afghans in health and education. The coalition has to endure the attacks of the remains of the Taliban and war lords. Although the latter fought against the Taliban, they became a burden as they keep expanding their power over the land of the Afghans in the countryside. The question is: how do British and American playwrights represent such a complicated situation? This is the main question of this chapter.

The Tricycle Theatre in London chose *The Great Game: Afghanistan* (2009) to be the title of its project, which seemed to be an attempt to motivate both British and American playwrights to find answers, or to ask their own questions about the ongoing conflict. In Britain, it was premiered at the Tricycle Theatre, London on 17 April. On 15 September, its first American performance was at Sidney Harman Hall in Washington DC. The project consisted of thirteen plays that represent three milestones in the long history of Afghan confrontations with occupiers.

The first group includes four plays: Stephen Jeffreys' *Bugles at the Gates of Jalalabad*, Ron Hutchinson's *Durand's Line*, Amit Gupta's *Campaign*, and Joy Wilkinson's *Now is the Time*. These plays portray British and Russian competitive attempts to occupy Afghanistan between 1842 and 1930. The second group of plays focuses on the Russian occupation and the establishment and growth of the Taliban in the period from 1979 to 1996, and includes four plays: David Edgar's *Black Tulips*, J. T. Rogers' *Blood and Gifts*, David Greig's *Miniskirts of Kabul*, and Colin Teevan's *The Lion of Kabul*. Finally, five plays comment on the American intervention in Afghanistan from 1996 to 2009: Ben Ockrent's *Honey*, Abi Morgan's *The Night is Darkest before the Dawn*, Richard Bean's *On the Side of the Angels*, Simon Stephens' *Canopy of Stars*, and Naomi Wallace's *No Such Cold Thing*.

Nicolas Kent, the artistic director of the Tricycle Theatre, explains the reasons for such a production at this specific time:

For a short period in the Autumn of 2001, just after 9/11, Afghanistan took centre stage. But after the fall of the Taliban both Bush and Blair ensured that the world's attention moved swiftly back to Iraq. [...] However in early 2008, [...] I began to notice that [the] world's political focus was very slowly but inexorably swinging back towards Afghanistan. Afghanistan was surely going to be the main focus of British, European and American policy for at least the next decade. (Kent 7)

Kent's words reflect a high degree of awareness of both the political situation and the social role of theatre. However, the noticeable aspect of this thirteen-play project is the fact that all the authors are either Britons or Americans. It seems reasonable to suggest that if some native Afghan playwrights were involved they could have offered additional insights into the conflict.

The historical approach of the project can be justified by the need for raising the Anglo-American audience's awareness of the roots of the conflict. To assure this instructive goal of the three-night performance of the project, more information about Afghanistan was delivered to spectators by 'Verbatim pieces from public figures giving their views on the future of Afghanistan – these were from interviews conducted and edited by Richard Norton-Taylor; there were also monologues by Siba Shakib telling some of the stories of Afghanistan before 1842' (Kent 251).¹⁴⁴

The overall enlightening purpose can be realised within single plays, where the playwright weaves factual material with—and sometimes imposes it on—the characters' speeches. Within the project, many matters are repeatedly mentioned through representations of specific historical incidents in different plays. Consequently, these matters or events are profoundly spotlighted. That explains why Ben Brantley argues that 'the production's strength is in how its different chapters reinforce one another and in the echoes they set off in your mind' (Brantley, Web).

To create an appropriate context to include their informative discourse about Afghanistan, most plays of *The Great Game* usually rely on situations in which dramatic characters are expected to mention such documentary content. To give examples, Amit Gupta's *Campaign* takes the form of a meeting, where a Pakistani historian is consulted

¹⁴⁴ Wallace's *No Such Cold Thing* was part of the festival of Afghanistan theatre, film and visual arts, which was held at the Tricycle theatre from 17 April to 14 June 2009. However, it was performed apart from other plays, prior to the sessions of political discussions during the festival. Eventually, it was published as part of the project.

about the reign of Amanullah,¹⁴⁵ the king of Afghanistan in the period between 1919 and 1929. David Greig's *Miniskirts of Kabul* introduces its historical information through an imaginary interview with Najibullah,¹⁴⁶ a former President of Afghanistan from 1987 to 1992. In *Black Tulips*, David Edgar utilises the form of a lecture to represent specific moments of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. That enables Edgar to give detailed description of historical and even geographical facts. In the first scene, the high-ranked Russian officials refer to a huge map on a screen to tell some facts about Afghanistan. Characters' speeches, including presentations and testimonies, turn the process of spectatorship into getting information rather than watching dramatic action:

1ST DEPUTY: Afghanistan. A landlocked central asian [sic] country approximately the size of France.

COMMANDER: But, unlike France ...

1ST DEPUTY: ... consisting largely of impassable high mountain chains and backing desert. [...] Its history being one of successive invasions and resistance, from the time of Alexander the Great. (Edgar 85)

A similar description of the rough Afghan environment is given by the nineteenth-century British soldiers in Jeffreys' *Bugles at the Gates of Jalalabad*. Drawing such images elucidates the implacable nature of the battlefields, where the British and American soldiers are fighting at the moment. On the other hand, the many historical failures of powerful countries in Afghanistan, especially the British Empire and the former Soviet Union, raise questions about the future of the current war. Michael Billington argues that *The Great Game: Afghanistan* clearly suggests 'that Afghanistan's tragedy stems as much from geography as history. And the failure of America, especially, to grasp local realities emerges time and again' (Billington 2009, 19). In this sense, portraying historical events does not contradict the topicality of these plays.

Representation of the past comments on the present

It is crucial to realise that, because these plays were written during the ongoing War on Terror, their playwrights are unlikely to ignore the current military existence in Afghanistan. Regardless of the historical themes of the plays, they are relevant to the third

¹⁴⁵ Amanullah Khan (1892–1960).

¹⁴⁶ Mohammad Najibullah Ahmadzai (1947–1996).

phase of the conflict, which started in 2001. For instance, although the bulk of the dialogue in *Campaign* is about the unsuccessful attempt of Amanullah to enforce his project of secular social reform in the third decade of the twentieth century, the action takes place at the present time. The play portrays a desperate British endeavour to exit the continuing War in Afghanistan in a dignified way. To avoid any accusation of leaving the country under the pressure of Islamists, British politicians strive to invent a fake Afghan secular tendency that demands their withdrawal. By reminding Afghans of Amanullah's old project, the plan seeks to convince them, and the entire world, that this new secular movement has authentic internal origins, and is not a British political trick. In what seems a confession of the disastrous results of the coalition's existence in Afghanistan, Harry Hawk, a fictional character that represents the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, declares:

HAWK: Wouldn't be the British thing to do. Start a war – not finish it – make a bit of mess and go. Doesn't add up, does it? But an Afghan nationalist campaign fuelled by the desire for a secular democracy? Now that would leave us with no choice. And we could leave, having left something behind!

KHAN: That's crazy!

HAWK: No Professor, that's politics. (Gupta 61)

Apart from Khan's surprise, which reflects his specialization as a historian who believes in facts compared to political maneuvers, the most striking point of Hawk's speech is his claim that the British Empire has not made similar mistakes. This claim is contradicted by *Bugles at the Gates of Jalalabad*, which portrays the aftermath of the British occupation in the 1840s.

Such intersections between the informative discourses of these plays achieve a kind of organic unity; while each play can be performed independently, it also can be considered as an act within the whole project of *The Great Game: Afghanistan*. This feature is designed to increase the audience's awareness about historical and topical events, figures, and political discussions within the plays. Examples of these cross-play connections are various. For instance, Joy Wilkinson's *Now is the Time* depicts King Amanullah's escape from Afghanistan after his abdication, accompanied by his wife Soraya Tarzi and her

father.¹⁴⁷ Throughout the play, Tarzi refers to Amanullah's overhasty attempt to implement his secular dreams of modernizing Afghanistan:

AMANULLAH: I've done everything I can for my country, so don't you dare accuse me of failing it.
 TARZI: Perhaps you've done too much. That's what angers people.
 (Wilkinson 69)

A similar opinion on the king's project can be found in the discussion between Hawk and Khan in *Campaign*. Such a resemblance seems at first to weaken the cycle because it repeats information irrelevant to the current conflict. However, the intersection between the two plays is not limited to sharing the same historical narrative. While the call for secularity in Gupta's play comments on Britain's opportunistic policies in Afghanistan in the 2000s, *Now is the Time* focuses on the ugly face of Amanullah, whose dream of secular modernity in the 1920s is cast as a selfish desire for his own luxury. His wife bluntly declares 'I see all that matters is you, you hanging on to your precious life, your mighty power, your stupid motorcar' (Wilkinson 73). Historically, there is no evidence of such a dispute between Soraya and her husband regarding his lavish type of life, which she shared as a common feature of the Afghan monarchy in different times. By referring to the arduous life of the bulk of the Afghans, it seems that Wilkinson's play comments on the situation in the late 2000s. *Now is the Time* was written in 2009, the year in which the regime of Hamid Karzai, the pro-America President of Afghanistan since 2004, was accused of huge financial corruption; Rani D. Mullen argues: 'Corruption charges against high-ranking government officials and many of Karzai's own family members continued to surface with little indication that the government was willing to address this issue' (Mullen 133). The highlighting of such a link between historical and current events is one of the most striking features of *The Great Game: Afghanistan*, especially the plays that belong to the first and second groups.

While most playwrights of *The Great Game Afghanistan* are keen to make the connections between their dramatisations of historical incidents and the present conflict detectable, having enough knowledge about the latter is crucial in order to move to such an analytical level. Otherwise, any single play may work separately to provide information

¹⁴⁷ In addition to being Amanullah's father-in-law, Mahmud Tarzi was the King's friend, consultant, and his Foreign Minister.

about a particular historical incident. However, the relationship between the events of the past and the current conflict is usually based on causality as well as resemblance. Thus, historical events that are depicted by some plays can be conceived as origins of more recent situations within other plays. By tracing the impact of historically-distant situations on the current conflict, *The Great Game: Afghanistan* accentuates one of the crucial dilemmas regarding the responsibility for Afghanistan's struggles; are they internal or external factors that have been badly damaging Afghans' lives for centuries? Both Gupta's *Campaign* and Jeffreys' *Bugles at the Gates of Jalalabad* direct the blame towards Britain's historical intrusions in two different eras. Likewise, in *Durand's Line*, Ron Hutchinson goes back to 1893 to portray the last minutes before Abdur Rahman Khan, the Amir of Afghanistan, accepts to give a sector of the North West borders of his country to British India for one hundred years. While he yields to the carrot-and-stick pressure of Sir Henry Mortimer Durand, the Foreign Minister of British India, Abdur Rahman complains of his country's fate of being the reward of a competition between Russian and British imperial ambitions. The Amir wonders: 'I'm to choose between the embrace of the Bear and the claw of the Lion?' (Hutchinson 47). However, it seems that Hawk knows how to induce the Afghan Amir to accept the British plan to re-draw the Afghani-Pakistani borderline, the British politician is not ashamed to declare: 'I'll sweeten the deal – I'll increase the subsidy we pay you and give you the monopoly of the opium trade' (Hutchinson 36). Referring to Durand's Line, the dramatic character of Najibullah in *Miniskirts of Kabul* claims: 'My country has been imagined enough. My country is the creation of foreign imaginings. The border between Pakistan and Afghanistan is an imaginary line' (Greig 2009, 130).

Ben Ockrent's *Honey* exploits a more recent historical event to forge links between the questionable American policies in Afghanistan in the period of the Cold War and the strength of international terrorists. The play depicts the American efforts to retrieve Stinger missiles, which were deployed by the United States in Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation. CIA Operative Gray Schroen asks Ahmad Shah Massoud, the Afghan Minister of Defence, to buy these missiles from the Taliban. Although Massoud shared the Taliban's resistance to the Soviet occupation, he is against their radical thoughts. Therefore, he refuses Schroen's suggestion because it will offer the Taliban a huge amount of money:

MASSOUD: You know Mullah Omar is helping the terrorists you seek to destroy.

SCHROEN: At this stage we have no evidence of any connection between terrorism and the Taliban.

MASSOUD: And of course you don't. Not when your glasses are the Pakistanis. (Ockrent 178-9)

Based on a real meeting that took place in the American Embassy in Islamabad¹⁴⁸ in 1996, the play ends by referring to 9/11 as the stage directions read: '*the projection of the two aeroplanes flying into the World Trade Centre*' (Ockrent 190). The most striking feature of Massoud's speech is that he blames the United States for its over-reliance on Pakistan.

Ockrent's play hints at Pakistan's controversial role, whether distributing American weapons or in concealing the potential threat of the Taliban. According to a large number of political studies, damaging foreign influences on Afghanistan were not confined to the direct actions of powerful countries with colonial goals. Thomas Johnson and M. Mason claim:

The United States and Saudi Arabia poured \$7.2 billion of covert aid into the jihad against the Soviets, the vast majority of which was channeled by the ISI¹⁴⁹ [...] to the most radical religious elements, deliberately marginalizing Durrani Pashtuns and those parties with a less radical, more nationalist political vision for the future of Afghanistan. (Johnson 2008, 70-1)

In *Miniskirts of Kabul*, Najibullah blames the regimes of many Muslim countries for sending extremists to his country. In addition to the main players of the Great Game such as Russia, Britain, and the United States, several Arabic and Muslim countries were influential on the course of the game. Apart from the foreign countries, Afghan leaders have been participating in the agony of their country. The image of the puppet ruler echoes in several plays of the project. In addition, most Afghan rulers within plays blame foreign countries for their own faults. In *Now is the Time*, for example, the queen challenges her husband when she declares: 'It's always the British. Or the Soviets. Point your finger in 360 degrees and you still won't see who has brought us to this' (Wilkinson 73). It does not mean, though, that the play denies any British or Soviet influences, but it precisely insists on drawing attention to the mistakes of Afghan rulers, who are represented by Amanullah. The

¹⁴⁸ Holding the meeting in the capital of Pakistan indicates the chaotic situation in Afghanistan. In addition, it hints at the American ultimate trust in the Pakistani regime.

¹⁴⁹ Inter-Services Intelligence is the Pakistani intelligence agency.

question of responsibility is always raised within the plays that comment on the consequences of the conflict rather than exploring its roots.

The cooperation between CIA and the Afghans against the Russians is portrayed as a mistake in J. T. Rogers's *Blood and Gifts*. The American playwright portrays how Abdullah, a leader of an Afghan tribe, keeps asking the American agent, Jim, for more effective weapons. A friendship gradually grows between the two men in seven years between 1981 and 1888, depicted in three scenes of Rogers's short play. At the finale, while they celebrating the defeat of the Russians, the agent informs the tribal leader that the US will retrieve the weapons. Then Abdullah declares that he will ally with the Taliban, which he denounces all the time for their radicalism, against the US Abdullah's last word in the play is 'we will cross the ocean' (Rogers 121). This unconvincingly swift and childish change in Abdullah's opinions and behavior is part of Rogers' depiction of the tribal leader, which doubts his ability to manage her men.

In the third group of plays, except for *Honey*,¹⁵⁰ the informative nature gives way to more dramatic representation, where imaginary characters represent the real victims of this conflict. Some of the first and second groups of plays also reveal the agony of both British and Russian soldiers and civilian Afghans. These texts include *Bugles at the Gates of Jalalabad* and *Black Tulips*, which can be conceived as a comment on the similar aspect of the current phase of the conflict. However, in these two plays, the atrocities of the British and the Soviet occupations are respectively mentioned, with a few exceptions, as a matter for political discussion. Put differently, we are informed about the struggle of the victims rather than watching their despondent suffering and hearing their desperate complaints. In contrast, we are provoked to sympathise with Jay, the British Sergeant in Stephens's *Canopy of Stars*, when he urges the medic to rescue one of his soldiers, who has got a deadly wound. The same can be said about Alya, the Afghan girl who recalls the last moments before her meaningless death in Wallace's *No Such Cold Thing*. However, such an emotional aspect does not mean that this third group of plays tends to be melodramatic. On the contrary, they urge the audience not only to think of several consequences of the conflict, but also to challenge it by a lot of questions, which the playwrights themselves do not answer. These questions mostly focus on the complicated situation in Afghanistan after

¹⁵⁰ Out of the five plays in the third group, Ockrent's play is the only one whose action takes place before the coalition's attack on Afghanistan in 2001. On the grounds of the unity of the entire project, *Honey* can be considered a link between the second and the third phases of the conflict.

the defeat of the Taliban. Both Richard Bean's *On the Side of the Angels* and Abi Morgan's *The Night is Darkest before the Dawn* portray the important effort of international charitable organisations to achieve Afghanistan's transition from a focus of terrorists to a safe and modernised country. Nevertheless, the plays reveal that such philanthropic actions are challenged by several difficulties.

In Bean's play, Dawood is one of the Afghan warlords who has extended his dominance over vast rural areas in order to plant poppies. Using his thugs, he seized the land of one-hundred farmers who had to wait for the arrival of Jackie and Graham, two workers in a nongovernmental organisation that provides humanitarian services to the Afghans. Although the two Britons eventually convince Dawood to allow the farmers to return to their land, he stipulates that the farmers should accept his request to marry three of their girls whose ages are ten, eleven, and twelve. While Jackie pragmatically approves this weird deal in order to save the starving farmers' lives, Graham sharply expresses his condemnation. Then she argues:

Graham, listen! You know perfectly well that there's no such thing as right and wrong in our business, there's only culture. It's not our job to impose our values. You have put your mother in an old people's home. [...] You judge them, let them judge you. You think they treat women badly, they would not even believe that a human being could sink so low, could be so vile as to abandon their own mother, ill as she is, in local [sic] authority facility, and leave the country. (Bean *On the Side*, 225)

Here, *On the Side of the Angels* suggests that there are some aspects of every culture that cannot be understood by those who belong to other cultures. However, despite Jackie's harsh critique of contradicting the Afghan traditions, the last scene reveals that the two Britons sacrificed their lives while they were trying to rescue the youngest Afghan girl. Whether Jackie had changed her opinion or she was mainly protecting her colleague, their shocking murder reveals Dawood's undisputed power.

The play draws a picture of the complicated situation in Afghanistan after the supposed defeat of the Taliban. In the first scene of the play, through an argument between Jackie and two of her co-workers in the British office of their charitable organization we realise that the Taliban is still active:

FIONA: Most NGOs have withdrawn from Taliban controlled areas. [...] Icelandic Action Alliance, quite rightly in my opinion, abandoned that school because of Taliban interference.

JACKIE: Yes, and I rescued it and kept it open.

JONATHAN: Without girls!

JACKIE: If you close that school the boys will be sent to a madrassa in Pakistan where the syllabus is Monday, all day hatred; Tuesday, automatic weapons; Wednesday, how to park a 747 in a stationary cupboard. (Bean *On the Side*, 216)

Here, we understand that the Afghans endure Dawood's brutality because he protects them from the Taliban. The fear of the Taliban's potential threat is realised in many plays.

In *No Such Cold Thing*, for example, Alya keeps warning her sister to be quiet and to wear her scarf. Similarly, in Abi Morgan's *The Night is Darkest before the Dawn*, when Omaid explains why he refuses to send his daughter to school, he claims: 'You think the Taliban has gone far? They are only a few kilometers away. Hiding across a border or in the mountain. They do not go away' (Morgan 2009, 202). However, he finally follows his leader Elmar who represents a more positive image of warlords compared to Dawood in *On the Side of the Angels*. As his conversation with the American civilian who is responsible for building a new school in Afghanistan reveals, the warlord believes in the importance of education for girls despite the danger of the Taliban:

Elmar: I'm a father. Five girls. [...]

Alex: That's a lot of wedding cake.

Elmar: You teach my girls. You make them clever. When Taliban comes back, if Taliban comes back, they know something at least. I give you money for school. Money from poppies. (Morgan 2009, 209)

As practical as Jackie in Bean's play, Alex agrees to use Elmar's money to build the school. There is a low possibility of finding a poppy-grower who believes in education for girls, let alone risking his business by challenging the Taliban. However, Morgan's play suggests that if the Taliban is invincible militarily, its thoughts can be challenged by a peaceful goal like education. Billington claims that 'the only play that sounds a note of hope is Abi Morgan's *The Night is Darkest Before the Dawn*, [...] which suggests that education and female enfranchisement will counter years of oppression' (Billington 19). The factual statistics suggest that Billington's hope is just an optimistic wish; Johnson and Mason affirm 'In Afghanistan, where the U.S. Agency for International Development has built

hundreds of schools since 2001, the Taliban burned down 1,089 from 2005 to 2007' (Johnson 2008, 65). If Abi's play is a whisper of optimism, it is subdued by loud cries of pain throughout the vast majority of the plays of the project. To give its spectators unjustified hopes is not one of *The Great Game: Afghanistan's* goals.

Neither *On the Side of the Angels* nor *The Night is Darkest before the Dawn* suggests whether the Anglo-American declaration of the Taliban's defeat was a military misjudgement or a political manoeuvre. What they mainly seek to reveal is the complicated situation in Afghanistan, which is defined by the danger of the Taliban and the prosperity of the drug trade. Although both playwrights establish their plots by imaginative dramatisation, they indirectly refer to one of the most difficult problems that challenge reform in Afghanistan. The American politician Thomas Schweich argues:

[S]ome of our NATO allies have resisted the anti-opium offensive, as has our own Defense Department, which tends to see counternarcotics as other people's business to be settled once the war-fighting is over. The trouble is that the fighting is unlikely to end as long as the Taliban can finance themselves through drugs – and as long as the Kabul government is dependent on opium to sustain its own hold on power. (Schweich B45)

Such a mess should fuel anxieties about the time needed to end this war and might increase doubts about the possibility of Afghanistan being turned into a stable country.

If *On the Side of the Angels* portrays Afghanistan as a savage place where British civilians lose their lives, *Canopy of Stars* takes a further step by doubting the viability of sending British soldiers. Because he believes in the right of the Afghan people to live in a safe country, Jay insists on returning to Afghanistan. He is proud of the role of the British army, including himself, in fighting the remnants of the Taliban. In contrast, his girlfriend considers the death of the Afghans an effective way to reduce the world's excessive populations, she argues: 'People shouldn't survive in places like that. [...] It's good. There are too many of us in the first place. We just need to decide where. And that's a good fucking place to start if you ask me. It's a hole in the bottom of the world. You should let them burn. They deserve it' (Stephens 249). Cheryl's cruel speech can be understood, to some extent, as a desperate response to her boyfriend's decision to return to Afghanistan, especially with his odd behaviour. Not only did he become haunted by the dreadful scenes of the battlefield, he also does not show any sign of yearning for either her or their boy.

Stephens's play gives both characters a chance to say what seems to be his/her last desire at the end of the last scene.

As thousands of soldiers' relatives may do, Cheryl expresses her constant fear as she begs her boyfriend to stay: 'I don't want you to go back there. Every day I think that it's going to be you they talk about on the radio as being the person the Ministry of Defence are informing the family about. I hate that feeling. It exhausts me' (Stephens 249). Jay, on the other hand, justifies his decision by recalling the struggle of Afghans, especially children. He tells his eyewitness-testimony about the mutilation of a ten-year girl whom he used to see during his visits to the village's school:

On our last afternoon there she was coming home from school when a forty year-old man stepped from out of one of the houses [...] with a water pistol in his hand and he sprayed it at Delaram. Laughed a bit. Giggled a bit. Sprayed the water pistol in her face. [...] Only what was in his water pistol, of course, wasn't water, [...] it was acid. He burnt her eyes out because she was ten and she was going to school. (Stephens 248)

Ironically, even his presence did not prevent this tragedy from happening, which supports his girlfriend's belief in the uselessness of sending the British soldiers there. The play also raises spectators' awareness of the soldiers' complaints of their country's lack of both financial and emotional appreciation. Richard, a disgruntled soldier from Oldham expresses his upset to Jay:

I've got a mate working security in the Trafford Centre gets paid five grand a year more than me. [...] last time I was at home I went out with him and a couple of his pals. You should have seen the looks on their faces. They asked me if I'd met Saddam Hussein. Straight up. They haven't got a clue, you know? (Stephens 236)

Apart from the comic effect of the question about Saddam, perhaps the playwright hints at media coverage being dominated by the War in Iraq. Richard's grievance resembles what we see in *Bugles at the Gates of Jalalabad* and *Black Tulips*.

The overall message of the thirteen-play series is that the consequences of politicians' repeated and accumulated mistakes are victims from both sides, whether civilians or soldiers; on the battlefields and at home. While most plays in the first two groups tend to contain a kind of descriptive discourse, in which information is delivered to

the audience, the vast majority of the third group's plays takes a further step by focusing on the dramatic representation of imaginary characters. The plays in the third group take advantage of the documentary material within the more historical plays, but every single play of the project adds to the essential purpose of the production overall, which mainly revolves around circulating knowledge about this highly complicated conflict. Moreover, every single play comments on the current phase of the conflict by representing a specific point in the long history of confrontations that goes back to the middle of the nineteenth century. Links between the three successive phases of great countries' interventions in Afghanistan can be specifically explored in Stephen Jeffreys' *Bugles at the Gates of Jalalabad* and David Greig's *Miniskirts of Kabul*. Naomi Wallace's *No Such Cold Thing* is representative of the third group of plays.

Repeated mistakes: *Bugles at the Gates of Jalalabad*

In *Bugles at the Gates of Jalalabad*, the British playwright Stephen Jeffreys comments on the conflict in Afghanistan by returning to the eighteenth century. The play tells the story of one of the most infamous disasters of the British Empire; while part of the British army were retreating from Kabul, more than sixteen thousands were killed, including the families of high-ranking officers and their servants. Senzil Nawid states that 'In January 1842, 4,500 British troops left Kabul for Jalalabad. Only Dr. William Bryden, a medical officer, survived the continuous attacks en route through the passes. So ended in total disaster the first British invasion of Afghanistan' (Nawid 588). However, it seems that because he focuses on the military loss, Nawid ignored that civilian victims amounted to three-fold the casualties from soldiers. In their eight-day escape, they were attacked by Afghan tribes and suffered in the tough environment of Afghanistan; Charles Morris declares that 'On the 6th of January the fatal march began,—a march of four thousand five hundred soldiers and twelve thousand camp-followers, besides women and children, through a mountainous country, filled with savage foes, and in severe winter weather' (Morris 332-3). It seems that Stephen Jeffreys chose such a huge tragedy to represent the history of Anglo-Afghan conflict; William Trousdale argues: 'The single most important event of the first Afghan War (1838-42) is the virtual destruction of the British Army in the wintry mountainous terrain between Kabul and Jelalabad [sic] in 1842' (Trousdale 26). But did Jeffreys confine his play to portray this historical incident? Put differently, to what extent does *Bugles at the Gates of Jalalabad* comment on the 2001 War in Afghanistan?

In the steps of the factual event, the play portrays a group of soldiers who stand in front of the Kabul gate of Jalalabad. By using their bugles, they endeavour to attract potential survivors. When Hendrick declares that ‘yesterday morning, the thirteen of January 1842’ (Jeffreys 17), the play defines the time of its action as taking place the day after the disaster when news of the disaster had already been delivered by William Bryden, the only one who managed to complete the journey from Kabul. Neither the number of the real buglers nor their conversations can be found in any historical writing. However, their hopeless prediction that there were more survivors is described in many historical sources. The huge scale of the disaster motivated the German novelist and poet Theodor Fontane (1819-1898) to write his poem *Das Trauerspiel von Afghanistan (The Tragedy of Afghanistan)*, in which he depicted the same situation used for Jeffreys’ play.

While it is hard to prove that Jeffreys was influenced by this poem, I can suggest two sources from which *Bugles at the Gates of Jalalabad* seems to have acquired its documentary aspect. For instance, when one of the Buglers describes the four of them as ‘Sentinels on the ramparts of Jalalabad’ (Jeffreys 18), he borrows the exact words by which Morris starts his chapter about the event: ‘The sentinels on the ramparts of Jelalabad [sic]’ (Morris 331)¹⁵¹. The other source is the diary of Lady Florentia Sale (1790 –1853), an eyewitness to the real catastrophe, who managed to write her detailed observation of the events.¹⁵² The significance of this documentary source is that Jeffreys’s play includes Lady Sale as one of its dramatic characters. The first line in the play precisely cites her introduction to the diaries: ‘It is easy to argue on the wisdom or folly of conduct after the catastrophe has taken place’ (Sale 3).¹⁵³ In his comment on Lady Sale’s introductory line, Brantley argues that the entire project suggests ‘that when it comes to the history of occupied Afghanistan, even hindsight is irrevocably blurry’ (Brantley, Web). Perhaps, but the plays are still able to warn us from repeating the same mistakes.

Documented history within dramatic structure:

Jeffreys weaves documentary materials with his imaginary dramatic structure in order to comment on the current conflict in Afghanistan and even to predict its future. One

¹⁵¹ Charles Morris’ book was first published in 1902 in Philadelphia by J.B. Lippincott Company.

¹⁵² Sale’s manuscript was published in both London and Paris in 1843.

¹⁵³ It is hard to know whether the real Lady Sale was trying to protect her diaries from a potential accusation of pedantry, or/and she was suggesting that the British political and military mistakes in Afghanistan were inevitable, or at least understandable on the grounds of the complicated circumstances there.

of the noticeable features of this fictional context is the subtle differences among the buglers. By portraying their individual responses to the same agony of defeat and desperate waiting, Jeffreys' characterisation of the buglers goes further than their common identity as soldiers. The play distinguishes Lady Sale from other characters by her location onstage, which is '*either elevated or to the side*' (Jeffreys 17). While she can hear and see others, Lady Sale is invisible and inaudible to them. This ghostlike presence emphasises the temporal/spatial distance between her and the world of the buglers. The play utilises her presence as a link between the documented facts of the historical incident and the imaginary realm of dramatic action. For the audience, because she is the only character that represents a real person, she has the authority of assuming the role of first-person narrator. In addition, as an eyewitness, she tells details about the real disaster, which the buglers did not see, especially when she describes the agony of the journey:

We are starving. My horse gnaws voraciously at a cartwheel. Nothing is satisfied for food except the pariah dogs who are gorged with eating dead camels and horses. Even some of the gentlemen are eating camel, particularly the heart. I was never tempted by these choice viands so cannot offer an opinion. (Jeffreys 20)

She also challenges the heroic image of Dr. William Bryden's survival, which was just a matter of luck as she recalls: 'A copy of Blackwood's Magazine stuffed in his forage cap cushioned a blow from an Afghan blade. The pen, for once, is mightier than the sword (Jeffreys 20). This stylistic method of utilising the adage for a pun can be considered comic relief. More importantly, it seems a bitter mockery of the military leaders' exaggerated confidence in the British army's power, which led them to be deceived by the Afghans. Although the pun fits the historical disaster, it partially hints at the current Anglo-American war. When Dickenson accuses the tribes of treason, Hendrick reveals that the British Generals started by deceiving the leaders of these tribes, which used to be British allies. This scenario is similar to the relationship between the leaders of the Taliban and the American administrations since the 1980s.

Apart from treason, the play reveals several British soldiers' misconceptions, which draw an image of the inferior Afghans by giving them derogative descriptions such as pusillanimous and treasonous. Lady Sale may seem tolerant when she denies the allegations that Afghans fear fighting by declaring that 'they show no cowardice in standing as they do

against guns without using any themselves' (Jeffreys 26). However, her arrogant attitude towards the Afghani women is another slanted judgment, which is based on her belief in the British superior civilisation. Edward Said argues that 'as [far as] the West was concerned during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, an assumption had been made that the Orient and everything in it was, if not patently inferior to, then in need of corrective study by the West' (Said 41).

The danger of such biased conceptions increases when they become part of the individual soldier's belief in his/her enemy's inferiority, especially on ethical bases. Because Winterflood believes that all the Afghans are fearful and deceitful murderers, he unnecessarily kills Afzal, a forty-year civilian Afghani. Although he peacefully interrupts the soldiers' hours of waiting, Afzal insists on reminding them of the fact that they are occupiers of his own country:

McCANN: Who are you?

AFZAL: The question is curious. You stand in a bright red coat in my country's customary snow and ask me who I am? But who are you?

McCANN: I am an admirer of simplicity. When I ask you who you are and I am the one with the rifle, you tell me. (Jeffreys 25)

Despite McCann's aggressive tone, the Afghani man does not show any sign of fear. It seems that this courage causes Winterflood to panic; he suddenly draws his bayonet and stabs Afzal. Therefore, Winterflood instantly regrets his action and keeps claiming that he 'meant something else' (Jeffreys 28). He meant to defend himself, as his earlier conversation with Dickenson reveals:

WINTERFLOOD: I will not let any Gilzye¹⁵⁴ get so close he can use a knife.

DICKENSON: Gets the fear running in your guts though, doesn't it, Winterflood?

WINTERFLOOD: I'm not afraid. (Jeffreys 23)

Affected by the British army's disaster and the desperate waiting for survivors, Winterflood's misconceptions of the Afghans generated his unjustified fear, which led him

¹⁵⁴ Winterflood means any Afghan person. The most common translation of the tribe's name is 'Ghilzai' the playwright borrows from the diary of Lady Sale, whose translation of the tribe's name as 'Gilzye' cannot be found in any other source.

to murder a guiltless civilian. In this sense, and to some extent, Winterflood's crime is similar to Monk's in *Embedded: Live*, Waller's in *Savages*, and Dai's in *The Pull of Negative Gravity*.

In contrast to the fearful situations, which soldiers have to endure, the play refers to the luxurious life of British officers of high ranks as the following dialogue reveals:

HENDRICK: Indeed. There was a Brigadier in our regiment came to the war with sixty camels bearing plate, bedding, dressing cases, Windsor soap and eau-de-cologne.

McCANN: It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God (Jeffreys 24).

Apart from the linguistic trick of playing on words, citing this biblical verse is unsurprising from McCann whose Christian religion always determines his argument. As the leader of the group, McCann has the authority to control them, but his vision of this authority extends beyond the military rules; he argues 'My authority is vested in me by my superior officers and comes through them by the grace of God' (26). Consequently, his religion defines his opinion on the Muslim Afghans; he declares: 'We call them Infidel and they say the same of us. But who is the infidel here? Which is the side of no faith? Let it not be us' (23). This claim does not mean that Jeffreys suggests the British war in Afghanistan was a religious conflict; highlighting religious discrepancy is rather one of the results of the military confrontation. Religion is one of the methods by which soldiers convince themselves of their side's rightness, especially when the politicians from both sides promote religious slogans to justify their decisions. In this sense, McCann's argument reminds me of the sixteenth-century using of the word 'infidel' by the leaders of the Ottoman Empire and European states in order to denounce each other. More recently, the Taliban's claim of a 'holy war' against the alleged 'Crusade' intentionally recycles the same religion-based means of 'legitimation' and 'mobilisation'.

A retrievable myth: warning from future disasters

Jeffreys utilises the idea of the prophecy in order to link between the historical event and the current war in Afghanistan. While they are waiting for more survivors, the buglers repeat rumours about a Brigadier called Dennie, who warned the General earlier: 'They are all massacred, every soul - [...] Every soul but one. And he shall come to bring news of the

death of every other soul' (Jeffreys 17). Similarly, Lady Sale assures the mythic explanation of the disaster when she cites lines of *Hohenlinden*, a poem written by the Scottish poet Thomas Campbell (1777 –1844) that reads:

Few, few shall part where many meet
The snow shall be their winding sheet:
And every turf beneath their feet
Shall be a soldier's sepulchre. (Jeffreys 24)

These exact lines are mentioned in Lady Sale's diaries as a forewarning before the journey to Jalalabad; she states 'I found [...] Campbell's Poems, which opened at Hohenlinden [sic]; and, strange to say, one verse actually haunted me day and night: [...] I am far from being a believer in presentiments; but this verse is never absent from my thoughts' (Sale 227).

It seems that the gloomy shadow of Campbell's lines inspired Jeffreys to precede Sale's by Hendrick's singing of part of an English folk lyric story:

To heal my lovesick passion
If you'll consent with me to go
I'll roll you in my morning cloak
And bring you home to Easter snow. (Jeffreys 24)

The origin of the lyrics, according to Roger Renwick, is 'Easter Snow', which is a variant of the popular English ballad *The Bold Fisherman* where the fisherman's offer to roll the maid in his 'morning' cloak reveals his sexual intention to seduce her (Renwick 27-28). The joyful image of Easter snow at home contradicts the harmful snow in Afghanistan, which was one of the factors leading to the disaster, which Campbell's verse predicted. However, this mythic atmosphere does not prevent *Bugles at the Gates of Jalalabad* from seeking a rational explanation for the disaster. In contrast, the playwright utilises the notion of prophecy in order to give his prediction of the upcoming consequences of the ongoing conflict. But before reflecting on the future, the play underlines some similarities between the historical event and the current war.

Because of its tremendous number of victims, the vast majority of which were civilians, the massacre of 1882 seems to be comparable to the situation in 2009. Therefore, when the soldiers attempt to define who is responsible for the disaster, their comments echo

a very tiny part of what has been being proposed throughout the Anglo-American media since 2001 in order to trace the reason for the coalition's growing number of casualties:

McCANN: Who is to blame?

HENDRICK: The politicians who put them there –

DICKENSON: The dithering, numbskull Generals –

WINTERFLOOD: The cowards in the ranks –

McCANN: The bloodthirsty, deceitful enemy. (Jeffreys 18-19)

Moreover, when the play starts to debate some of these possible answers, the playwright takes a further step towards revealing the similarity between the historical and ongoing wars. This discussion is dominated by Hendrick who, unlike his colleagues, does not deceive himself by accusing the merciless enemy. Instead, Hendrick identifies the core of the problem, claiming: 'And we wake up to the fact that we are stuck in a country we do not understand upholding a puppet king nobody wants' (22). When Hendrick's refusal of his colleagues' prejudice leads him to criticise the British presence in Afghanistan, the play focuses on the crucial role of such misconceptions as reasons for the British occupation. If we read Jeffreys' play in the context of the relationship between the plays of *The Great Game Afghanistan*, we can realise that both *Black Tulips* and *Miniskirts of Kabul* suggest that both the Russian invasion and the American action against it were claimed by the two powerful countries as an attempt to extricate Afghanistan from its troubles. Such claims imply a condemnatory image of the helpless Afghan people.

When Hendrick claims that the weak king was a reason for the Afghans' uprising against the British army, we are invited to reflect on the repeated uprisings against the pro-coalition Afghan president. In his exploration of the reasons for growing Afghan rebellions since 2005, Seth Jones argues that 'U.S. and Afghan efforts failed to prevent the rise of an insurgency in that country. [...] The newly established interim government was too weak to provide essential services or security to most of the country, especially rural areas' (Jones 37).

However, the message of *Bugles at the Gates of Jalalabad* extends beyond drawing our attention to such resemblances between the First Anglo-Afghan War (1839 to 1842) and the Anglo-American invasion in 2001. Most importantly, the play suggests that because the mistakes are repeatable, the future of the current conflict can be seen through the historical disaster. Before he devises the consequences of the disaster, Hendrick insists

on the unique geographic and demographic aspects of Afghanistan as crucial factors in the British defeat; he describes ‘This country is a death-trap for foreign armies. The narrow defiles, the paths through the mountains. Sixty Afghan tribesmen, hiding on the tops of ridges with their long rifles can take out a battalion’ (Jeffreys 22). Using the phrase ‘foreign armies’ rather than saying British army suggests the references to the current war. Conceiving the disaster as an inevitable result of initial mistakes enables Hendrick to produce his own prophecy of the future:

I am here, we are all here, because of a mistake. [...] There was a mistake. [...] The war will become more expensive. We, here in Jalalabad, must be relieved. Then our enemy must be punished. [...] Then all us soldiers must be got out, evacuated. Leaving the country in a worse state than you found it. (Jeffreys 27-28)

Unlike Dennie’s prediction of the disaster, Hendrick’s prevision cannot occur within the imaginary realm of the play. On the other hand, for the audience of the play, the future of the British war in Afghanistan is part of the history, which affirms that the British army withdrew from Afghanistan to leave the country in a very bad condition. The play highlights this fictional prophecy/historical fact as a warning of what can be worse in the Anglo-American coalition in the 2000s. This message could not be communicated without the play’s emphasis on the similarity between the past and present wars. While *Bugles at the Gates of Jalalabad* suggests that both foreign countries and Afghan accomplices repeated similar policies in Afghanistan, observing history suggests that, apart from the historical gap between British, Soviet, and American interventions, their consequences intersect and collectively reproduce disastrous situations in Afghanistan and affect the entire world. Such an interactional relationship defines *Miniskirts of Kabul*’s depiction of historical events in order to comment on the ongoing coalition’s war in Afghanistan.

Repeated mistakes are mutual and connected: *Miniskirts of Kabul*

By focusing on the Russian/American indirect competition over Afghanistan, which shaped the end of the Cold War, *Miniskirts of Kabul* suggests that the history of Afghanistan was a series of political and military mistakes. Greig’s play goes further by suggesting that historical mistakes, whether committed by internal or external sides, have influenced the current conflict. In the play, an unidentified British Writer imagines her

meeting with Najibullah, the president of Afghanistan during the Russian occupation of his country, which ‘destroyed many Afghan provinces, and caused 50,000 Soviet and over 1.2 million Afghan casualties’ (Westad 49). Unlike most puppet-rulers, he managed to stay in power for almost four years without Soviet military support. According to Lansford, ‘the majority of international observers expected the Najibullah regime to fall in the immediate aftermath of the Soviet withdrawal’ (Lansford 2003, 136). Najibullah’s political ambition took the priority over the stability and security of his country. He refused all demands to step down, regardless of the disastrous consequences of his persistence. In April 1992, just a few days before the removal of Najibullah, Amin Saikal argued:

Of course, no progress is possible while the illegitimate government of Najibullah holds sway in Kabul. The sooner that this regime, a tragic legacy of Soviet communism and the Cold War, is removed from the scene, the better it will be for both the Afghans and the region as a whole. (Saikal 102)

Although his secular project to modernise Afghanistan enhanced education and women’s rights, Najibullah’s reforms were opposed by the vast majority of the Afghans, especially in the rural districts, because these reformative measures did not consider either the Afghans’ traditions or religion. Therefore, even after the Russian withdrawal, as Phillip Corwin declares, ‘The Mujahidin saw Najib[ullah] as a Soviet puppet, and even worse, a godless atheist ruling a devout Muslim country’ (Corwin 2). The large number of civilian victims of his mistakes suggests that he is one of the most brutal leaders in the history of Afghanistan. All these elements justify the Writer’s decision to imagine meeting Najibullah. Put differently, the play used him as a dramaturgical device to reveal the links between 1990s and 2000s.

Laws of imagination: presentation defines reception

As the stage directions state, this imaginary meeting is supposed to be held just two days before Najibullah’s death, at ‘The United Nations Compound, Kabul, 26 September 1996’ (Greig 2009, 123). In this trans-decade meeting the Writer’s imagination went back from the actual night of production in 2009 to the time of the dramatic action. Therefore, when the narration of historical events reaches the day of the interview, Najibullah exploits

the Writer's privilege of belonging to the present time to know the rest of his story. His last words eagerly ask her about his fate. She responds:

This morning. September 27th 1996 Kabul falls to the Taliban. [...] The Taliban capture you. They beat you. They castrate you. They tie your dying body to a jeep and drive round the compound pulling you behind them in the dirt. Finally they take you to a busy road junction where they hang you from a concrete lamp post. They put money in your pocket and stuff cigarettes in your mouth as a symbol of your decadence. (Greig 2009, 144-5)

While the Writer is recalling what she knows about the historical incidents, Najibullah does not comment on his future/death. This description of extreme brutality suggests that terrorists' violence and hatred are not an exceptional attitude towards Westerners or Christians. In addition, the gruesome disfigurement of his corpse draws our attention to the Taliban's deviation from the rules of Islam.¹⁵⁵

Because the entire discourse of the play is an internal dialogue within the Writer's mind, the lines of the two characters are not preceded by their names in the printed text. Theatrically, this imaginary aspect influences both the elements of performance and the process of reception. The repeated insistence on the imaginary nature of the dramatic action frees the play from the restrictions of realistic representation. Throughout the play, visual and audible theatrical elements immediately respond to verbal speeches as if it is a fantasy world. As soon as they are mentioned, things such as a bottle of whisky, a woman's skirt, and torchlight appear. These moments of revealing theatrical artifice challenge the dramatic illusion in order to draw spectators' attention, inviting them to the political discourses that accompany these moments. The play also exploits nonverbal sound effects in order to highlight particular lines of characters' speeches. Before the play affirms that the interview is just an imaginary conversation with a dead man, it hints at his death by a slip of the Writer's tongue:

WRITER: Imagining what it was like to be you.
NAJIBULLAH: Was?
WRITER: Is. I mean 'is.'
A shell lands nearby. (Greig 2009, 130-1)¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵Islam, just like all religions and human norms, insists on respecting dead bodies, even those of enemies, by burying them as soon as possible. Any sort of humiliating a corpse is considered a big sin.

¹⁵⁶The names of characters are added for the sake of clarification.

These offstage explosions are partly utilised to denote the constant threat of the Taliban fighters. Towards the finale, the gradual increase of the noises denotes their successful attack on the army of Masood.¹⁵⁷ In addition, throughout the play, Greig employs these audible elements at specific moments as a method of highlighting the last line of speech. For example, while Najibullah starts to tell the Writer about the historical mistakes that led his country to its present miserable situation, the backstage noises prevent him from proceeding:

NAJIBULLAH: We Afghans always make the same mistake.

WRITER: What mistake?

NAJIBULLAH: We always –
A massive explosion nearby. (Greig 2009, 128)

Cutting the flow of the conversation intentionally leaves the Writer's question without answer, which invites us to trace such mistakes within Najibullah's speeches throughout the interview. Moreover, to involve the audience within this game of imagination, Greig turns what is supposed to be part of his stage directions into a character's speech:

WRITER: Perhaps you could begin by describing where we are?

NAJIBULLAH: You know where we are.

WRITER: Yes but pretend I don't know. Paint me a picture.

NAJIBULLAH: We are in the reception room of the guest house in the United Nations compound. You can see all this with your own eyes.

WRITER: I want to see it with your eyes. (Greig 2009, 127)

Initially, Najibullah's description seems like a dramatic trick to inform spectators about the scene where the action of the play occurs, but when he continues to tell the Writer about the offstage yard with its pool and trees, the play reveals its intention to establish the rules of imagination that will frame the two characters of the interview and define the audience's relationship with each character. Here, the members of the audience share the position of the Writer; both are listeners to Najibullah's discourse. Thus, the audience is positioned to identify itself with the Writer, who supposedly belongs to her time, against Najibullah, who

¹⁵⁷ He is an absent character that refers to Ahmad Shah Massoud, the main character in Ben Ockrent's *Honey*. Because Massoud fought against the Soviet occupation of his country, he was one of Najibullah's rivals. However, both were enemies of the Taliban. Therefore, Massoud's defeat means that Najibullah should expect the arrival of Islamist militias.

represents the other culture and era. Consequently, when Najibullah advises the Writer to read Peter Hopkirk's book *The Great Game*, the play indirectly encourages its spectators to broaden their knowledge about the history of Afghanistan. Such knowledge is important to recognise the cultural misapprehensions, which create and justify the conflict.

Individual mistakes represent an international conflict

Najibullah's replies to the Writer's questions are full of references to historical incidents. However the play does not reduce the character of Najibullah to a source for informative discourse. He is not a character in a tribunal play, who gives testimony. By highlighting some facts from his private life, the playwright portrays Najibullah as an individual who, to some extent, may win respect and sympathy from the British and American audiences. For instance, as a self-made person, he successfully utilised education in order to challenge the difficulties of being a member of an underprivileged social class. The play also refers to Najibullah's stand against reactionary movements, when he declares: 'we had to fight to defend the future – because the conservatives, the mullahs – they wanted to keep Afghanistan in the past' (Greig 2009, 132). However, these positive traits are challenged by the play's profound exploration of his character, which in turn exposes concealed aspects of the conflict. Gradually, this constant process of shifting the narrative from Najibullah's life to the political and military conflict and vice versa suggests that what may seem personal mistakes can end up destroying the lives of thousands. Najibullah's own statements replace the false image of the saviour of his people with the more realistic picture of a disguised savage, whose modernity is limited to wearing western suits instead of traditional Afghan clothes. To give some examples of Najibullah's declarations of his crimes, the following dialogue shows his dictator attitude:

WRITER: Did you kill anybody?

NAJIBULLAH: Once. [...] I killed another student during an argument.

WRITER: What were you arguing about?

NAJIBULLAH: I don't remember. [...]

WRITER: Why did you kill him?

NAJIBULLAH: To prove the point. (Greig 2009, 132-3)

This cruel behaviour, even before he occupied any official job, is consistent with his later brutality when he became the head of the secret police:

WRITER: How many people did you kill? [...]
 NAJIBULLAH: With my own hands or by my order?
 WRITER: With your own hands.
 NAJIBULLAH: Not many. A few. [...] I don't remember.
 WRITER: How many by your order?
 NAJIBULLAH: A few thousand. (Greig 2009, 135-6)

Such atrocities are enough to disprove his claims to assume the role of the moderniser and civilised politician. But why does Najibullah confess to these crimes? For Najibullah, Afghans are not able to have a democratic regime—a typical discourse of all dictatorships—as he claims: ‘Democracy is not a possibility for us. It is not desirable for us. It may never be possible for us’ (Greig 2009, 143). The end of the play suggests that Najibullah’s murderers had suffered from his previous crimes. When the Writer informs him about his brutal death, she tells him that ‘most reports say they are Taliban foot soldiers. The Taliban general had lost a father and a brother to your secret service who had pushed them out of a helicopter. Imagine what it’s like to be pushed out of a helicopter’ (Greig 2009, 145). The play emphasises how the violent practices of authoritarian regimes play a crucial role in creating more violent responses.

Preoccupied by his incessant ambition to repossess power, the play focuses on Najibullah’s baseless invented cocoon of hope, which will be proven too feeble to protect him from his horrible destiny. Even, at the crucial moment of his life when he expected the Taliban fighters to arrive, he wasted the last opportunity to escape. The Writer declares: ‘Some reports say that in the last hours before dawn your old enemy Ahmed Shah Masood comes to the UN compound and offers to take you to safety in the north. You refuse’ (Greig 2009, 144). He thought that he would deceive the Taliban fighters if he only changed his Western appearance. Therefore, he ‘*takes off his suit and shirt. He dresses in Afghan clothes, an Afghan waistcoat*’ (Greig 2009, 144). This chameleonic behaviour suggests that his secular project of reformation was just a pretext to get the Russian shelter. Najibullah’s story is a chapter of the same repeated mistakes of the three great powers, namely Britain, Russia, and the US.

Greig’s play significantly reveals one of the most repeated misconceptions of all Western interventions in Afghanistan, which is the supposition that a puppet ruler can be accepted, especially if he is tough, seems to regulate Western misconception. Here, a series of ‘metaphorical parallelism[s]’ can be drawn, where a long history of Afghan puppets are created by British, Russian, and American occupations. Because of its colonial history,

Britain's puppets outnumber those made by the other two great powers. Seán Lang explains:

The British were afraid that the Russians were going to invade India through Afghanistan, so they sent an army into Kaboul and put their own man in charge, a hapless character called Shah Sujah. The Afghans knew a British puppet when they saw one. [...] When the British finally did retreat, the Afghans shot them to pieces. Then they did the same to Shah Sujah. [...] Invasions of Afghanistan have a habit of going badly wrong. The British imposed another government in 1878 and the Afghans overthrew that one too. (Lang 306)

Karzai is described as an American puppet not only by his political foes, but also by Western media, including those of the United States. In February 2009, he was asked by Dan Rather, the Anchor from CBS News: 'Someone who knows Afghanistan, loves Afghanistan said, "Nothing speaks 'puppet' more than being guarded by U.S. bodyguards." Do you agree with that?' (ctd. in Chan, web).

Hawk, the British politician in *Campaign* reveals Karzai's pretension of asking NATO occupation to leave. Hawk argues: 'You think that Karzai means it? Of course he doesn't, Taliban knocking on his front door – no way! He wants us to stay' (Gupta 61). Likewise, Najibullah could not expand his power to rural areas. He even deceptively declared that he asked the Russians to withdraw, as both the history and Greig's play suggest. Nothing proves the fragility of puppet rulers more than their insistence on keeping the occupation because if they lose its support they will be overthrown or killed.

When poetry creates a virtual world: *No Such Cold Thing*

When Alya and Meena, the thirteen and fourteen-year Afghan girls, meet in the first moment of the play we realise the difference between their appearance; as the stage directions read '*ALYA, wearing a burka, [...] MEENA is wearing a headscarf covering her hair, and a long coat, covering her more Western-style dress*' (Wallace *No Such Cold Thing*, 253). Then they start to cite lines from Faiz's verse:

MEENA: Hedgehog? Is it you, Hedgehog? Alya, is it you?

ALYA: (*Quotes.*) 'He is the lord of sleep/lord of peace/lord of night' MEENA: (*Quotes.*) 'on whose arm your hair is lying.' (Wallace *No Such Cold Thing* 253)

It seems that the Pakistani poet's verse acts like a secret code, a password that enables them to recognise each other. But if Alya's burka prevents Meena from recognising the former, why does the latter need to introduce herself by such a poetic identification? When they quarrel about Meena's stealing of Faiz's collection of poems, we learn more about the two girls:

ALYA: You stole it when you left. That was our one book of verse that Uncle Khan brought back from his studies in Pakistan.
 MEENA: What do you care if I took it? You don't like Faiz.
 ALYA: But I like to read. Mother taught us from that book.
 (Wallace *No Such Cold Thing* 253)

Apart from the significant role of this book of poetry in their life, they are two sisters who did not meet for several years because Meena travelled to England with their father. Now she has returned just to take her younger sister to what seems a heaven compared to their own country. Later we discover that the sisters did not easily identify each other because both are dead, victims of an American raid. Before revealing such a shocking turn of events, the play utilises Meena's supposed absence to highlight the calamitous situation in Afghanistan under the rule of the Taliban, especially for women.

Compared to the vast majority of the Afghan girls, Alya is lucky because her mother is a teacher, but with the absence of her father, who is supposedly in England with Meena, both the younger sister and her mother have to suffer. Alya recalls 'We've been alone, mother and I, and outside, the Taliban. We cannot leave the house. Mother had to stop her teaching; she is forbidden to work. Uncle Khan keeps us alive with scraps from his table' (Wallace *No Such Cold Thing*, 255). Although Alya is the younger, she is more aware of the restrictions that should rule girls' behavior under the authority of the Taliban. Meena's absence prevented her from realising the hell her younger sister had to get used to. Therefore, Alya reminds her sister 'We have no one to travel with us. If the Taliban see us travelling alone, they'll beat us' (Wallace *No Such Cold Thing*, 254). Instead of rushing towards the taxi that will take them to the airport, where their father waits, Alya starts a series of stories that inform her sister, and the audience, about her life while her sister was abroad. Understandably, the Taliban's brutality is the centre of her speech; she recalls:

Fauzia was walking with her father to see family. It was two years ago. She had on her best shoes and they made a click, click, click. Not loud but too loud. The Virtue Police heard Fauzia clicking and they shot her. [...] Our cousin Nargis laughed too loud at the market and the Virtue Police hit her and now she is missing three front teeth and is ugly. Girls are not allowed to go outside at all. I'm forbidden to learn to read and write. (Wallace *No Such Cold Thing*, 255)

Alya tells these stories not only to complain about the situation under the Taliban, but also in order to warn her sister of their punishment. In addition, Alya's speech indirectly accuses her sister of betrayal because she did not share her suffering. Later, Alya obviously blames her sister and father for leaving her as she declares: 'You left us to rot. Father left us to rot' (Wallace *No Such Cold Thing*, 264). Nevertheless, at scattered moments, Alya looks as if she has adapted to this kind of life, or is at least pretending that she is happy. Moreover, she tries to assume the role of the wise sister whose experience allows her to advise Meena, and she even punishes her sister for breaching the Taliban's rules about women's appearances and behaviour:

MEENA: I've been held in the arms. Of a man.

ALYA slaps her sister's face.

MEENA touches the sting with her hand.

ALYA: You are dirty. You are disrespectful. You shame me. You shame father. *MEENA just stares at her sister.* Tell me more. [...] Did he squeeze your boobs? (Wallace *No Such Cold Thing*, 257)

As adolescents in Afghanistan, Alya was forced to forget, if not to hate the fact that she is on the threshold of womanhood. Naturally, she is curious about the world of men, which should be more available to her sister. Therefore, she cannot hide her eagerness to know more about what she has just considered immoral. Nevertheless, she is still obsessed with the fear of punishment; she declares 'You've been touched by a man not of your family. That's a death sentence for you here. Whore. Whore' (Wallace *No Such Cold Thing*, 257). Alya's hesitation reflects her contradictory feelings towards her sister; a mixture of jealousy and fear of the Taliban. While Alya is burdened by years of oppression, Meena's alleged living in England makes her optimistic. Gradually, the older encourages her sister to air her wishes and think of what they will be able to do when they return to Afghanistan in the future; they express their dreams loudly:

ALYA: We'll come back here when we're teachers?
 MEENA: Yes. And we'll teach in the daylight. And girls will be allowed to go to school.
 ALYA: And we'll scrape, scrape the paint from the windows.
 MEENA: And we'll open our doors, skip out any time,
 ALYA: And we won't need a man to be with us.
 MEENA: And we can click and shout as loud as...
 ALYA: cannons! And we can eat till our bellies are round...
 MEENA: as buckets!
 ALYA: And we'll have radio and singing
 MEENA: and so many apples we can fill our mouths
 ALYA: till they burst! (Wallace *No Such Cold Thing*, 257)

These simple rights, which do not need to be even asked for in any Western society, compose what seems the long petition for women's demands in the era of the Taliban. However, their daydream is interrupted by the appearance of Sergio, the American soldier in his twenties, who does not realise that he was sleeping on the springs of a grave-like bed without a mattress. From this moment, we gradually discover that the three characters are already dead. That explains why the two girls and the American soldier are altogether in a desert.

Meena, the poor Afghan girl that has never actually been to England, and Sergio, the American soldier in the battlefield away from home, are reluctant to accept the fact of their death. The most striking point of their denial is that they do not claim to be alive as they were at the moment of their death; they talk about their dream rather than reality. In contrast, Alya, who deals with her death as a matter of fact, helps them to remember the last minutes of their lives:

SERGIO: I got drunk last night. In my home town bar. With Kubick, Tony, Mike and. With Kubick, Tony, Mike and... (*Shouts.*)
 Mama? Wake up. Come in here. [...]
 ALYA: There were twenty of you, maybe thirty. We raised our arms. (Wallace *No Such Cold Thing*, 267-8)

Thus, Alya drags Sergio from dream to reality to make him remember that what he alleged as the names of his friends in his home town are actually those of the soldiers, who accompanied him when they broke into the sisters' house. Similarly, Meena still adheres to her dream of studying in England:

ALYA: You didn't go to England. We can't even speak English.

MEENA: But we are speaking English.

ALYA: Yes. Father and Mother would be impressed.

MEENA: Father is waiting at the airport. We've come back to get you. We're going to university!

ALYA: We've never left our village. [...] What is real is that we are usually hungry. We are usually afraid. We are usually more hungry than afraid for years now. [...] We dream of escaping the Taliban, of going to England, of you and father leaving first, of your coming back to get us. (Wallace *No Such Cold Thing*, 272)

It is part of theatrical tradition that dramatic characters usually speak the language of their spectators, regardless of the place and the time of the action. Here, Wallace intentionally refers to the fact that the sisters who are deprived of going to school cannot speak English. Eventually, Alya succeeds in getting them involved in representing the incident that led to their death. Frightened of the soldiers, both sisters ran. While Alya distractedly fell in a well, Meena was shot by Sergio after he repeatedly asked her to stop. Finally, while he was leaving with the other soldiers, their car hit a ground-emplaced mine. All survived except him. Similar to thousands of stories about the death of both soldiers and civilians, many of which are even more poignant, this story is weaved through Wallace's poetic images, which are full of bitter ironies. For instance, as the last moments of the play reveals, the bodies of these dramatic characters are tucked in three sand bags. In addition, to explain why she wears Sergio's boots, Alya declares:

Your friends are unharmed but you fly up in the air, high, high, and your boots fly off your feet, one with a foot still attached and Uncle sees your boots lying a hundred feet from your body. He throws your boots in the well to hide them. He is afraid the village will be blamed. He doesn't even know I'm down there. (Wallace *No Such Cold Thing*, 271)

The main focus of the play, though, is on revealing their real life rather than the way they died. The connotation of Alya wearing Sergio's boots extends both the emotion behind this description and the earlier comic effect of her stumbling movement on large boots. It is the link between their unnecessary deaths.

After we become aware of the siblings' deaths, we realise that all Alya's memories about her poor life describe Meena's struggle as well. Even the latter's adventure of being touched by a man, which was a reason for Alya's envy, is proven to be a moment of pain;

the man was Sergio who tried to get his bullet out of her neck, while she was dying. However, as a teenager, she is as excited as her sister to ask him:

MEENA: Am I pretty? (*Beat.*) Were we pretty? My sister and I.
 SERGIO: You were just kids.
 MEENA: But if we had grown up? [...]
 SERGIO: Well, I wouldn't kicked you out of bed, that's for sure.
 MEENA: Bastard. (*Beat.*) Thank you. (Wallace *No Such Cold Thing* 274)

Although she is aware of her death, Meena is glad to be flattered by her killer. Considering their short tough life, such words of praise should mean a lot for the two Afghan girls. Yet, the most striking aspect of the sisters' lives is their utopian imagined world, in which they experience an alternative life. If reading books is the way in which Ali, the young Iraqi man in Wallace's *The Retreating World*, escapes his suffering under Saddam's political dictatorship, poetry is the refuge in which the mother of Meena and Alya protects their hope from being stolen by the religious tyranny of the Taliban. Meena, Alya, and their parents are victims of both sides of the military conflict, the Taliban and the coalition. They are just like Omaid in *The Night is Darkest before the Dawn* who watched his brother's punishment for his insistence on teaching Afghan girls. He recalls:

They tied his arms to one truck, his legs to another. They disembowelled him. They made the people watch and then the footballers come on. Kicking the ball, his guts still on the ground. The Taliban with the guns, shouting at them 'keep your head up...keep watching. Don't look down...Watch the game.' (*Tapping the side of his head.*) I will be watching that game all my life. (Morgan 2009, 202-3)

However, the arrival of the coalition did not end his agony because his pregnant wife and two of his sons were killed by the American bombs.

Sergio in Wallace's play is not a victim of the land mine planted by the Taliban only; as an unemployed young man, who cannot afford to resume his study at the university, he chose to join the army for money, and went to Afghanistan.¹⁵⁸ Instead of returning to achieve his dream, he is dead in the desert, away from his mother's French toast and the oak tree

¹⁵⁸ Sergio is just like Dai in *The Pull of Negative Gravity*, Danny in *Motortown*, and Jen in *Embedded: Live*, who joined the army in order to get money.

outside his window. *No Such Cold Thing* says nothing new about the history of the conflict, but Wallace's play turns the theoretical discourse about the conflict into live world occupied by dramatic characters whose simple dreams are crushed before losing their lives to what seems to be endless conflict. Does Wallace seek to comment on the conflict by sending a message of despair? Does the play suggest that the death is the best possible end of the characters' agony? Is it a declaration of despair as no justice in this world? Or, it is a mystical escape from what seems unliveable reality? The play urges us to recognise the unretrievable victims from both sides as precious losses of unnecessary disputes, not as the obligatory casualties of unavoidable conflicts. Neither killed civilians nor soldiers are abstract numbers on the wars' bills; they are human beings whose dreams will never come true, whose families and friends have no chance to see them anymore. However, we should be optimistic; in the context of its overall purpose, *The Great Game: Afghanistan* insists on the fact that, as long as there are questions to be asked, answers will be found. Then mistakes can be unrepeatable.

Documentary material within imaginary plots: the ethical borders

Unlike tribunal or Verbatim plays, an imaginary plot is supposedly the playwright's invention. However, the parallels between historical information and invented speeches sometimes raises questions about the limits of using, modifying, or even contradicting documented facts. The form of interview in Grieg's *Miniskirts of Kabul* enabled the play to include documentary information, whether pertinent to the Afghan ex-president's private life or his political career that should be reflected on the conflict. For the audience, this information can be obtained through Najibullah's answers to the Writer's questions such as: 'Where were you born? [...] When did you become interested in politics?' (Greig 2009, 131). In addition, the Writer, herself, directly refers to some facts in order to induce his comments; she declares: 'You became an assistant to the party leader. [...] You went to University to study medicine' (Greig 2009, 132). In both cases, her questions and hints are followed by Najibullah's announcement. Although the bulk of this information can be considered as documented fact, there are some more speculative happenings such as Najibullah's declarations about torturing or killing people. The problem of *Miniskirts of Kabul* is that these Najibullah's negative features are revealed by his own speeches within the interview form, which suggests that they are as factual as documented historical incidents. Moreover, in her last monologue, where the Writer explains how Najibullah was

killed and who, exactly killed him, she uses the phrase ‘Some reports say’. When there are contradictory versions of the story she refers to them but, ultimately, she prefers one version explaining: ‘Some reports say [...] but most reports say’. In addition, and most importantly, when the Writer needs to guess Najibullah’s reaction to the Taliban torture, she declares: ‘No one wrote it down. I imagine you fought. You spent four years lifting weights. You were a boxer. They called you the ox. I imagine you fought’ (Greig 2009, 144-5). This precise attitude suggests that every single piece of information within the play should be a matter of fact. Greig’s play might be defended on the grounds of its insistence on the imaginary nature of the interview. What rebuts this claim is that some spectators may fail to distinguish invented yet plausible incidents or information from the narration of historical events. As a result, the former will get undeserved credibility.

Speculation seems to be a challenge that topical and historical drama must face. Throughout *The Great Game: Afghanistan*, playwrights deal with alleged incidents in different ways. To give an example, the disputed responsibility of Amanullah for his father’s assassination is one of the most debatable matters in the history of Afghanistan; as Fraser-Tytler explains: ‘By some it was attributed to political motives; by others to a plot hatched within the ruling family itself for private reasons and connived at if not instigated by the Amir’s third son Amanullah’ (Fraser-Tytler 192). This incident is portrayed in both *Now is the Time* and *Campaign*. In the former, Wilkinson nearly adopts Fraser-Tytler’s description because the play tends to accuse Amanullah. Nevertheless, it is indecisive. To prove the soon-to-be-king’s role in killing his father, Wilkinson utilises another speculation about Amanullah’s agreement with the rebels, in which he survives at the expense of his father-in-law’s life. It is very important to realize that once this agreement is mentioned by the queen, her father recalls the old rumors:

TARZI: Some said you had your father killed. [...]

AMANULLAH: I did not kill my father. [...] it was the British.

[...]

SORAYA: It wasn’t the British in that room today, signing my father’s death warrant, was it? It was you. (Wilkinson 72-3)

While Amanullah denies the charge of patricide, his wife persists to accuse him of a more recent betrayal. On the other hand, Amanullah’s defence is still reasonable to some extent. For the audience, when Amanullah accuses the British of murdering his father, his claim can be supported by several historical incidents and speculations that suggest the great

countries' interferences in the ruling of Afghanistan. In terms of his alleged treason of Tarzi, Amanullah does not deny his deal with the leaders of the revolution, but he describes it as a kind of political tactic, claiming: 'I negotiated, to buy us time, to form a plan. Tarzi, you know how it is, we say things. I would never betray you' (Wilkinson 72). It is understood that the king addresses Tarzi as a politician, who is supposed to be familiar with political tricks. A more objective depiction of the incident can be found in *Campaign*, where Gupta equally introduces both accusation and vindication. Although the defendant is not one of the dramatic characters, Professor Khan, the specialist in the history of Afghanistan, is present to answer Hawk's questions:

HAWK: Was he involved, you think? In the assassination?

KHAN: Some believe he was – others blame the British, the Soviets, Habibullah's brother Nasrullah...there's nothing conclusive.

HAWK: What do *you* think?

KHAN: Amanullah was ambitious, maybe the best placed to seize power, that's all. Suspicion was always likely to fall on him.

HAWK: But in your opinion, he *wasn't* involved?

KHAN: Yes that is my opinion and it's what I say in my book.
(Gupta 54-5)

The word 'involved' seems precise because, just like many aspects of the conflict, this assassination could be a result of the cooperation of different sides, including the two great European countries. But what is the significance of such a debatable issue that prompted commentary by two playwrights? Is it just to inform spectators about the history of Afghanistan? Although this incident appears to be irrelevant to the invasion of 2001, its connection to the overall meaning of *The Great Game: Afghanistan* can be seen from two perspectives; in terms of the dichotomy of internal/external responsibility for Afghanistan's problems, this incident is one among identical cases in other plays, *Campaign* included. In addition, regardless of the playwrights' own opinions on the ongoing conflict, they refer to one of the toughest obstacles of dealing with the available information about this conflict, which is uncertainty. For spectators who came away puzzled that they could not decide on a point of view, it is a way to tell them that they have the right to be confused; it is a really thorny conflict that deserves much more thinking. Simultaneously, those who naively understood the conflict as a simple confrontation between good and evil are encouraged to deepen their thinking and reconsider their view.

Chapter Five

Israeli-Palestinian conflict: controversial plays comment on a complicated dispute

Compared to the large number of British and American plays that comment on the invasion of Iraq and the war in Afghanistan, the Anglo-American playwrights' responses to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute are noticeably few. Unlike the case of the other two locations of conflict, neither Britain nor the US has had a direct military confrontation, which may account for such a phenomenon. However, it seems that the controversial nature of the conflict itself may account for playwrights' reluctance to write about it.¹⁵⁹

With decades of historical, geographical, religious and political writings and media coverage, several old questions have not been answered yet. It would be enough to ask, for example, whose land is it? Each side produces its elaborate answers for every single question, but the discrepancy between these answers is no less baffling than the depth of the conflict. It is unlikely, nearly impossible, that a play attempts to comment on the conflict without being accused of bias from one side. However, as the first chapter of this thesis suggests, the increasing power of Hamas has had a big influence on the conflict since the middle of the 1990s. Many playwrights such as Toni Kushner, David Hare, Naomi Wallace, and David Greig, were keen to visit the most disputed land in order to know more about the conflict. Commenting on the effect of his visit to Palestine, Greig argues: 'Politics has changed, and after my experiences in Palestine, I had changed. I was no longer satisfied with letting my work simply exist and not questioning whether it was helping or hindering the powers shaping our lives' (Greig 2007, 212-13).

Because of the significant role of the conflict on the Western confrontations with Muslim and Arabic countries, some playwrights refer to it within their plays, in which they comment on another topic. For instance, in *Stuff Happens*, one of those interviewed to give a statement about the invasion of Iraq is a Palestinian academic. In her statement, as Hare writes it, she argues that: 'For the Palestinian, there is no other context. We see everything in the context of Palestine. [...] For Palestinians, it's about one thing: defending the interests of America's three-billion-dollar-a-year colony in the Middle East' (Hare 57). It is important to mention that this explanation is adopted by a big sector of the Arabs and Muslims as if it was a fact. Therefore, it is hard to find an Arabic study about the 2003 War

¹⁵⁹ It may be useful to mention that since the 1950s, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the most political topic that concerns Arabic playwrights of political drama.

in Iraq without mentioning Israel as the main beneficiary. Moreover, it seems that Hare, as with many Western left-wing writers, suggests that Israel's interests are a main factor in shaping US foreign policies. Roy explains:

[W]e should be wary of traditional analyses from a section of the anti-imperialist left which sees American Middle East policy either as being defined in Tel Aviv or as governed chiefly by oil interests. In intervening in Iraq, the Bush administration was neither seeking to control oil nor acting on Israel's wishes. (Roy 2008, 16)

Whether Hare's character's opinion seems to be reasonable or not, the inclusion of the Palestinian academic's statement within *Stuff Happens*, which comments on the war in Iraq, suggests that both conflicts are correlated, especially since 1991 as I have highlighted in the first and third chapters. In the latter I specifically underscore Wallace's references to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict within *In the Heart of America*, which is mainly about the First Gulf War.

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is mentioned in Soans' Verbatim play *Talking to Terrorists*. In his statement, an ex-member of the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade claims:

1993 was a good time. [...] I started working for a peace organisation as a policeman for the Palestinian Authority. And on first day of Intifada, when I am in Jericho, there was a big demonstration. [...] Civilians started to throw stones at the Israeli soldiers. The Israeli soldiers started shooting gas, then plastic bullets, then real bullets. I was sitting on a doorstep with a friend. A six year-old boy came and sat by me. He look [sic] at me. 'You have a gun, why aren't you using it?' The last he told me, 'If you are too shy to use it, I will shoot them.' Me and my friend started shooting at the soldiers. (Soans 2005, 60–61)

As his comment suggests, the Palestinian man attempts to justify his violence by the Israeli soldiers' attack on Palestinian civilians. The most shocking declaration in the play is included within a speech of a Bethlehem schoolgirl, by which Soans ends his drama: 'When I first saw the Twin Towers on television, I felt sorry. But now I feel happy that they died. It's their turn to suffer. I could see many thousands of them die. I wouldn't feel a thing' (Soans 2005, 97). By referring to 9/11 in the context of commenting on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the play invites spectators to realise that Palestinians believe that the US is responsible for Israel's violence against them. In addition, it is upsetting to

hear such a comment from a young girl, who is sad because her friend was killed by Israel. Violence leads to hatred and brutality.

As with Hare's *Via Dolorosa*, *The Arab-Israeli Cookbook*, which premiered at The Gate Theatre in London in 2004, is another Verbatim play in which Soans records his visit to Israel and the West Bank. The play includes forty-two speeches by both Palestinian and Israeli citizens. The characters' testimonial memories of the violent conflict are interwoven with their recipes for food. All the Palestinian characters in the play, including Christian Palestinians, live in the Occupied Territories. Therefore, the play indirectly diminishes the religious factor in the conflict, according to which the radical group of Hamas is the source for terror. Consequently, Soans presents the relationship between the two sides as a dispute between an occupier and occupied people. Debbie Young comments:

As someone who places herself quite far to the left on the political spectrum, particularly when it comes to Israel, I was pleased to hear Palestinian narratives told so movingly, and there were voices which it is important for a Jewish audience in particular to hear. But in neglecting to balance the stories as might have been done, the powerful dialogue that might have been created, even if only on stage, was somewhat lost. (Young 2006, 120)

What Young considers an unbalanced representation of the factual suffering of both sides is part of the message of *The Arab-Israeli Cookbook*. Although the play affirms the possibility of co-existence, it portrays, but does not justify, the Palestinian violence as a response to both Israeli occupation and aggression. In this sense, Palestinians' violence can be seen as a reaction to the Israeli government's oppressive measures. Juergensmeyer argues that 'the feeling of oppression held by Palestinian Muslims, for example, is one that many throughout the world consider to be an understandable though regrettable response to a situation of political control' (Juergensmeyer 12). Even some Americans declared their support to Palestinian people. A good example is Naomi Wallace who wrote two plays about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In addition to *A State of Innocence* (2004), which I analyse in this chapter, *Between This Breath and You* (2005) portrays an encounter between an Israeli young woman and a Palestinian father whose deceased son's lung was transplanted in her body saving her life, a fact she was not aware of.

Furthermore, in 2002 Wallace was commissioned by the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis to write a play about her visit to Palestine. Wallace collaborated with the

Jewish American playwright Lisa Schlesinger and the Muslim Palestinian writer Abdelfattah Abusrour in writing *Twenty-One Positions: A Cartographic Dream of the Middle East*. Commenting on Israel's building of the security wall, a 430-mile barrier that separates the Palestinian West Bank from Israel, the play ignited angry responses even before it was performed. Kelly Stuart explains:

As soon as the Guthrie advertised the reading of her play on its Web site, they received a phone call from someone threatening to lobby their board to pull funding. Without ever seeing or reading the play. As if some subjects simply cannot be dramatized or discussed. That's the climate we're in. (qtd. in Garrett 61)

The most striking feature of Stuart's statement is its highlighting of the way in which the boards of the so-called nonprofit theatres in America might yield to the pressure of specific sectors of the audience, especially the subscribers.

More infamous incident of this kind of public-motivated censorship is related to *My Name is Rachel Corrie*, which is edited by Alan Rickman and Katharine Viner and premiered in April 2005 at the Royal Court Theatre in London. The documentary play that uses the diary and e-mails of the twenty-three-year-old activist, who was killed under an Israeli bulldozer while she was attempting to prevent Israeli soldiers from demolishing a Palestinian house in March 2003, was scheduled to get its premiere in the US at the New York Theatre Workshop (NYTW) in March 2006. However, the show was decided to be delayed to an undefined date because of potential accusations of being biased, which might be intensified by the recent victory of Hamas in the Palestinian elections and, also, due to Sharon's severe illness. On 22 March 2006, under the title 'In Defense of a Play', the *New York Times* published a letter signed by twenty-one British writers and theatre practitioners, including Harold Pinter and Gillian Slovo, who expressed their upset at the shocking decision made by the NYTW. In April 2006 a panel discussion on the NYTW's decision was held at Barnard College. Contributors included American academics, critics and playwrights such as Marvin Carlson, John Heilpern, and Alisa Solomon.¹⁶⁰

This chapter will investigate two plays that respond to brutal reality in a country which was described by its founders as a utopia, while the victims of violence from both

¹⁶⁰ For more information about the reasons for this postponement, which were given by the artistic director of the NYTW Jim Nicola and its managing director Lynn Moffat, see the articles of McKinley and Borger. A transcript of the panel discussion held at Barnard College, see Garrett.

sides live in a dystopia. The two plays are Caryl Churchill's *Seven Jewish Children: A play for Gaza*, premiered at the Royal Court Theatre in London in February 2009, and Wallace's *A State of Innocence*, premiered at Theatre 7:84, Scotland in 2006.¹⁶¹

A State of Innocence: Exceptional tolerance

The two factual events that Naomi Wallace's *A State of Innocence* dramatises are quite discrepant, both in terms of their impact and their moral dimensions. On 20 May 2004, the more influential event occurred when the Israeli army attacked the local zoo in Rafah. As a part of what Israel called Operation Rainbow, aggression caused dangerous injuries, and the death of most animals:

Among the casualties of the Israeli raid into the Rafah refugee camp has been the local zoo - the only one in the Gaza Strip. The Israeli army probably took about 10 minutes to turn it into a wasteland, with tanks churning the whole area into an expanse of mud and twisted metal. There were ostriches, kangaroos and crocodiles, but the zoo's pride was its jaguar - he is missing now. An ostrich is rotting in the rubble and its stench hangs over the ruins. [...] The week before, five Israeli families had lost their sons in Rafah when a roadside bomb tore apart their troop-carrier. (Johnston, web)

After describing the animals' agony, the BBC correspondent in Gaza ended his report with what can be considered, at least partly, an implied justification for the attack not only by referring to the earlier murder of the Israeli soldiers but also by giving this military incident a civilian shadow by relating the loss to the soldiers' families. Evidently, there is no mention of the suffering of civilian Palestinians. Although the human casualties of the Israeli military operation exceeded the animals' injuries and deaths, the Western media gave the latter significant attention.

Undoubtedly, it is hard to imagine that priority was given to animals on the grounds of the value-comparison with Palestinian human beings, or, even because of the novelty of

¹⁶¹ In 2008, Wallace decided to combine three separate plays in a kind of three-piece text under the title *The Fever Chart: Three Visions of the Middle East*. In addition to *A State of Innocence*, the trilogy includes *Between This Breath and You*, written in 2005, which has never been performed as a single play, but was premiered as a staged reading in 2005 at Menagerie Theatre, Cambridge. The third play is *The Retreating World*, a monodrama written in 2000 and premiered at The Cambridge New Writing Festival in July 2002. The trio's world premiere was in Egypt at the American University in Cairo in March 2008. Later, in April 2008, it was produced by New York's Public Theatre. Its British premiere was in 2009 at York Theatre Royal and the Trafalgar Studios 2.

the incident. Arabic media, in contrast, focused basically on the humanitarian catastrophe with scattered and minor mentions of the pragmatic danger of released wild animals, the children's loss of the only accessible leisure attraction, the financial impact on the zoo's owner, and finally, the death of animals. Israeli officials found it more difficult to rationalise the destruction of the zoo. Chris McGreal reveals their hard task of presenting a reasonable justification:

The army's explanation evolved through the day. At first it said it had not destroyed the zoo, then it said a tank may have accidentally reversed into it. By the end of yesterday, the military said its soldiers had been forced to drive through the zoo because an alternative route was booby-trapped by Palestinian explosives. Finally a spokesman said the soldiers had released the animals from their cages in a compassionate gesture to prevent them being harmed. (McGreal 1)

The demolition of Palestinian houses and the murder of civilians, including children, were justified implicitly as revenge: 'The incursion, the biggest in years, followed the killing of 13 Israeli soldiers in Gaza last week' (Cowell A6).

Regardless of the difference between the number of dead Israeli soldiers as reported by the *New York Times* and declared by the BBC, there was sophism in using the murder of soldiers who were invading an occupied territory to provide a rationale for the killing and frightening of civilians. As Donald Macintyre argues,

The despoliation of the zoo at the Brazil refugee camp may seem insignificant after 41 Palestinian deaths in Rafah this week and the trail of destruction left by the Israelis elsewhere in the Al Salaam and Brazil camps - the Israelis demolished an estimated 43 homes in Brazil, reducing them to rubble still awaiting clearance yesterday - but it is a potent symbol of the much wider havoc wrought in the two camps and a third, Tel Sultan, since the Rafah incursion began on Monday. (Macintyre 30)

Wallace invests the symbolic virtue of the zoo's destruction to embody the entire Palestinian-Israeli conflict by merging this event with another actual occurrence. The second incident, unlike the former, involves a blink of leniency: 'Um Hisham Qishta [A Palestinian woman] cradled a dying Israeli soldier in her arms a few days ago' (McGreal 1). There was no single mention of this action by Arabic or Israeli media. Why was such a

prominent extraordinary gesture neglected? Was it too peaceful to accord with the enmity that normalised as the only type of relation between members of the two conflicting sides? For Palestinians, was this real woman seen as a shameful example of weakness and lunacy that must be ignored? Or, perhaps, should she be accused of treason? For Israel, was it painful to the military pride to accept this moment of disgrace when a Palestinian woman did a favour to an Israeli soldier? Or, did this incident contradict the Israeli insistence on confining the Palestinians to the image of merciless violent enemy?

By using these two factual events, Wallace's play portrays a confrontation between a Palestinian woman and two dead Israelis, a young soldier and a middle-aged architect. The entire play could be considered as an illusion in the mind of a sorrowful mother who expresses her paradoxical experience. While Um Hisham was prevented from cradling her murdered daughter, she bestowed her care on a dying Israeli soldier. She enters the ruin of Rafah's zoo to force the Israeli soldier Yuval to face the fact of his earlier death in her house. Finally, he gives up his denial and both share a kind of ritual consolation by reliving the last three minutes of his life.

This dreamlike play adopts a nonlinear structure that transgresses the boundaries of time and place. Inside this spatiotemporal confusion, the dramatic act revolves around several paralleled narrative threads that intersect at scattered moments to create occasional interactions among their fragments. Therefore, a number of narrative gaps are left to be filled by the audience. This dramatic structure enables Wallace to mingle two factual events within the imaginary realm of the play. The demolition of the zoo and the tolerant gesture of a Palestinian woman towards an Israeli soldier shed their status as raw material to be woven into the fictional life of the dramatic characters. Likewise, the documentary information that the play offers about the history of Israel is problematic, not only because it is delivered mainly by Shlomo the other dead character, but also because it is presented as a part of conversational arguments among the three characters. However, neither these non-realistic aspects nor the merging of political claims with the dramatic speech of opposing characters can hide the partisan discourse of the play.

Compared to the two Israeli characters, Um Hisham is portrayed as a merciful character that shows her tolerance to one of her enemies, and her sympathy extends to Yuval's mother. Moreover, every evil act of aggression inside the play belongs to Israeli people, whether soldiers or civilians; the building of settlements on Palestinian lands, the destruction of the zoo, including the brutal killing of animals, the attacking of Palestinian

houses, and, finally the killing of a Palestinian child. Even the murder of Yuval by the unknown Palestinian sniper can be justified as an act of resistance against an Israeli soldier while he was invading a Palestinian house. Um Hisham dominates the process of telling all the stories. In addition to her awareness of the circumstances that led to, and followed, Yuval's death, she tells about her daughter Asma's life and death. If Yuval, who became the zoo keeper after his death, has the authority to tell the audience about the present state of the zoo, Um Hisham is the only person who can talk about the beautiful past of the zoo before the destruction, which can be considered as Wallace's reference to the Palestinian's original right to this land.

Wallace's play declares its opposition to the official Israeli version of the zoo's destruction. Yuval tries to repeat the official explanation: 'The military dismissed those accusations. A spokesman said the soldiers released the animals from their cages in a compassionate gesture to prevent them being harmed' (Wallace 2006, 109). The aftermath of the Israeli attack reveals these lies as: 'The ostrich was flattened, as were the squirrels, goats, and kangaroos. The single deer lay on her side all night, paddling with her broken legs as though she were swimming' (Wallace 2006, 109). Wallace puts the realistic events into a grotesque atmosphere in this unrealistic zoo where animals lose parts of their bodies at night and retrieve them in the morning, and a woman insists on giving the last three minutes of a soldier's life to his mother. However, the play is full of references to some real historical incidents and famous people whether by mentioning their names, such as 'Kaganovich' and 'Herzl', citing some of their quotes, like Shuqayri's alleged sentence about throwing Jews into the sea (Wallace 2006, 104), or by both methods:

Shlomo: (*Suddenly quotes, excited:*) "Move, run and grab as many hilltops as you can to enlarge the Jewish settlements because everything we take now will stay ours . . . everything we don't grab will go to them."

Yuval: Ariel Sharon. (Wallace 2006, 107)

The play's comment on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict moves between two states of awareness: the nightmarish reality and the utopian dream. Starting from the title of the play to the very end, Wallace keeps pushing the dramatic action to the edge of both of hope and despair. The word 'state', as a noun, in the title of Wallace's play is a multi-denotation sign. Simply, it can refer to a territory or a country. On the other hand, it can describe an exact

status at a particular time. Surprisingly, both meanings are possible, especially when considering the relationship between the title, as a threshold to the whole text, and specific vectors inside the play. Since the play deals with a conflict that is developing almost daily, it is not unusual to find traces of realistic happenings within *A State of Innocence*. The non-textual contextual elements may be essential in the process of interpretation, particularly, because of the intrinsic connections between the play and specific socio-political circumstances.

Working as the dominant element of the plot, this binary aspect of the title encapsulates the play, and it is, finally, what gives the play its tone of dialectical relation between two approaches: the real and the dream, dystopia and utopia, respectively. While the introductory stage directions suggest a minimum use of scenic elements, the verbal signs insist that we are in a zoo, or more specifically, in a zoo that has been destroyed. A zoo in Israel can be taken as a dramatic sign that stands for the whole country.

However, it may be a kind of exaggerated interpretation unless more signs support this connotation. In his direct speech to audiences, Yuval, the 27-yearold Israeli soldier describes the place: 'it's a small zoo, but it's got a big spirit' (Wallace 2006, 103). This sentence has been connected to Israel since October 1948 when Chaim Weizmann, the first President of the State of Israel, said, 'We are a small country, but a big people' (qtd. in *Time*, web). After 56 years, Julie Burchill, a British journalist, chose similar words as a title of her promotional article: 'Israel: small country, big impression' (Burchill 4-5). This metaphor of the zoo/Israel is emphasised several times through the play. Yuval tells Um Hisham that he does not discriminate, and everyone is welcome to his tiny zoo provided that they are not threatening: 'the one who comes to kill us, we shall rise early and kill him' (Wallace 2006, 104). Yuval here paraphrases one of the Jewish religious principles, which is derived from the Old Testament:

The Torah determines that a home-owner may kill a thief who is breaking into his property at night (Exodus 22:1) and Rava concluded from this that "If somebody comes to kill you, rise early and kill him first" (Sanhedrin 72a). In other words, if someone approaches an individual with the intention of killing him, that person is permitted to kill the attacker as an act of self-defense. (Golinkin, web)

In addition to setting up a fundamental tension along religious/doctrinal lines, Yuval uses the pronouns 'us' and 'I' instead of 'you' in the religious text, thereby assuming the role of the entire Jewish people who live in Israel. Without losing his uniqueness as a dramatic character, Yuval, as a member of a specific group, can signify his people. This process of representation, albeit a sort of reification, enables the audience to perceive the different levels of meaning. Subsequently, these intersecting significations reveal the connections between the dramatic text and the external social, political, and historical contexts.

Similarly, when Yuval accuses Um Hisham of the ultimate hatred that she needs to get rid of him, his words extend beyond an argument between two individuals to a representation of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, especially when he uses one of the most infamous quotes in the long history of the war of words between the two sides:

Yuval: You want to throw me in the sea.
 Um Hisham: I just might. But I can't get on the sea. Seventeen and
 half checkpoints keep me from it.
 (Wallace 2006, 104)

Um Hisham does not deny Yuval's accusation, and when she mentions the Israeli checkpoints, Wallace cleverly directs our attention to the essence of the enigma that creates the vicious circle of violence: do the Israeli measures really protect them from Palestinian anger? Or does the exaggerated Israeli violence of collective punishment provoke the desperately tough response of the Palestinians? It is easily understood that politicians may use this kind of fierce statement, especially in times of war or conflict, and it is not hard to find similar examples in which we may find more brutal words. However, being addressed to Israel makes it different, mainly because Jews have just suffered from the genocide that was committed by the Nazis. This alleged desire of throwing Israeli people into the sea implies a racial extermination, as if there is a threat of new Holocaust, this time by Arabs. Here, the play refers indirectly to the Jews' inherited fears from the long history of suffering and migration. These fears may explain, but do not justify, the Israeli violence against Palestinians.

One of the most striking signs in the play is the porcupine. It is obvious that it has special treatment from Yuval, which can be explained inside the frame of the image of the Israeli people who are surrounded by hostility, especially when seeing it in the light of social and historical signs. Alongside the zoo/country metaphor, there is another metaphor

of porcupine/Israel, which intersects with the main metaphor of the zoo/Israel and emphasises it. In April 2007, the United States' Senate Foreign Relations Committee disclosed more than a thousand pages of what were previously secret documents. In his reading of these documents, the Israeli writer Amir Oren cites a discussion dated 23 May 1967 when Dean Rusk, the Secretary of State, tried to explain the reasons for Israeli fears from Arab countries. According to Israeli foreign minister Golda Meir:

You see, Israel is in a very, very difficult geographic position, and Mrs. Meir's comment to you in that conversation is relevant here. They are surrounded by Arab states who declare periodically or publicly their hostility towards Israel. They have not got much wriggle room in there. Therefore, they feel that they have got to bristle like a porcupine to fend off these neighbors if anything ever starts. (Oren, web)

Wallace creates the appropriate context that makes Um Hisham show her kindness to Yuval, who studied philosophy and keeps citing philosophers, repeating Platonic utopian thoughts in particular: 'He whom love touches not, walks in darkness' (Wallace 2006, 103). Even animals are treated by Yuval as if they are human beings, as he gives them human names and talks to them: he humanises the animals and expects them to act according to his imagination. He is a dreamer of a utopian world where love becomes the dominant feeling:

Yuval: If there were only some way of contriving that a state or an army should be made up of lovers, they would be the very best governors of their own city. (Wallace 2006, 109)

Wallace's portrayal of Yuval as an amateur philosopher with utopian solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict simultaneously critiques the inadequacies of simple humanist politics that ignore the complicated nature of the conflict, and exposes the reasonable longings of the populace to escape the daily agonies of war.

Here, Yuval's dream of ending the conflict is a kind of avoidance. Noticeably, a state of lovers is a state of innocence. But if the word 'state' in the title really means the country, does the play suggest, or rather dream of, a homogeneous country, where the daily contact between Israeli and Palestinian people reflects their acceptance of each other? A country, where, eventually, the state of innocence means a society of peace? Oz describes a specific type of political theatre which includes a prophecy:

[T]he state structures its citizens, and since these are never completely obtainable, integrity requires the constant acknowledgement of lack, [which] is expressed through the fictional prophecy, never totally fulfilled, but its existence as a prophecy which aims at its fulfilment on the experiential level of the theatrical show is totally concrete, and may even, surprisingly, please, through a kind of cathartic pleasure. (Oz 29-30)

It is vital to remember that the establishment of Israel was itself based on a utopian thought for Jews. This explains why Shlomo, the Israeli architect in the play, mentions *Altneuland*, Herzl's novel, which is essentially a literary utopia (Wallace 2006, 107). But, the actual bloody conflict, whether in the play or in the real world is extremely far from any utopian dream. Miserably, it is nearly a dystopia, where all the dreams have become daily nightmares.

Is Israel, where the dramatic incidents take place, the country of innocence? Or is it the tolerance of two characters, a Palestinian mother and an Israeli soldier, that creates the state of exceptional innocence? Not before the last moment of the play can these questions be fully explored, though there are no decisive answers. In contrast to Yuval's utopian dream, the play insists on revealing the rooted hatred between both sides. For instance, the play exposes the stereotyped image of Palestinians at different points:

Yuval: We're always under attack. I'm not afraid of you. Are you a terrorist?

Um Hisham: Palestinorist. Terrestinian. Palerrorist. I was born in the country of Terrorist. I commit terrible acts of Palestinianism [...]

Yuval: (*Interrupts.*) Don't get playful with me. You want to throw me in the sea.

(Wallace 2006, 104)

It is utterly senseless of Yuval to ask this question, as if he is expecting Um Hisham to confess: 'Yes, I am'. Or, to deny: 'No, I am not'. So Um Hisham, who is aware of the futility of answering this idiotic interrogation, plays with words to reveal the unjust accusation of terrorism for being Palestinian.

By mixing her nationality with the detestable charge she makes up the new identity: 'Palestinorist', who, logically, should perpetrate the crime of 'Palestinianism'. But Um Hisham takes the device of word play further by innovating 'Terrestinian', which, similar

to 'Palestinorist', can be considered as another variation compounding both 'Palestinian' and 'terrorist'. Additionally, 'Terrestinian' may be the result of blending 'Palestinian' and 'terrestrial'. Thus, Um Hisham indirectly hints at the contrast between Palestinians who inhabited the land as opposed to Israelis who came from the sea.

This implicit meaning may refer to Wallace's belief in the Palestinian right to the land, compared to the Israelis who came from the sea, and that explains Yuval's reply. In this scene, Wallace suggests that offensive and degrading charges are part of the Israeli propagandist machine. Although Yuval sometimes tends to see Palestinians according to this systematic official myth, neither he nor his colleagues are totally convinced that it is true:

Yuval: Do you really think that I believe that the Palestinian is a—
 Um Hisham: —land-grabbing trickster with a head full of gasoline-soaked rags, feeding off—
 Yuval:—the pure, steamed and distilled—
 Um Hisham/Yuval: —hatred of Jews?
 Um Hisham: Do you believe it, Yuval? Do your friends believe it?
 Yuval: Sometimes. Some of them. It's what we eat.
 (Wallace 2006, 109 - 10)

Here, Yuval perhaps, seems disloyal as he refuses the essential motive of a soldier in the Israeli Defence Army; nevertheless, he is not a traitor. Although he keeps obeying the rules and acts as a proper patriot, his personality seems to be against any kind of violence. After short elusiveness, he confesses: 'You're right. I never wanted to be a soldier' (Wallace 2006, 110). Sadly, his kindness may be the reason for his death when he chooses to counteract the wild behaviour of his compatriots. This is the first step in his destiny as a dead soldier living in the imagination of Um Hisham where he works as a zoo keeper.

Absent characters are employed as a justification for the narrative process which is undertaken by Um Hisham. While the factual event of the destruction of the zoo is revealed through the dialogue between her and Yuval, Um Hisham is the only person who knows everything about his death, and, through her telling of the story, Yuval starts to recall the situation that led to his tragic end. Um Hisham's husband, who is a physically absent character, is portrayed as a victim of Israeli soldiers' violence. Although they had not found any weapons in his house, they punish him for no reason except their feeling of boredom:

Your friends were bored so they began to beat my husband. He was on the ground. They kicked him in the chest seven times [...] But then you stopped them. Why did you stop them? (Wallace, 2006 112)

It took a relatively long time for Yuval to interfere with his comrades' unprovoked violence. This delay reveals the difficulty that he would suffer in risking his image in the eyes of his colleagues when he shows his sympathy to a Palestinian man. It is hard to contradict your people, and it is harder if you do so in front of your enemy.

Whereas Um Hisham's question might reflect her astonishment at Yuval's kind reaction, it is suggestively full of blame, as if she says: 'I wish you did not intervene to rescue my husband from your colleagues' violence'. Simultaneously, she blames herself for expressing gratitude for Yuval's behaviour by giving him a cup of tea, which he was drinking when he was shot. Then, she found herself suddenly embroiled in the murder of an Israeli soldier. Her remorse reveals the brutal reality of the dystopian state where any single kind gesture may be rewarded by a similar response, or, surprisingly lead to disastrous consequences: a chain of unjust punishments for uncommitted crimes. Um Hisham's paradoxical situation rests on the simple fact that the Palestinian sniper is a kind of emancipator whom she has to praise.

However, Um Hisham acts as if she is harmed by his effort. It seems that she is against the killing of Yuval not only because of his kindness, but also because it can cause more trouble. Among the contradictory feelings which she experiences, neither the sympathy with a merciful Israeli soldier, the anxiety for an imprisoned husband, or the grievous homelessness after the demolition of her house can equal losing her own daughter. Asma's death may be a relatively old incident, but the bereavement is still so alive that sorrow will perhaps be the most constant feeling through the rest of Um Hisham's life. What keeps exacerbating her distress is the fact that she was not able to hold her daughter while dying. Asma was alone, except for pigeons, and all that Um Hisham can do is reimagining her daughter's last moments.

Likewise in Wallace's *The Retreating World*, pigeons are victims again. This time pigeons are just numbers on the killing list. Pigeons, together with tea, are the signs of peace and friendship. In the face of the conflict between their different peoples, there is a kind of resemblance between Asma and Yuval. First and foremost, both were murdered while they were peacefully relaxed and neither was able to feel the mother's passion at the

moment of dying. Moreover, each had a kind of obsession: Asma's fondness of counting, nearly matches Yuval's propensity to repeat philosophical quotes. Furthermore, both of them were killed for the sake of political goals supported by religious motivations. Here, it seems that Wallace's point of view, which accuses Israel of exaggerated use of power against unequal victims, also encompasses consideration of the Israeli victims. Of course, Um Hisham was disturbed by the death of this kind soldier, but it is impossible for her to consider him as the equivalent of her daughter. Visibly, nothing can equal the enormity of losing Asma, even the appreciation of Yuval's behaviour. In addition, Um Hisham is a member of the large proportion of Palestinian population who has suffered from a long history of conflict and thus she has accumulated inherited hatred:

Everything I have despised, for decades—the uniform, the power, the brutality, the inhumanity—and I held it in my arms. I held you, Yuval, and God forgive me I held you as I would have held my own child. (Wallace 2006, 112)

In this respect, *A State of Innocence* can be this unique situation which includes the Israeli soldier Yuval and the Palestinian mother Um Hisham as just two individuals, whose exchanged kindness reflects humanness as an exceptional behaviour in such a fierce environment. These two exceptional states of tolerance can be seen in figure (8):

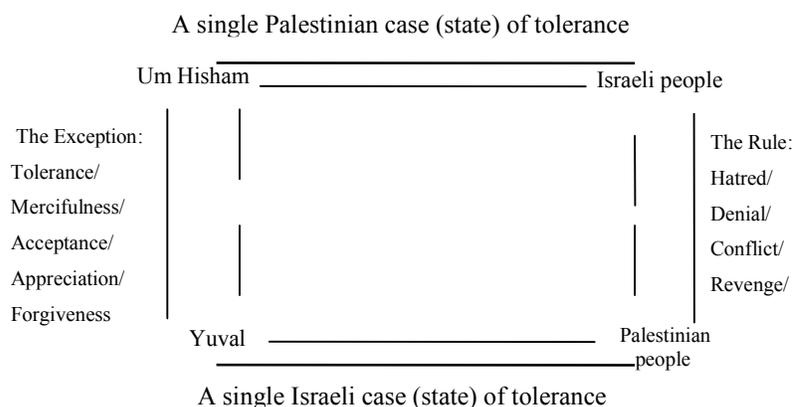


Figure (8)
Exceptional tolerance

Amazingly, the resemblance between these tolerant individuals occurs apparently where each of them acts against his/her own people's history of hatred. Here, the play's

message is obvious: tolerance is possible. However, it is still an exceptional choice, not only because it is difficult for others to repeat it in this environment, but also because both of them, Um Hisham and Yuval, would have never done the same thing if they had another chance to choose their destiny. It is not unusual for this Palestinian lady to be described as unpatriotic by one or more of the Palestinian snipers. Similarly, Yuval's act is likely to be seen as a weakness, which is a shameful trait for any soldier.

If I consider the fact that Um Hisham's name in Arabic means 'the mother of Hisham',¹⁶² the latter is supposed to be Asma's brother. However, as one of the several narrative gaps, neither the play nor the real incident has any mention of him. So, we should regard him as one of the absent characters. Hisham may be a victim of an Israeli action, imprisoned like his father or killed like his sister. However, irrespective of how he lost his life, his absence should make his mother's loss of Asma more grievous.

Wallace uses the character of Shlomo to insist on revealing the ugly nature of the conflict which is shared by Um Hisham. Shlomo, unlike Yuval, is a radical and elegant Israeli architect who believes that building more settlements is the only proper and sacred action to strengthen Israel. He keeps repeating the phrase: 'Homa Umigdal' (Wallace 2006, 106), which is the English translation of a Hebrew term that means 'Tower and Wall'. Rabinowitz explains:

the name given to Zionist settlement operations that took place in the late 1930s, primarily in Galilee [...] The operation had prefabricated huts, watchtowers and fences erected literally overnight to enclose residential compounds of new kibbutzim. (Rabinowitz 835)

This operation reflected the early attempts by Israel to use settlements as a subterfuge to expand its existence on Palestinian land. Unfortunately, it was not the last time:

The operation was meant to secure the hold of Jews in areas where their claim to sovereignty was in question [...] More than sixty years later (March 1997), when the Likud government wanted to ensure Israeli control over the areas surrounding Jerusalem prior to any

¹⁶² In most Arab countries, an uneducated housewife of the low social classes is usually named by referring to her elder son. It is mainly because of a ridiculous thought that any man should be embarrassed when his mother's name, or wife's, is uttered. Stunningly, this unique phenomenon of degrading the woman was rooted in the old Arab traditions, but was strictly prohibited by Islam.

further implementation of the Oslo agreement, it accepted a plan to swiftly build a neighborhood [sic] on Har Homa (Wall Mountain). In both cases, the expansion strategy generated a profound crisis in the relations between Jews and Arabs. (Chowers 675)

Although he looks just as old as Um Hisham (they are in their fifties), Shlomo claims that he is 96-years old; besides, he used to eat the remains of demolished Palestinian houses. It is not so strange that he insists on recalling this old term of ‘Homa Umigdal’:

Shlomo: I do not eat anymore. I will be 96 years old in November.
 Yuval: What? You look barely 40.
 Um Hisham: The lies of an Israeli architect!
 Shlomo: I assure you I am indeed that old. I bathe in the Dead Sea. Each time I give it some of my dying.
 (Wallace 2006, 107)

With this use of word play, Shlomo’s illogical explanation looks like a speech in a play of the theatre of the absurd, such as we can find in Eugene Ionesco’s *Maid to Marry*:

Gentleman: How old is she?
 Lady: Ninety-three!
 Gentleman: She’s passed her majority then?
 Lady: No. She owes us eighty years, so that makes her only thirteen. (Ionesco 159)

Shlomo enters with an authoritative, bragging attitude. However, he gradually loses his domination and becomes so obedient that he leaves the zoo even though he wants to stay longer:

Um Hisham: Leave us, Shlomo.
 Shlomo: I would like to stay a little while.
 Um Hisham: Not now. Your ruins are missing you. Go. [...] Come and see me again tomorrow. You know I always expect you.
 (Shlomo nods, then says some quiet words to her in Arabic: “And I will always expect you, Um Hisham. Let us go with God.” Then he leaves.) (Wallace 2006, 111)

Shlomo, like Um Hisham, speaks the language of his enemy. Both are aware of the history of the conflict, and expect it to continue; surprisingly, both once slapped Yuval. In addition, he teases Yuval because of his origin: ‘Nothing more sacred. Mother and son. Like the

land and the settler—though the ones from Brooklyn ... don't get me started!' (Wallace 2006, 105). This vague contempt may reflect his awareness of the fact that neither Yuval nor his mother is comfortable with their life in Israel; as he tells Um Hisham, his mother 'doesn't like the zoo' (Wallace 2006, 104). It seems that Wallace, again, refers to the heterogeneous nature of Israeli people as they come from different backgrounds. Here, Shlomo with his socialist background may think that he is more suitable as a member of Israeli society than Yuval's family. Generally, Shlomo, with his grotesque nature, enables the play to escape the trap of emotional overstatement which Wallace was keen to avoid.

In addition to surrealistic and grotesque elements that tend sometimes to characterise the theatre of the absurd, Wallace uses Brechtian techniques to avoid the exaggeration of emotional expression. As John Willett argues:

Brecht wanted it set out economically, with a minimum expenditure of words, temperament and other resources (orchestral scoring, stage set). This economy, like the intelligibility and ease of execution that went with it [...] was partly a reaction against the verbal and emotional wastefulness of Expressionism and the inflated egos that went with it. (Willett 225)

Wallace interrupts this sentimentality when Um Hisham slaps Yuval. Even at the end of the play, the accompanying song is a crucial element in destroying this exaggerated sympathy. Firstly, it is uttered in Arabic, which creates a kind of alienation for the Western audience. Secondly, in addition to the ambiguity of the words, Wallace's stage direction states that 'Her voice is strong and echoes across the zoo' (Wallace 2006, 113).

Brechtian traces in the play extend beyond some apparent features like Yuval's direct speech to the audience at the beginning of the play. Wallace presents a profound dialectic between notions of innocence and guilt where there is no 'pure innocence' or 'complete guilt' in the world of adult enemies. Yuval's innocent gesture of preventing his fellow Israeli soldiers from harming Um Hisham's husband is contaminated by his guilt at breaking into their house. Moreover, he cannot forget his crime of using his tank to kill the animals. The latter may explain his endless suffering from the animals' cries while he is haunted by visions of losing and retrieving parts of their bodies every night. Similarly, Um Hisham's innocent act of holding him as a mother is confused, not only by her conscious feeling of guilt as she contradicts her peoples' heritage, but also by her unconscious guilt about her daughter dying alone. In spite of her occasional use of poetic language, Wallace

does not portray the innocent acts in an emotionally charged manner. She challenges them by contrary actions or opposite speech. Um Hisham slaps Yuval just before an imaginary conjuring up of the moments of his death.

Even her act of singing, which may seem like a kind of lamentation, is alienated by her strong voice and by the distancing that results from her Arabic language. Although Wallace chooses this merciful act to end the play, it is hard to ignore the visual fact of Yuval's death and Um Hisham's grief for her daughter while there is no evidence that the unknown snipers from the two sides may retreat. The dialectic between innocence and guilt that is explored through the characters, together with the dreamlike structure of the play, works to elicit sympathy for the victims from both sides of the conflict.

The play portrays Um Hisham as a modernised woman who can challenge Yuval in terms of Western music: '*Yuval screams a couple lines of rock and roll, but just the tune, not words. Then quits abruptly and stares at Um Hisham. Suddenly she does the rock and roll line back to him, but even better. Then she stares back*' (Wallace 2006, 108). In addition, she is more aware of Jewish history than Yuval. For instance, she knows the origin of the name of his country's capital, Tel Aviv, and she speaks and understands Hebrew while he cannot understand Arabic language. Not only has she read Hertzl's novel, but she is also aware of the date of its publication. What is more, there is no hesitation in her voice when she evaluates it in front of two Jewish people. On one hand, this image is far from the vast majority of Palestinian housewives. On the other hand, Wallace may suggest that the weaker side in terms of military power can be the better on the grounds of knowledge and culture. Moreover, she sympathise with Yuval's mother:

Um Hisham: ... I have thought of sending your mother a bouquet but I am too angry and I hate the smell of flowers. So just tell your mother I think of her. I don't want to, but I do.
(Wallace 2006, 112)

Finally, it can be said that Wallace's *A State of Innocence*, although it depends on two factual events, tries to produce a kind of fair dramatic comment on the entire Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This balanced point of view chooses to support the Palestinian side while considering the agony of the victims on both sides. When Um Hisham informs Yuval of his earlier death, he overcomes his denial rapidly to ask her to sing her song again. He needs to recall his last three minutes; this is a pragmatic, wise demand that suits a dead man

who needs to get rid of his loneliness by fixing these moments of sympathy in time. He wishes he could live them forever. Thus, the play's vision of tolerance at the end is clear: it is possible for people to be tolerant, even with those hated as the historical and constant enemy. It is possible that hatred can be temporally forgotten in such a distinguishing moment.

When violence claims triumph over life, it is the time to support hope at least by sympathy. Therefore, despite her verbal refusal to sing the song again, Um Hisham eventually acts against all her established beliefs. As if they were sharing a ritual action, Um Hisham and Yuval repeat the retrieved situation of his death. Although the text does not mention the nature of Um Hisham's song that accompanies this situation, it can be conceived appropriately as a kind of lamentation, or perhaps a lullaby. When Yuval puts his head in Um Hisham's lap, he seems to consider this song, although it is uttered in Arabic, as an aspect of universal motherhood that may replace, at least partly, his absent real mother. By showing her merciful response toward Yuval, Um Hisham tries to resurrect her daughter's last moments as an alternative consolation to her interrupted grief which may be reached by transforming her impossible desire to embrace her dying daughter into an imitative action of caring for another mother's son in the last three minutes of his life. With this emotional ending, Wallace manages to give a somewhat optimistic view with the hope of tolerance extending beyond two individuals to become the dominant mood of the entire country.

However, with this high price, it is hard to say that many individuals will be ready to try the same route. While critiquing the brutality of the Israeli regime, Wallace is thus able to show the human consequences of the war as well as the paradoxes and contradictions it encompasses. When Wallace republished the play in 2009, she made alterations to the 2006 version; one of these was making Um Hisham wear a head scarf. I directly relate this visual sign to the increase of the religious aspect of the conflict as part of the War on Terror, especially as when she wears her scarf, the stage directions read, Um Hisham becomes '*ready for the vision to begin*' (Wallace 2009, 7). When I asked the playwright, she gave me a different reason for such a change. Wallace declares:

As far as my further research revealed, Um Hisham, in Gaza, would most likely wear a scarf on her head. [...] I was thinking more to honor [sic] the reality of women in Gaza, and how they dress. [...]

We Westerners have many blind-spots we have to break through in writing about these subjects. (Wallace 2013, e-mail)

The most striking alteration in the new version is the finale where Um Hisham is more reluctant to express her tolerance, especially in terms of physical contact with Yuval (Wallace 2009, 24). I asked if she realised that Um Hisham's behaviour in the 2006 version was too idealistic to come from a mother who had lost her daughter to Yuval's army, Wallace answers:

Yes, it was too idealistic to have physical contact. But more so, it was sentimental. I critique myself here. [...] However, it's not *too sentimental* just because Um Hisham has lost her daughter, but because of the whole illegal Occupation. That Um Hisham even converses with Yuval is enough. That she says 'no' to singing the song again at the end is a resistance to all the conditions of the occupation, and refusal to 'follow orders'. And yet her humanity allows her to 'glance back' and sing the song again, but on her own terms. (Wallace 2013, e-mail)

The new finale may be more realistic. However, it is upsetting to see tolerance fade, even—or perhaps especially—within a play, where dreams of a better world are more likely to survive. It seems that the bloody events of the conflict during January 2009 have provoked Wallace to change her play. On these events, Caryl Churchill's *Seven Jewish Children: A Play for Gaza* comments.

Seven Jewish Children: anti-Semitic or pro-victims?

Churchill's play responds to the Israeli raid on Gaza in December and January 2009 and it can be considered one of the most controversial plays in contemporary British theatre. Moreover, *Seven Jewish Children* urged another playwright to write his dramatic response to it after only a few months of its debut, as did the British writer and actor Richard Stirling with *Seven Other Children: A Theatrical Response to Seven Jewish Children* in May 2009.

For a political play written at the peak of the event on which it comments, Churchill's call for donating to Gaza makes the performance itself look like a component of a greater political act of supporting Gaza and not just a dramatic reflection on its disaster. Susannah Clapp states:

You don't have to pay for a seat for *Seven Jewish Children*, though there's a bucket person at the door collecting for Medical Aid for Palestinians. Even so, it's remarkable how many people, on the sleetiest day of a grim winter, trekked into the Royal Court for 10 minutes'-worth of Caryl Churchill's words. (Clapp, 17)

When Aleks Sierz defines the features of a controversial play, it seems that he was describing *Seven Jewish Children*. He argues that:

It needs to touch raw nerves. Often, although the audience's feeling of discomfort and outrage are real enough, the form that controversy takes is itself a performance: walkouts, letters to the press, leader articles denouncing 'waste of public money', calls for bans or cuts in funding, mocking cartoons, questions in parliament, or even prosecution on charges of obscenity or blasphemy. (Sierz 5)

Although Churchill has rarely been included among the writers of In-yer-face, Dan Rebellato mentions 'that writers like Brenton, Griffiths, Churchill and Daniels sometimes used aggressive effects in their work.' (Rebellato 193). Actually, there is no trace of physical violence in *Seven Jewish Children* unless we consider the kind of linguistic brutality that occurs in its final scene, especially the last speech. Here, while one of the Jewish parents is supposed to comment on Gaza's disaster, he unleashes his hatred with no space for guilt, shame, or even worry about his, or her child's morality or feelings. It is a shocking experience to read these words in a dramatic text or listen to them in a live performance:

Tell her about the family of dead girls, tell her their names why not, tell her the whole world knows why shouldn't she know? ... Tell her we're the iron fist now... tell her we won't stop killing them till we're safe, tell her I laughed when I saw the dead policemen ... tell her I wouldn't care if we wiped them out, the world would hate us is the only thing, tell her I don't care if the world hates us, tell her we're better haters, tell her we're chosen people, tell her I look at one of their children covered in blood and what do I feel? tell her all I feel is happy it's not her. (Churchill 6)

Do we have to watch those dead bodies on stage to feel brutality? Most probably, the answer is no.

It was not surprising that this final speech, along with the title of the play, were the most provocative evidence that proved Churchill's partiality according to several critics. The criticism of the play, though, was not limited to theatrical reviews. A fierce debate extended beyond theatre reviews to political and historical discussions, in which both Churchill and her play were the targets of attack, As Tim Walker declares:

Caryl Churchill has been accused of being "anti-Israel" by The Board of Deputies of British Jews, which was invited to provide input for her play *Seven Jewish Children* at the Royal Court Theatre, London. "We knew the play was going to be horrifically anti-Israel because Caryl Churchill is a patron of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign," says Mark Frazier, the organisation's spokesman. "This is an anti-Semitic play," claims The Jewish Chronicle. "It is one of those occasions when the merits of a play are eclipsed by its politics." (Walker 8)

Despite the mingling between the playwright and her work, the last passage contains another confusion that seems to be a common feature of the Israeli-Palestinian political discourse, from both sides.

In her letter to *The Independent*, Churchill hints at this identity's mingling as she argues that there is not anything 'new about describing critics of Israel as anti-Semitic. But it's the usual tactic. We are not going to agree about politics ... But we should be able to disagree without accusations of anti-Semitism' (Judd, 20). Some critics agree with Churchill's argument such as Charlotte Higgins who claims: 'The play did not strike me as antisemitic and I do not now believe it to be antisemitic [...] I cleave strongly to the view that it is possible to be critical of Israel without being antisemitic' (Higgins, 25), but Churchill received more critique. Siobhain Butterworth states:

Dave Rich and Mark Gardner joined critics who have deconstructed the play and characterised it as antisemitic. It is not for me to challenge this analysis and I accept that it is one possible interpretation. What I don't accept is the complainant's suggestion that it is the only possible reading. (Butterworth 29)

Commenting on the debate caused by Churchill's play, Mark Ravenhill defends the partiality of prominent writers in their political plays:

Great writers don't just produce goodies and baddies, though, however strongly they support one side of an argument. [...] Of course, having a strong point of view is no guarantee of great art. [...] But having a powerful, partial or even partisan slant is far more likely to end in a piece that, ultimately, everyone can appreciate - even if they view the world differently. So let's stop calling for balance: that way dullness lies. (Ravenhill, 24)

Despite his general and indirect appreciation of Churchill's writing, Ravenhill avoids any analysis of *Seven Jewish Children*. The writer's biased way of looking at or presenting something can be acceptable as long as he/she does not suggest any kind of discrimination on the basis of religion, race, or belief. Is this a truism as well? Perhaps, but the breaching of this latter rule was the way in which Churchill's play was interpreted by its opponents. Christopher Hart degrades the play by excluding it from the realm of art, as he claims:

Seven Jewish Children isn't art, it's straitjacketed political orthodoxy. No surprises, no challenges, no risks. Only the enclosed, fetid, smug, self-congratulating and entirely irrelevant little world of contemporary political theatre. Fresh air is urgently needed. But I'm not holding my breath. Meanwhile, donating to Medical Aid for Palestinians seems a good idea. I just hope the supplies get through. Two weeks ago, the UN suspended all food aid to Gaza after 10 lorryloads of supplies, 3,500 blankets and 400 food boxes were stolen at gunpoint. By Hamas. (Hart, 22)

In spite of Hart's reference to the uselessness of any kind of donations because, according to him, Hamas will steal them, I realise that a theatrical review does not ignore the inseparable relation between the play and the donation to Medical Aid for Palestinians. The awareness of this relationship was supposed to emphasise Churchill's message. Unfortunately, it distracted most of the critics as further evidence of partiality. Because the situation in Gaza was so disastrous that any effort except for succouring would be irrelevant, it is not surprising that Churchill's appeal for donating to Gaza's children accompanied the debut of her play. That is why *Seven Jewish Children* avoids any kind of detailed exploration regarding the historical rights of the two sides. The play acts like a cry for help rather than a judicial investigation.

It is hard to claim that Churchill's play was misunderstood just because of the confusion of the different aspects of identity, Israeli, Jewish, and Semitic. It is a mistake also to suggest that opponents of the play were totally biased against Palestinians, or pro-

Israel. Neither the form of the play nor its intersected thoughts are as simple as they appear at the first reading, or watching. Starting from its elusive title to the shocking speech in its last scene, the play keeps weaving its complicated mixture of historical events, Gaza's disaster, and the imaginary world that coherently includes all these inharmonious elements.

Relatively, Churchill's response to Gaza's factual events was so swift that it may be anticipated to be not profound enough. However, *Seven Jewish Children* reflects the depth and creativity of her long career as a prominent playwright. It is important to mention that both supportive and critical comments on the play have created an increasing momentum. For instance, when the BBC decided not to broadcast the play it created an opportunity for attracting more interest in it.

The officials at the BBC did not ban Churchill's play in terms of dramatic values. In contrast, 'Radio 4's drama commissioning editor Jeremy Howe said that he and Radio 4 controller Mark Damazer thought Churchill's play was a "brilliant piece"' (Dowell 2009, 9). However, the BBC backed out of broadcasting its radio production of the text, and confessed 'that a significant factor in the decision was awareness of the controversy stirred by *Seven Jewish Children* during its theatre run' (Dowell 2009, 9).

If these fierce protests had prevented the play from being introduced to a wider audience through the BBC, this banning, alongside the continuous objections, has increased people's desire to watch it, or, at least, to read its text. The Royal Court Theatre has put a printable copy of the text on its site. Later, a video version of the play was produced by *The Guardian* and has been made available on line, with the possibility of sharing it through social networking websites such as Facebook and Twitter. Moreover, with the increasing number of productions in different languages, several videos of different performances can be watched and downloaded on a large number of video-hosting sites and blogs. Furthermore, every new production has brought more arguments. In addition to its status as a remarkably short play with minimal requirements for production. The unprecedented circulation of the play via new media technology makes it perfect in addressing those who are interested in the political issue whether or not they are theatregoers. Even those who have never watched a single play have the opportunity of reading, watching, and debating it. Actually, the more opposition the play faced, the greater attention it acquired.

While *Seven Jewish Children* refers to the problematic topic of identifying the historical right to a land inhabited by ancient ancestors of Jews and Palestinians respectively, the play avoids assuming the authority of the judge. Alternatively, Churchill's

play considers the conflict as an inevitable clash between two groups that are compelled to share the same land since Jewish immigration, or return from Diaspora, to Palestine. Despite criticising Israel's exaggerated use of power, the play does not ignore the responsibility of Hamas as an Islamic extremist group that commits the same sin of targeting civilians, even if the effect of the latter is tiny in comparison with the casualties of the former.

By using the linear structure that adopts the developing narrative, the seven scenes of the play, albeit significantly condensed, attempt to introduce a comprehensive presentation of the most influential moments of the entire conflict in the frame of causality. This diachronic narrative enables the play to explore the increasing brutality of the conflict. Moreover, Churchill's play delivers this documentary-like discourse through a group of actors who change their roles in different scenes without neglecting their constant identity as Israeli parents. Therefore, these parents can be considered as the successive generations of Israeli people who may have different points of view, but share the same dilemma regarding informing their children about the conflict. Similarly, the absent Jewish children and Palestinian people are mentioned in general terms. In addition, the use of reported speech, repeated phrases, and linguistic manoeuvres is employed to prevent any emotional effect from confusing Churchill's analysis of the conflict.

Although the play suggests that Israeli nation as a political project was established at the expense of Palestinian agony, the play portrays Jews as a religious group that suffered from racial discrimination. Not only in the first two scenes where the play reflects the catastrophe of the Holocaust and its aftermath, but also through the rest of the scenes. The play does not produce this Jewish historical anguish as a justification for the victim of Nazi aggression becoming the aggressor whose victim is the Palestinian people. Actually, the play refers several times to the world's awareness of the disastrous conflict. As the title of Churchill's play suggests, *Seven Jewish Children: A play for Gaza*, reflects a balanced consideration of the victims from both sides. However, the play does not seek our futile sympathy. In contrast, it criticises the international community's sympathy unless it is going to be translated into actions that may prevent humanity from reaching such a degree of brutality. Otherwise, this conflict is predicted to continue and its violence is likely to get worse.

Unlike Wallace's play, Churchill's play adopts a linear structure. As a journey through time between two places, the play summarises the historical existence of Jews

between the Diaspora and their present life in Palestine. However, despite this linear structure, the storytelling process is undertaken by all the characters who act like a chorus. This epic use of the narrator who owns the authority to tell the story coincides with the play's approach to challenging traditional notions of dramatic character by marginalising its individuality.

Additionally, as with Crimp's *Advice to Iraqi Women*, Churchill play gives any potential performance the ultimate right to choose the way in which the speeches can be shared out among the characters who may be played by any number of actors. It is important here to mention that this kind of abstraction can be traced in many previous theatrical traditions, especially Expressionism. Similarly, the use of the chorus in non-classical plays can be traced in a huge number of plays, and not just in the Brechtian legacy, or the works of his disciples. But, in *Seven Jewish Children* it seems that there is a return to the primitive shape of the ancient chorus before the use of actors. Commenting on the specific features of Churchill's political theatre Elaine Aston and Elin Diamond claim: 'For Churchill, dramatizing the political is not just a question of content, but also of form. With the renewal of form comes the renewal of the political: new forms and new socially and politically relevant questions' (Aston 2).

Although there are some contradictory opinions in the text, these differences are not embodied in different personalities. Rather, they are different tones inside the same discourse. The narrator here is the chorus that consists of Jewish parents and relatives. On the other hand, the narratee is the Jewish child who is always absent. Indeed, the actual audience is the implied receiver to whom Churchill delivers each element of the play.

In terms of the absent child, she is supposed to believe her parents – the reliable narrator– not only on the ground of their patriarchal authority, but also because she is not aware of their discrepant speeches. In contrast, the actual audience which hears the different facets of the story discovers the unreliability of the parents whose historical stories are filtered by the pragmatic factors. Spectators have the virtue of receiving the raw documentary material as if they are watching a documentary movie before the process of editing. The structure of the play, including the title, creates several controversial issues. While the title refers to '*Jewish Children*', the play itself contains five scenes that primarily portray Israeli people with Zionist views. This textual fact should raise the question: what is the purpose of mentioning the Holocaust? And, more to the point is *Seven Jewish Children*

a play about the history of the Jews? Again, the subtitle of the play '*A Play for Gaza*', contradicts this assumption because it refers to Gaza in a kind of implicit sympathy.

Moreover, the image of Palestinians inside the play, although they are physically absent, emphasises Churchill's consideration of Palestinian agony to the extent that can be described as partisan. It is hard also to think that a playwright like Churchill may use the first two scenes just as a kind of ingratiating to balance the overall image of Jews in the play. These first two scenes can be justified in the frame of Churchill's dialectic focus on the notion of the victim and the aggressor. The result of her dialectics may seem to be limited to the simple exchange of roles: the Jewish people who were once the victims of the Nazis have become the aggressors whose victims are the Palestinian people.

Out of seven scenes that compose the entire play, the first six scenes reflect the agony of those innocent children. Structurally, the first six scenes may be considered as an introductory background to the last scene which is dedicated to comment on the factual contemporaneous tension in Gaza between December 2008 and January 2009. It seems that Dominic Maxwell reaches the meaning of Churchill's play when she claims that:

Churchill is not just stating that victims can become aggressors. She shows people wrestling with whether to define themselves by their situation or by some broader notion of humanity. Wrestling with what innocence means. [...] There are no heroes or villains, for all that Churchill decries what is happening in Gaza. There is just the constant colliding of the two big, mutually exclusive truths of our lives: we're just like everybody else, and we're nothing like anybody else. (Maxwell 16)

It is a vicious circle of converting innocence to brutality. Some of the Jewish children who survived the Nazis became Israeli soldiers who used tanks to kill Palestinian children, and some of these Palestinian children have survived to become suicide bombers in Israeli cafes. In this respect, we can interpret the final speech in the last scene as uttered by an Israeli adult who was just a child when he escaped an explosion by a suicide bomber where he lost one or some of his family.

Therefore, the continuity of the scenes is a crucial element in order to understand each single line in every scene. Every single child in each scene stands for tens of thousands of children. Despite being absent as children, they are figured as adults in the next scenes. Losing this sense of continuity and causality may damage the meaning of

Churchill's play as we can find in *the Guardian* video production of the text. Although old black-and-white photographs are utilised as interludes among different scenes, only one actress performs the whole play. In addition to her fixed gesture, she wears the same modern costume, and looks at the same point outside the frame of the scenes, which are taken from the same angle. Another defect of the *Guardian's* performance video is explained by Travis Bedard, a director who staged his own production of the play. He claims that:

The problem lies in the fact that it is performed by only one person. This, he says, "does the piece and the discussion a disservice ... the balm to the outcry against the presumed antisemitism in the piece was to show the conflict in the unnamed and textually undifferentiated characters" but with only one voice there can be no debate and this "leaves the trendline towards Ms Churchill's conclusion as the ONLY point of the piece". (Wilkinson, web)

In Bedard's version, the speeches are distributed to different speakers in every scene. However, he has fixed a sitting woman as the constant addressee in the first six scenes before she bursts in the last scene to utter the notorious monologue.

Perhaps Bedard's performance has avoided the one-sided point of view, but it ignores the factor of multiple points of time. Rachel Shabi claims:

The performance in Rabin Square featured a terror-stricken woman constantly rearranging a row of sacks around her baby's pram, in increasingly restrictive barricade formations. Around her, three actors debate, argue and advise on what to tell the child about the Holocaust, Israel, Palestinians and the war in Gaza. (Shabi 29)

Although the absence of the baby in the scene may bring more sympathy, especially with the mother's panicky movement, this Israeli performance, like Bedard's, avoids the passage of time. When the addressor or the addressee is the same person, without any visual sign of time changing, the chronological historical nature of Churchill's play is neglected. It is possible to conceive the main title of Churchill's play as a preliminary indication of backing the Israeli operation, or, at least, justifying it on the basis of Israel's legitimate right to react, albeit toughly, to protect its people from Hamas' danger.

In addition, the title uses the religious description '*Jewish*' with its long history of suffering oppression, instead of the political word 'Israeli'. This initial interpretation is

contradicted by the sub-title: '*A Play for Gaza*'. This complementary part of the title seems to be a kind of author's dedication, and it is obvious that it is not a play about Gaza, it is for it. As long as Gaza, the city and the people, are the victims of the military operation, this sub-title implies that the play may be sympathetic to Gaza.

Regarding this title, with its two discrepant parts, a two-part question may be raised: Is it just an elusive artistic method that acts as a preventive defense against any probable accusation of bias? Or, on the contrary, does this title imply that the play is going to introduce an objective, balanced vision? The expectations that can be directed by the complete title should become more problematic after reading the very first sentence of the opening stage directions which insist that 'No children appear in the play' (Churchill 1).

Does the play itself resolve this confusion by unveiling the reason for mentioning 'Seven Jewish Children' who are not represented in a play dedicated to Gaza? In seven short parts, the play portrays seven different phases of Jewish history. Seven sequences involve different parents, perhaps relatives, who are talking about a different child. The main issue that pervades the entire play seems to be the simple common educative question: What must, and must not, our children know about real life? However, because the parents and the children are Jewish in some serious moments of existential danger, the simplicity of the educative question becomes the crucial matter for survival. Deliberately, neither the number of characters nor actors who will play these characters is fixed. Consequently, a single actor may portray different characters by moving from one to the other in the different parts of the performance.

Moreover, there are no specific features to distinguish physical, psychological, or individual aspects of any character. Even the characters' gender is vague, except for the children who, although absent, are girls; a different girl in every scene. This absent girl is as different as the parents are in every situation. This exclusiveness in terms of the child's gender is a functional choice on the basis of the situations' purposeful succession. The sequence of situations are supposed to take place in different historical times and places, and a change of the child's gender may lead to a mistaken conclusion that these events occur at the same time in different places. Being a girl, especially in the case of fear, is more able to elicit sympathy than a boy. In my first reading of the play, I recalled the diary of Anne Frank, the Jewish girl, who had to hide with her family from the Nazis, especially when she complains: 'All the conflicts about our upbringing, about not pampering children, about the food – about everything, absolutely everything – might have taken a different turn

if we'd remained open and on friendly terms instead of always seeing the worst side' (Frank 171).

Although the play is plainly so short that it may not last more than ten minutes on stage, this concentrated play tries to define the dominant factors of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Starting before the establishment of Israel as a country/dream and ending at a point of what seems to be an endless and controversial conflict, the play reveals the paradoxical situation of any Israeli discourse that importunately seeks to persuade successive generations of a happy, peaceful, and legitimate dream, without neglecting the dangers of their intrinsically brutal enemy.

Through the entire play, Churchill uses the repetition of words effectively. The excessive repetition of the encouraging phrase 'tell her' and the negatively warning one 'do not tell her' reflects the fanatical fears about the future that obsess those parents, and reveals their inherited anguishes from their past. Therefore, the cautious sentence: 'Don't frighten her' is repeated by different parents six times in the play. It is meaningful that this warning is the very last phrase said at the end of the play. Theatrically, these repeated words may act like the index that refers to, and emphasises the rest of the dialogue and gives it more significance.

The first three parts happen outside Palestine, somewhere in one of the European countries invaded by the Nazis during World War II. While the first and second scenes can be construed as a representation of the Holocaust, the third is an introduction to the Palestinian era of Jewish modern history. The danger of being killed by invisible pursuers dominates the first scene where the parents try to make the situation as easy as possible by borrowing concepts from the realm of children's imagination:

Tell her it's a game ...
 Tell her she'll have cake if she's good ...
 Tell her it's a story...
 Tell her she can make them go away if she keeps still
 By magic. (Churchill 1)

However, as happens through the entire play, the parents' hopes of protecting the child by hiding hurtful facts are always contradicted by the necessity of making her safe from danger:

Tell her it's serious ...
 Tell her it's important to be quiet ...
 Tell her to curl up as if she's in bed

But not to sing
 Tell her something about the men
 Tell her they're bad in the game ...
 But not to sing. (Churchill 1)

There is a conditional survival that is dependent upon silence and stillness. It is obvious here that the child, for security's sake, must abandon the most prominent aspects of children's behaviour: excessive movement and talk.

Singing, specifically, is completely forbidden in this brutal dangerous world which may resemble the situation in Wallace's *A State of Innocence*, where children's singing was the Israeli soldier's justification for destroying the zoo:

Yuval: gurgling is no longer permitted. There was gurgling coming
 from the Rafah zoo, day in, day out. Gurgle, gurgle,
 gurgle. The children were gurgling.
 Um Hisham: Not gurgling. Singing.
 Yuval: Same thing.
 (Wallace 2006, 104)

In both plays, the innocent expression of freedom and happiness is challenged by the rigid laws of the tough authority. While Jewish children are the victims in Churchill's play, it is the turn of Palestinian children to suffer in Wallace's.

As part of her potent use of contradictions, Churchill embodies the ambiguous dangerous men through the parents' cautions where the discrepant aspects of utterances symbolise the elusive outside danger:

Tell her not to come out even if she hears shouting ...
 Tell her not to come out even if she hears nothing for a long time.
 (Churchill 1)

It is clear that parents themselves are not safe. They have to hide from the same danger to not be hunted: 'Tell her we'll come and find her ... Tell her we'll be here all the time' (Churchill 1).

The second scene of the play depicts a family that survived after the Holocaust as the characters refer to some hurtful consequences by remembering their killed relatives. Through opposing sentences, Churchill exposes the paradoxical situation of Jewish adults who are keen to keep the roots of their own culture and religion alive inside their child

without hurting her innocence, by pushing her to recognise that she is different from other children on the basis of religion:

Tell her this is a photograph of her grandmother, her uncles and me
 Tell her her uncles died
 Don't tell her they were killed [...]
 Tell her there were people who hated Jews [...]
 Tell her there are still people who hate Jews
 Tell her there are people who love Jews
 Don't tell her to think Jews or not Jews
 Tell her more when she's older
 Tell her how many when she's older. (Churchill 1-2)

As a matter of protecting her sensitive feelings, this child, according to her parents must know nothing about people who hate her just because of her religion. But, as a matter of protecting her life, she must be aware, not only of the existence of this hatred, but also of its real dimensions.

This is the only way to defend herself and her religion as well. Jerusalem is the last word to be pronounced by one of the parents in the third scene. In this part of the play, the parents try to prepare their child to accept the thought of immigration to Palestine. The discrepancy in this scene resides in the disputed blurred space of identity among religion, history, and politics. One of the mentioned privileges of the new country is that '...no one will tease her' (Churchill 2009, 3). The play does not reveal whether this teasing was a kind of discrimination that the child has been suffering because of her religion, or it was just normal, as those things happen between children.

The sixth scene is the longest one in the play because it portrays the everyday suffering of constant contact between the new settlers and the Palestinian residents. Whether the Jewish parents choose to inform their child of these issues or not, the whole scene reveals the suffering of Palestinian people by Israeli army and Israeli civilians. The parents' speeches always portray an image of Palestinians as violent people who are not able to be discussed. In other words, they are not able to share any negotiations with them:

Tell her, tell her they set off bombs in cafés [...]
 Tell her they want to drive us into the sea [...]
 Tell her they don't understand anything except violence. (Churchill 2009, 4 - 5)

Contrarily, and despite all the Palestinian daily misery, the parents seek to persuade the child that Israelis are completely peaceful. Ironically, their own words destroy this claim:

Don't tell her anything she doesn't ask [...]
 Don't tell her anything. [...]
 Tell her we kill far more of them [...]
 Tell her we're stronger
 Tell her we're entitled. (Churchill 2009, 4 - 5)

The most remarkable feature of the sixth scene is the incongruity between verbal claims and real actions. Churchill uses this verbal-action contradiction to scorn the Israeli parents' fake declarations of peace:

Tell her we want peace
 Tell her we're going swimming.
 (Churchill 2009, 5)

As Israeli swimming pools are causing the death of Palestinian crops because of the lack of water, the insistence on going swimming contradicts the will to peace.

The seventh and final scene is an extension of the previous, not only in terms of referring to the current moment of the conflict but also because of the constant increase in the tone of hatred. New tough words are added to the description of Palestinians: 'terrorists ... filth ... animals living in rubble' (Churchill 2009, 5-6). Churchill's play refers to the apparent discrepancy of powers:

Tell her they're attacking with rockets [...]
 Tell her only a few of us have been killed [...]
 Don't tell her how many of them have been killed
 Tell her the Hamas fighters have been killed [...]
 Don't tell her about the family of dead girls
 Tell her you can't believe what you see on television
 Tell her we killed the babies by mistake
 Don't tell her anything about the army. (Churchill 2009, 5 - 6)

Churchill's play shows that it is an unequal war whether in terms of military power or the number of civilian casualties, especially when bearing in mind the fact that Israeli existence in Gaza is an action of occupation. However, the parents' false justifications and their continuous attempts to hide facts to prevent their child from recognising Israeli brutal

activities, restore some hope. As long as they feel that there is something wrong, it means that someday, maybe they can do something to stop it.

Churchill's play selectively displays specific moments of Jewish history and contains what can be described as deliberate narrative gaps that avoid mentioning some historical events, while focusing on dramatic aspects such as portraying an absent character. Similarly, although Wallace's play reflects one major event of military violence that includes an occasional incident of tolerance between two individuals, the play brings the incident to the foreground, and uses the main event as a background. While Wallace's play emphasises the distinction between documentary quotes and dramatic discourse, Churchill's play intentionally hides the borders between documentary and dramatic aspects. However, regarding the real incidents *A State of Innocence*, just as *Seven Jewish Children*, mixes the imaginary elements with the factual incident. So, we cannot find a precise literal record of any real event inside the two plays, but rather, the playwrights' interpretation of these events.

Conclusion

In addition to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the disaster of 9/11 generated two phenomena in Western countries. Firstly, individual stances of discrimination against Muslims, Arabs, and even Jews were directly and temporally realised in the US and different European countries. However, due to official and public condemnations, such incidents of intolerance increasingly became remarkably rare. Secondly, and most importantly, the post-9/11 Western world has become more aware of the new challenge that faces the notion and practice of multicultural societies. This challenge is mainly motivated by the discrepancy between many rules of the Sharia Law and the values of secularity.

The first phenomenon provoked many playwrights to express a situation of troubled minority whose members were denounced, because terroristic operations were committed by groups, which utilised hateful, albeit claimed to be religious, mottos. The vast majority of the writers of these dramatic texts, who live in Western countries, belong to Muslim or Arabic background. The Egyptian-American Yussef El Guindi's *Back of the Throat* is a good example. However, playwrights from other ethnic groups such as Sikh and even Jews expressed similar feelings of unease or even fear resulted from scattered incidents of discrimination. *Salam. Peace: An Anthology of Middle Eastern-American Drama*, edited by Hill and Amin, can represent this type of plays. More authentic and increasingly becomes recognised by both secular and Christian Westerners, I argue that the second phenomenon will lead to writing massive literature, including dramatic texts. Richard Bean's *England People Very Nice* (2009) is an example.

Because of its large number of victims, the calamity of 9/11 is usually considered as the prelude to the so-called War on Terror. However, such a disaster was preceded by several attacks on American targets. These violent operations against the US before 9/11 were planned and executed by both Arabic organisations and radical Islamic groups. The leaders of these groups always describe their operations as a direct response to specific harmful actions by the US or/and Israel.

The growth of both nationalist and Islamist violent groups in Arabic and Muslim countries can be attributed to domestic circumstances as well as the competition between some of these countries over the political leadership of the region. The main aspects of this rivalry are, firstly, the so-called Saudi-Egyptian cold war, within which the Saudi project of pan-Islamism collided with Nasser's call for pan-Arabism in the 1950s and 1960s. The

aftermath of this political confrontation was the alliance between the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the Saudi Wahhabis. This alliance was the early sign of the multi-national Islamic terror materialised in al-Qaeda. Secondly, the Saudi-Iranian cold war reflected a dispute between the Sunni and Shii projects of pan-Islamism, which was an active factor in the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990) and the Iranian-Iraqi War (1980–1988).

All plays can indirectly and occasionally reflect on the dominant political structure of their playwrights' societies at specific moments. Specifically, political theatre intentionally utilises textual and theatrical methods in order to express its opposition to a de facto situation. By addressing this situation, which was created by the dominant political power(s), political theatre insists on the need for change. While earlier propagandist drama, which was introduced by Erwin Piscator and improved by Bertolt Brecht in the twentieth century, insists on suggesting communism as an alternative to Capitalism, the lack of a political alternative is one of what distinguishes the enlightening goal of political theatre in the era of the New World Order. Political plays of the 2000s mainly act as the *witness* on the atrocities of many episodes of the War on Terror, rather than assuming the role of the ideological *foe* of the American-led Capitalist coalition(s).

By commenting on different aspects of the three conflicts, contemporary British and American playwrights in the 2000s reveal the catastrophic consequences of the violent conflicts included in the War on Terror. This informative purpose seems to account for adopting forms of documentary theatre whose practice has a long history since initiated by Piscator and Brecht in the 1920s and revived by Peter Weiss and Heinar Kipphardt in the 1960s. Apart from different historical contexts and theoretical bases of that political theatre in each period, the common feature of these three booms in Documentary Dram is that a cycle of apolitical-political theatre is repeated. Put differently, the rise of political theatre in the 1920s, the 1960s, and the 2000s were preceded by the so-called Late Expressionism after First World War, Theatre of the Absurd after Second World War, and Postdramatic and In-yer-face plays in the 1980s and the 1990s, respectively.

Many British and American playwrights, such as Caryl Churchill, Trevor Griffiths, David Hare, Richard Bean, Simon Stephens, and Robin Soans, have shown their interest in the Muslim-related confrontations with the Anglo-American coalition by writing more than one play, whether to respond to the War on Terror in general, or to comment on events related to one or more of the three locations of conflict. For instance, the American playwright Naomi Wallace comments on the First Gulf War and the economic sanctions

that followed it, in *In the Heart of America* and *The Retreating World*, respectively. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the War in Afghanistan are correspondingly represented in *A State of Innocence* (2006) and *No Such Cold Thing* (2009).

Regardless of the playwright's style of writing and whatever the aspect of the war he/she chooses to dramatise, the common feature of the vast majority of American and British representations of the war in Iraq is the inclusion of Western characters' speeches that depict the agony of Iraqi civilians. Such speeches are usually occasional and seem to be marginalised in the context of doubting the reasons for the war or depicting Western soldiers as victims. While there is not any Iraqi character in plays such as Hare's *The Vertical Hour* and Martin Crimp's *Advice to Iraqi Women*, both portray the disastrous effect of the war on the Iraqi people through the narrative of Western characters. What distinguishes Crimp's play from Hare's is that the text of *Advice to Iraqi Women* gives the director of this play the right to distribute its lines to undefined number of actors. The same tactic is utilised by Churchill in *Seven Jewish Children*, which comments on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

The narrative about the civilian casualties in Iraq remarkably interacts with the main theme of the play to highlight its overall message. For instance, Monk's recalling of his killing of an Iraqi family in *Embedded: Live* urges the spectators of Tim Robbins' play, which mainly focuses on the controlled media coverage of the war, to sympathise with the Iraqi civilians, who represent a large number of innocent victims of the war. This incident itself is the cause for the American soldier's own psychological wound, which according to him will never be cured. More examples of soldiers' short speeches, within which they retrieve images of civilian Iraqi victims on the battlefield, can be found in Emily Ackerman's and KJ Sanchez's Verbatim play *Reentry* (2009) and Jonathan Lichtenstein's *The Pull of Negative Gravity*. As with Lichtenstein's play, the war is a background to imaginary plots where playwrights criticise their domestic societies more than commenting on the war in Simon Stephens' *Motortown* (2006) and Roy Williams' *Days of Significance* (2007).

In what I see as a reaction to the increasing blame laid on American soldiers in Iraq, *Reentry* celebrates American soldiers for their sense of responsibility and modesty. In contrast to the Stubbs in *States of Shock*, the soldiers in *Reentry*, even when they are victims of the war, do not lose their dignity or power. Moreover, the families of these soldiers are as brave and reliable as the latter. The play extends the motto: 'Supporting our

soldiers' to include the latter's families, which addresses calls raised in the American media to consider the sacrifice made by the relatives of combatants.

While many journalistic writings describe the American intervention in Afghanistan after the defeat of the Taliban as a reproduction of the British colonialism, the complicated situation in Afghanistan suggests that the US is not involved in a new Great Game as an occupier. Rather, domestic players such as war lords and members of the still active Taliban are preventing the transition of Afghanistan into a democratic country. The American-led international coalition, which includes NATO as well as Arabic and Islamic countries, may be seen as necessary not only to deal with these destructive powers, but also, and most significantly to enable international charitable organisation to facilitate education and health care for the Afghans. Ironically, while several British playwrights have highlighted the role played by the international coalition, I could not find any American play that underscores the humanitarian reasons for the American-led presence in the Asian country. Such a phenomenon can be attributed to the fewer number of American political plays compared to the British in general. Another explanation can be the foregrounding of the debate and news about the invasion of Iraq and its aftermath since 2003.

The project *The Great Game: Afghanistan*, which was produced by The Tricycle Theatre in London in 2009, traces the history of foreign interventions in Afghanistan in a three-phase military dispute between Afghanistan and the British, the Soviets, and the 2001 coalition. Out of the thirteen plays included in the project, only two plays written by American playwrights: Wallace's *No Such Cold Thing* and J. T. Rogers' *Blood and Gifts*. The former is a dream-like play with three ghosts of two Afghan girls and an American soldier. As with most of her plays, Wallace portrays emotive moments in the life and death of three innocent victims of the war. In his imaginary plot about factual events, Rogers depicts the American support for one of the tribal leaders to fight the Russians. However, when the Afghan man is asked to return the American weapons, he declares that he will fight against the US. In the complicated matter of American weapons given to the fighter for freedom from Russian occupation, the Afghan is portrayed with more depth in the British Ben Ockrent's *Honey*, within which the playwright stresses that Pakistan played a role in deceiving the US.

The War on Terror has been accompanied by an excessive use of metaphors which are utilised by both Western and Arabic politicians and media to comment on specific aspect of the conflict. Metaphors also were utilised by each side of confrontation, whether

to praise itself or to denounce the other side. One of the most debated metaphors has been Bin Laden's claim that the American-led coalition is a Christian war on Islam: a new version of the Crusades. My reading of Bush's statement suggests that he most probably was not referring to the historical religious wars. In either case, it is important to mention that since the 1990s, years before Bush infamous sentence, Bin Laden's speeches included claims about a 'Judaic-Christian Crusade' against Islam. Such alleged 'Crusade' was the reason, according to the leader of al-Qaeda, for his declaration of his holy war on the US and other Western countries. In turn several writers have seen Bin Laden as the monster, which was created by the US/Frankenstein. I realise more examples of the the utilisation of metaphorical discourse to deliver political messages in Saddam's propaganda, which identified him with Saladin, while the Iraqi dictator was described by Western media and politicians as Hitler. The German infamous leader was regularly mentioned by Arabic media to describe Bush's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Even the Jews, the victims of the Holocaust, have been dubbed by a large number of Arabic politicians, journalist, and even academics who comment on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as the new Nazis.

In their comment on the conflicts, playwrights also utilise a number of metaphors, so that their dramatic texts suggest resemblances between common aspects of the conflict and historical events. To give examples, in *Savages* (2006), the American playwright Anne Nelson comments on the scandal of Abu Ghraib by portraying a factual historical incident in the Philippines, when an American Marine was *ordered* by a high-ranked officer to torture and kill civilians after their failed insurgence. Ironically, using the metaphor as a method of avoiding any direct comment on the incident ends up suggesting that the brutality of the guards at Abu Ghraib is not an exceptional act of bored, tired, or even feared soldiers; it is repeated conduct. Therefore, although the incident was categorically condemned by the American public, the latter, as critical reviews of the play reveal, did not accept the allegation that torturing civilians in occupied countries is an American habit, which mistakenly the play suggests.

American spectators' and critics' lukewarm reception of *Savages* might explain why there is no American equivalent to *Tactical Questioning: Scenes from the Baha Mousa Inquiry* (2011), the tribunal play developed from Norton-Taylor's edited investigations into the death of an Iraqi man as a result of British soldiers' violent interrogations. In the introduction to his tribunal play, Norton-Taylor gives his opinion on the matter by extending the blame to include the British military system, which sends these soldiers to the

war without enough training to deal with the tough situation in Iraq. While several inquiries in different incidents of the war were turned into British tribunal plays, I cannot find a similar phenomenon in the US, where reports of most trials related to the war are not available in detail to the public. Usually, only the results of these investigations are declared. One of the most famous examples of British tribunal plays is *Justifying War: Scenes from the Hutton Inquiry* (2003).

If in the *Gulf between Us* (1991) Trevor Griffiths' critique of the American intervention in Iraq in the First Gulf War extends to include the historical genocide of the Native Americans and the twelfth-century Crusades, both of which have no resemblance to the factual incident when American planes mistakenly killed Iraqi children, who were put in a military building. Similarly, *In the Heart of America* draws comparisons between the First Gulf War and the War in Vietnam on the grounds of the utilisation of excessive military power by the US. Such a comparison downplays the stark differences between the two wars, whether in terms of each war's target or outcome. Wallace's attempt to link both wars seems to address the Americans' horrific experience with the US military intervention in foreign countries on the grounds of the so-called 'Vietnam Syndrome'. Even Stubbs in Sam Shepard's *States of Shock* was conceived by American critics as recycling the image of physically and mentally wounded soldiers portrayed in the literature of the Vietnam War. The same metaphorical reading of the invasion of Iraq is utilised by *Embedded: Live*. Although Robbins' dialogue does not include any reference to Vietnam, he uses visual elements through videos scenes of the Vietnam War with other footages of the two World Wars, including scenes of the Nazi Army. It is important to note that the mention of Vietnam, as a national disaster, in Robbins' play is a warning that the agony is possible to be repeated. *Stuff Happens* directly claims that the invasion of Iraq and its early consequences repeat the American's disastrous adventure in Vietnam. However, Hare focuses on the suffering of the Iraqi people from what he portrays as an Anglo-American conspiracy to invade Iraq. Wallace's *In the Heart of America* includes an encounter between two ghosts from the war in Vietnam, where the victim – a Vietnamese girl – is chasing her American killer.

It seems that the two British socialist playwrights, Griffiths and Hare, along with Wallace, conflate their perspectives on the specific war, on which they comment, with their political critique of the hegemony of the US over the world, which has defined international politics since the beginning of the 1990s. For being more anti-America than anti-war play,

Griffiths' *Camel Station* is a good example. The imaginary plot portrays the death of a Kurdish child by an American drone in a Northern No-Fly Zone in Iraq.

Ironically, the two plays that comment on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, namely Wallace's *A State of Innocence* and Churchill's *Seven Jewish Children* do not highlight the role of Hamas in creating the vicious circle of violence, for which my thesis included dramatic presentations of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Was I wrong for including them? But some scholars argue that when the Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon identified Hamas with al-Qaeda, Israel identified with the US in what Gilles Kepel calls the Bush-Sharon 'common war on terror' (Kepel 2006, xiii). In addition, when Hamas was classified as a terrorist group by the US and the European Union in 2003, a few months after the invasion of Iraq, the supporters of Hamas in Arabic and Muslim countries claimed that such a declaration is a sign of the American-Israeli – Christian-Jewish – war on Arabs and Islam. Then, why do both plays focus more on the Israeli reaction with only passing reference to the violent actions of Hamas? Consequently, do the two plays consider the killing of Israeli civilians as an act justified by fighting for freedom? No play does, but neither also stress that Hamas is a terrorist movement.

Although *A State of Innocence* does not plainly support Hamas, Um Hisham insists on distinguishing between the Palestinians who defend their lands and the Israelis as occupiers. Then why did *Seven Jewish Children* offend Jews, although it mentions Israel as an occupier less regular than Wallace's play? My answer is that Churchill puts these scattered references on the tongues of Israeli parents who insist that such information should never be told to their children. The Israeli parents look as if they are confessing the guilt, which they inherited from their ancestors, but dare not mention it to their children. A historical perspective of the relationship between war and theatre might suggest that, whether through comedies such as Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (411 BC), or within political theatre like Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1939), theatre always insists that, in spite of the justifications for politicians' mistakes, and whether they eventually concede the responsibility, wars in both history and the present prove that innocents are the real victims of political wrong decisions. Does it mean that theatre is not able to change the world? Perhaps, but at least it can raise humanity's awareness of their disastrous deeds. That is why these groups of topical plays were written and have been produced. And, in addition to its dramaturgic values, this body of work is worthy of an academic study.

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